

# Writing about Literature

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We often write about literature by exploring a work's metaphors and analyzing its literary techniques—such as plot, setting, character, and theme. The goal of this kind of essay is to reveal insights that enhance a reader's enjoyment and appreciation of the work.

When we read literature, we respond to it personally. We like or dislike its characters, we are touched by its passion and joy, we appreciate its humor, and we understand its sorrow. When you are asked to write an essay about literature, however, your job is to say how and why the work had these effects on you. This requires you to think critically about the work to discover the means by which an author, director, or playwright achieved these effects. When you begin to look closely at a work, to read critically and to observe in a detailed way how and why it achieves its effects, you begin asking what the work means.

Your goal is to offer a perspective that your readers will learn from, and an interpretation not easily recognizable on a first reading of the work.

## Developing a Thesis Statement about Plot

Think about the three, four, or five events that propel the story forward, the significant events that must be included if you are telling the story to a friend who hasn't read it. These are called the plot points. You can develop a thesis statement by asking a question about a plot point and then exploring it.

## Developing a Thesis Statement about a Character

The thesis claim may also come from a character analysis, in which you select one persona in the book for careful study. A character analysis can represent an ethical, psychological, moral, sociological, or cultural position or argument. Or, a character can be used as an allegory, metaphor, or archetype to further a theme or message. There are many things characters can bring to a text. Asking questions about what a character represents in a literary text is another way of working towards a thesis statement.

## Developing a Thesis Statement about a Theme

A theme is an idea that is given significant attention in an artistic work. Sometimes when working with literature, it is relatively easy to recognize a theme, such as jealousy, love, race relations, family unity, or identity struggle. Most works have more than one theme, but usually one or two are dominant. Because dominant themes are often easy to spot, they may be a natural place to begin when generating a thesis statement.