ENG3U Mr. Phil’s Class

The Erindale Academy

**HOW TO STRUCTURE A LITERARY ESSAY**

**A Working Template**



Step #1: Select a Literary Work and a Topic

Step #2: Formulate a THESIS

The Thesis = topic + your opinion. You must have a clear, strong, and arguable thesis that is brief, concise and summarizes the main point you are trying to prove.

Step #3: Search your text for short quotations that you can cite and use to support your thesis. Cite the line number if it’s a poem; cite the page number if it’s a short story or a book/novel, and cite the act, scene and line number(s) if it’s a play.

Step #4: Prepare a detailed outline in point form. (SEE TEMPLATE BELOW)

Step#5: Depending on the instruction, you may be required to submit your outline to the Teacher and/or a Peer Partner for feedback and comments.

Step #6: Once your outline is approved, compose your INTRODUCTION and 1ST BODY PARAGRAPH into paragraph format.

Step #6: Editing Process. The essay should be written using the conventions of formal writing (double spacing etc. )

When you finish writing your introduction and 1st body paragraph, proofread for logic and mechanical errors.

**HOW TO ORGANIZE A LITERARY ESSAY (CHECKLIST)**

**Introductory Paragraph**

•  State the theme, topic statement, starting with an interesting HOOK:

•  Linking statement (identify the Author and *Title* - written in *italic font*) or underline the title if you are handwriting the essay.

•  Identify Three (3) POINTS: areas of discussion, argument, ideas, that you will develop in your three (3) body paragraphs

•  Thesis Statement (your opinion)

**Body Paragraph**

* Begin with a TOPIC SENTENCE that focuses your first POINT

 •  **Context** (set up context\*for quote):

Example: The English poet William Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was characterized by a "*spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*" (263).

 •  **Quote** Direct quotation/passage with page number for novel, line number(s) for poetry, or Act/Scene/Line(s) for plays in MLA format:

Example: “*To be or not to be that is the question*” (*Hamlet*, III,i,57).

 •  **Evidence**: Take keywords/phrases from your chosen quote to assist with analysis

Example: Many people have questioned whether Hamlet’s words *“not to be”* indicate that he may commit suicide like Ophelia does in the play.

 •  **Analysis**: Explanation of the way in which the keywords/phrases work to prove your thesis

* **Conclusion** of your first argument then Transition to the next argument

 •  **Transitioning words** that can be used to indicate your next point of proof. Examples: “*In addition... / “Moreover ... / “Another ... / “On the other hand ... etc*

* **Evidence**: Extract keywords/phrases from your chosen quote to assist with analysis
* **Concluding Sentence(s)** to the paragraph and link it back to your thesis

LET’S GET STARTED

**STEP ONE: PLAN YOUR INTRODUCTION
4 types of statements:**

**Theme statement** – makes a general statement on the topic or theme you will be writing about with a strong HOOK (ex. a quote, a statistic, an anecdote, a universal belief)

**Linking statement** – connect the theme or topic to the author and *text* that is going to be discussed.

**Areas of discussion (3)** –a brief introduction to the POINTS used to support your thesis. Using the template below, plan out the thesis abstract for your essay (introduction).

**Thesis statement** – literary insight – what you are going to prove and the way you will prove the thesis. (topic+opinion+significance)

Example: In Sandra Cisneros’ book *The House on Mango Street* the author writes about her childhood growing up in a poor neighbourhood in Chicago. Many things happen in the novel which reflect the problems she faces, especially as a girl.

**Body Paragraph 1 ((with Topic Sentence)**

The social environment always restricts a girl’s power and rights, and this affects her life in a negative way if she doesn’t fight against it.

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| **Context:** Lead into your first piece of evidence. Tell the reader the situation and what is happening in the text surrounding the quotation: who is the speaker? To whom are they speaking?)  |
| Sally is a tragic character in this novel who is deeply troubled by others’ bad behavior or attitude. Gradually her life becomes worse and worse because few people treat her nicely or fairly, including her friends and family. |
| **Evidence #1:** (insert quote): |
| “You don’t laugh, Sally. You look at your feet and walk fast to the house you can’t come out from” (Cisneros, 82). |
| **Analysis:** Explain why this quotation proves your thesis.  |
| Sally becomes upset when Cheryl says this to her. They used to be very close friends, but after having an argument they separate, leaving each other alone. When Sally loses her best friend nobody else supports her, and it seems like she loses the only person she could rely on. |
| **Context:** (Lead into your second) piece of evidence. Tell the reader the situation and what is happening in the text surrounding the quotation: who is the speaker? To whom are they speaking?)  |
| Unfortunately, domestic violence also affects Sally’s life. In the story we learn that Sally’s father is an emotional man who frequently hits her at home. |
| **Evidence #2:** (insert quote):  |
| “...Sally tells about that time he hit her with his hands just like a dog, she said, like if I was an animal” (Cisneros, 92). |
| **Analysis:** Explain why this quotation proves your thesis.  |
| From this we can tell Sally’s father neither respects her nor treats her well. Domestic violence is always a serious problem, and a lot of women suffer from it. According to the 2019 Canadian Report on Physical Abuse, 2,340 deaths were caused by intimate partner violence—making up 14% of all homicides. 70% of these deaths were females (CROPA, 84). |
| **Concluding Sentence:** (restate the main idea of this paragraph and how it connects back to the thesis)  |
| Overall, aggressive behaviour and threat towards women’s safety and human rights shows up not only in the novel but it is clearly a general problem in our wider society. |

