

Learning Language Arts Through Literature



THE GOLD BOOK

Literary Criticism

By

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Day 1

For almost as long as literature has existed, people have been interested in analyzing it. Today, we call this type of writing **literary criticism**, the evaluation and interpretation of literature. While there are many, many forms of critiquing literature, we will be looking in depth at only four of them. Each of the styles focuses on a different aspect of the work.

In the coming weeks we will focus on the reader, the author, the culture, and the work. As we read a variety of short stories, poems, novels and more, we will endeavor to look at each work through the lens of one particular style. Any work can be examined under any of these styles; however, you will find that certain works lend themselves better to one style or another.

- a. The first style we will experiment with is sometimes known as **reader response**. While it may seem strange to our contemporary ears, it was once thought that the reader brought nothing to the work. That each piece of literature was complete in itself and could only be interpreted as the author intended.

Now we are very comfortable with the idea that each of us brings something different to a text and that even returning to a piece of literature at a later date can change the meaning for the reader. Our own life experiences shape the way we view the world and color our interpretation of what we read. A child reading *Peter Pan* might be enthralled with Peter's carefree adventurous spirit and long to join him, but when rereading the story as an adult, might be appalled at Peter's heartless cruelty. The same story, the same reader, but different life experiences change the interpretation.

Like the college application essay you finished in the last lesson, a reader response paper will also be in the first person. You will need to interact with the text. What does it mean to you? How does it apply to your life? Of what does it make you think? What do you believe the author was trying to say and do you agree with him or her? There is no right or wrong answer in your critique. It is a personal response for you that, while shared by other readers, is completely subjective. Reading other people's response to the same work might help you flesh out your own feelings and thoughts as well.

You will read four short stories this week. Be thinking and taking notes as you read. Write down your thoughts and your reactions to the story. Bookmark sections that stand out to you and sections that support what you think the author's main point is.

-  b. Read the short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014). Get a copy from the library or search online for "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World full text."

- c. You will have an opportunity to answer discussion questions for each reading assignment. Use the following questions for discussion with your teacher or with other students. Your teacher may ask you to give a written response. If so, write several full sentences. Some answers will, of course, be shorter than others. This is a time for you to practice putting your thoughts into words and will greatly help you when you are ready to write your essay. Please remember, you get out what you put in.
- d. Discuss or write answers for the following questions:
1. Write a short summary of the story.
 2. Using the internet, write a short biography of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.
 3. Write down three things you found interesting in the story.
 4. What instances of hyperbole can you list?
 5. How do you think the phrase “larger than life” fits with this story?

Day 2

-  a. Read the first five chapters of “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” by F. Scott Fitzgerald found on page 1 of the *Literary Criticism Anthology*.
- b. Discuss or write answers for the following questions:
1. Write a short summary of the story up to this point.
 2. What do you think will happen next?
 3. How do you feel about Benjamin? About his father?
 4. Using the internet, who was F. Scott Fitzgerald?
 5. This story is written about a situation that could not occur in the real world. What point do you feel Fitzgerald is trying to make?

Day 3

-  a. Finish reading “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” found on page 12 of the *Literary Criticism Anthology*.

- b. Discuss or write answers for the following questions:
1. Did the story end the way you thought it would?
 2. Do you feel differently about Benjamin now? How about his father? Or his son?
 3. What parts of the story made you think of something in the real world?
 4. Do you still feel that the author was trying to make the point you wrote about in Day 2?

Day 4

-  a. Read “The Lady, or the Tiger” by American writer Frank Stockton (1834-1902) found on page 20 of the *Literary Criticism Anthology*.
- b. Discuss or write answers for the following questions:
1. What do you think of the judicial system set up by the king?
 2. In your opinion, which door did the princess indicate to the young man? Why?
 3. Compare how a child reading the story might differ from an adult reading the story.
 4. Today the phrase “the lady or the tiger” is commonly used. To what is it applied?

Day 5

-  a. Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) is best known for his novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. The story you will read today is one of his short stories. Read “The Three Questions” by Leo Tolstoy found on page 24 of the *Literary Criticism Anthology*.
- b. Discuss or write answers for the following questions:
1. What are the three questions the king asked?
 2. Why did the king want to know the answer to the three questions?
 3. How would you answer the three questions?
 4. Can you think of three better/different questions you could ask that would make sure you succeeded in everything you did?
- c. Choose one of the four short stories you have read this week for your reader response essay. Next week you will be writing a five-paragraph essay on the story of your choice.