

The Literary Analysis Essay

Do you have a favorite dish or meal? Whether it's your grandmother's meatloaf or a spicy chicken curry, a dish's flavor comes from its unique blend of ingredients—and the way those ingredients are prepared. Most of the time, you probably just dig in and enjoy the meal. But what if you decided to chew each bite slowly and try to identify the spices that make it so tasty? What if went even further—and set out to explore the food's larger meaning—for your family or your culture?

Like certain foods, classic works of literature have meaning beyond the specific details or the events they describe. They mean something more to individual readers and to society as a whole. Analyzing an important piece of literature not only helps you appreciate your own personal connection to it—it also helps you understand what the story means in historical or cultural terms—what it means to us as a society or a civilization.

Where should you start? Well, first think about the parts of the book that you found remarkable, intriguing, or especially relatable. What events—or, in the case of a diary—what entries, stood out to you, and why?

Once you have located what seem to be important passages, spend some time asking yourself what those sections might mean on a deeper level, including what themes they suggest. Then decide on a claim—an idea that you believe to be true based on your analysis of these sections. Once you decide on a claim, imagine how you might explain why your interpretation is a good one. Make some notes that can guide you in building your argument.

Let's consider an example based on *The Diary of a Young Girl*. On July 15, 1944, Anne Frank wrote about how hard it is to stay true to one's principles and ideals in such a terrible situation. Anne wanted to believe that people were mostly good at heart, but her situation and personal experiences made it hard for her to trust herself and her family to be compassionate with each other.

An analysis of this passage might lead to a claim like this one: *Anne feels lonely and misunderstood even though she is living with people who care deeply for her. Once a claim is established, the next step is to support the claim with evidence:*

Throughout the July 15th entry, Anne complains that her parents don't understand her and always speak to her as though she is still a child. Anne mentions that even Pim and Peter don't know her true feelings or intentions. Anne also writes about how lonely it can be to be a teenager who is trying to form opinions when no one will give her the chance to support them. At the end of the entry, she notes that she is surprised that she hasn't abandoned her ideals—since her current circumstance don't allow her to carry them out.

Notice how this paragraph provides evidence for the claim—by describing details from the passage that support the writer's interpretation. And keep in mind that you don't have to limit yourself to a single passage or entry. You can pull examples, events, and quotes from several

parts of the book to support and explain your claim.

Now it's your turn to make a claim about *The Diary of a Young Girl* and support it with evidence. What entries stood out to you. What did they mean then—when Anne Frank wrote them, and what do they mean now?