**Body Paragraph #22**

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| **Main Idea** (topic sentence):  |
| People in the Chicago neighbourhood where the novel is set tend to treat all girls poorly and with disrespect. Some of those girls never notice or even try to change this attitude, which is one of the reasons why people continue bullying them as the novel makes clear. |
| **Context** (Lead into your first piece of evidence. Tell the reader the situation and what is happening in the novel surrounding the quotation: who is the speaker? To whom are they speaking?) |

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| Improper behaviours happen sometimes, and the worse thing is that many girls don’t really pay attention to it. One simple but strong example happens when Esperanza finds her first job at the Peter Pan Photo Finishers and is approached by an older man who works there. He says it is his birthday and asks Esperanza to give him a kiss. |
| **Evidence #1:** (insert quote):  |
| “... he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn’t let go” (Cisneros, 55). |
| **Analysis:** Explain why this quotation proves your thesis.  |
| The man’s aggressive action is shocking to Esperanza who is still very young, shy and nervous on her first day in the new job. However, Esperanza never tells anyone or even seems to realize this is harmful and bad for her. |
| **Context:** (Transition into your second) piece of evidence. Tell the reader the situation and what is happening in the novel surrounding the quotation: who is the speaker? To whom are they speaking?)  |
| Furthermore when Sally begins taking an interest in boys, and they in her, it is also clear that she doesn’t realize when she is not being respected by them. |
| **Evidence #2:** (insert quote):  |
| “I said, Sally, come on, but she wouldn’t. She stayed by the curb talking to Tito and his friends.... She could be stuck up like that if she wanted to, so I just left” (Cisneros, 96). |
| **Analysis:** Explain why this quotation proves your thesis.  |
| At this point, some boys stole Sally’s keys and they will not give it back to her unless Sally kisses them. Unfortunately Sally doesn’t realize those boys are teasing her, which is very disrespectful. Because of her neglect, people like Tito can’t reflect on their faults as well. |
| **Concluding Sentence:** (restate the main idea of this paragraph and how it connects back to the thesis) |
| In a word, when girls can not realize when they are being harassed, it is even more dangerous because it may indulge bad things to happen again, which will lead to a vicious circle. |

**Body Paragraph #3**

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| **Main Idea (topic sentence):** |
| Under the constant bullying and signs of disrespect shown against the girls in the novel, this behaviours may totally change a woman’s life.  |
| **Context** (Lead into your first piece of evidence. Tell the reader the situation and what is happening in the novel surrounding the quotation: who is the speaker? To whom are they speaking?)  |
| Sally in *The House on Mango Street* is a typical example of this. During all the time she bears her father’s violence and cruelty, the alienation and bullying by her friends’ alienation, and other boys’ harassment, bad things happen to her but she never thinks about or makes any changes to her life. Instead, she chooses to bear all of this unequal treatment. |

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| **Evidence #1:** (insert quote 1):  |
| “...(her husband) won’t let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn’t let her look out the window. She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission”(Cisneros, 101-102). |
| **Analysis:** Explain why this quotation proves your thesis. |
| Sally chooses to accept her fate and marries a marshmallow salesman. Although she escapes from her cruel father, once again she becomes an appendage of another man. In fact, her husband restricts her freedom and keeps her separate from the outside world. Sally’s future life after marriage is an understatement which the writer doesn’t describe, but not surprisingly she will likely live a life spent in loneliness and helplessness.  |
| **Context:** (Lead into your second) piece of evidence. Tell the reader the situation and what is happening in the novel surrounding the quotation: who is the speaker? To whom are they speaking?)  |
| On the contrary, if a woman does dare to say no to people who disrespect her, and she stands up for herself the way Esperanza does at the end of the book, she will have a totally different life living on her own terms. |
| **Evidence #2:** (insert quote):  |
| “One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away” (Cisneros, 110). |
| **Analysis:** Explain why this quotation proves your thesis.  |
| At the end of this book we can clearly feel Esperanza has developed an independent and special personality. She is ambitious, strong and confident. Her ambition makes her different from the other girls in the story. She doesn’t accept her fate as Sally does. Instead, she chooses to change her life. As we can see, she makes her life brilliant all by herself. |
| **Concluding Sentence:** (restate the main idea of this paragraph and how it connects back to the thesis)  |
| The girls who live on Mango Street who choose to keep silent about all the unfair things they face as they grow up, will live a sad and meaningless life. |

**STEP 3: PLAN YOUR CONCLUSION**: **Conclusion** =the reverse order of your introduction

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| **Restate your thesis** (first sentence)  |
| People may treat girls differently because of their gender, which will influence their life negatively, especially for girls who are timid and weak. |
| **Re-state your three POINTS** (1 sentence for each) |
| Stereotypes make people feel that women are weaker than men, and this has negative effects on some women’s life. Some girls cannot even notice it when others bully or discriminate against them, which makes it harder for them to overcome unfair treatment such as harassment, bullying and even domestic violence. Once they choose to keep silent and don’t fight back, their lives will be ruined.  |

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| **Finish with a general statement on the theme** (SO WHAT)  |
| For all girls, the most important things is to be brave and say no to any disrespectful behavior. |