**World Lit 9 (Boswell)**

**WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE**:

**The Literary Analysis Essay**

**A literary analysis essay differs from a summary in the following ways:**

1. Rather than summarizing the plot, a literary analysis is an opinion, **your opinion about a significant angle of a work of literature stated through a series of claims about the work.**  Most often this opinion will be about how an author uses a particular technique to reveal the theme of the work.
2. Your purpose is **to prove that your opinion/claims about the work are reasonable by using examples from the work of literature. You must support your points through textual excerpts as evidence.**
3. Rather than just writing about what happens in the story, **you must interpret** what those happenings mean, what they signify, and how they reveal the work’s theme.

**Your essay should have multiple paragraphs:**

1. Introductory paragraph ending with a thesis statement

2. 2-4 body paragraphs, each developing one aspect of the thesis

3. Concluding paragraph that restates the main point of the essay.

**I. Introduction:**

**Usually, the thesis statement is the last sentence of your introductory paragraph.** The first sentences of your introduction are more general in that they introduce the reader to the basic subject matter of your essay, including the author and work of literature you will discuss. They should grab the attention of your reader to convince him/her that he/she should read on, and they should lead to your thesis. In a literary analysis, the thesis should answer the following questions: *what, how*, and *why*?

* **What** particular technique does the writer use in this work? – syntax, diction, tone, symbolism, allegory, motif, characterization, setting, …..
* **How** does the writer use this technique in an interesting way? – through irony, ambiguity, juxtaposition, parallelism, ……
* **Why** does it matter? – The writer uses this technique in this way to reveal the work’s theme?

**Crafting the Thesis Statement**: consider the following examples based upon *Oedipus Rex*:

Poor Example: partial thesis statement w/o a theme:  *Sophocles treats blindness and sight ironically in Oedipus Rex*. (In this case, blindness and sight are topics, but there is no theme. Why does it matter?)

Poor Example: complete thesis statement with a verbose laundry list :  *In Oedipus Rex, Sophocles reveals the irony that Tiresius is physically blind, but has perfect vision of the dramatic situation while Oedipus has perfect eyesight, but has no vision or understanding of the role he plays in his own downfall*.

Improved Example: complete thesis statement w/o a laundry list:

***Through his ironic treatment of blindness and sight, Sophocles argues that hubris causes Oedipus’ downfall.***

This example achieves the three goals of a rhetorical analysis thesis statement:

1. Answers **What & narrows the topic**: blindness and sight act as symbols
2. Answers **How & presents angle:** ironic treatment of the two symbols
3. Answers **Why it matters** & **implies organizational structure** of essay: Although he is physically blind, Tiresius has perfect vision because he seeks understanding through the gods. Conversely, Oedipus allows his perfect eyesight and hubris about past achievements to blind him to the fact that his own excessive decree causes his downfall.

**II. Body Paragraphs:**

Once you craft your thesis, your next job is to substantiate it through the body of your essay. Your main task here is to show your thesis is reasonable. You don’t have to prove your thesis is one hundred percent true, without exception. What you have to do is to demonstrate that it is reasonable based on the literature – that there are details in the text to support your thesis.

**Each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that refers back to one aspect of the thesis.** This topic sentence should not introduce any specific evidence. The paragraph’s content should be **unified** around the topic sentence.  **The supporting sentences** should include examples from the text that develop this aspect.These examples or **evidence** can be **direct quotations, paraphrases of text, or illustrative summaries of action.**  Organize your paragraph in a way that follows your thesis statement so as to achieve **coherence.** Each set of supporting sentences or sub-argument should include three parts. Always introduce your support with a **claim** that states your argument. Next, present your **evidence**, followed by a parenthetical citation that includes the page number from which the quotation, paraphrase, or summary originates in the novel. Finally, include an **analysis** sentence that explains how the quotation proves the claim made in the introductory sentence and how together they reveal the novel’s theme.

Always include an **internal summary/transition** sentence as the last sentence in the paragraph, which summarizes the current paragraph and segues into the next body paragraph or conclusion. Like the topic sentence, the summary sentence should not introduce or explain any specific piece of evidence.

**III. Conclusion:**

The conclusion is often the most difficult to write because you feel you are repeating yourself. You are; however, take care to actually repeat only **key words** and find a way of restating the rest of your thesis using different phrasing. Be sure to reiterate your main body arguments as well. The end of the conclusion often returns to the opening quotation or ideas mentioned in the hook.