

Literary Analysis

Literary analysis starts with the careful examination of a text, or one element of a text, such as:

- Character
- Setting
- Plot
- Theme
- Conflict
- Back story (motivation)
- Patterns
- Word choice, figurative language
- Details

Thoughtful analysis will address why this particular element **matters** in the story; what the author may have intended; how the story might be affected, etc.

Follow these steps to write a thoughtful literary analysis paragraph:

1. **What do I notice?** Choose a sentence or two from the story to write about. Copy it down, in quotation marks, and include the page number.

2. **What is happening** in the story at this point? (Go beyond what is obvious in your quote.) Write just 1 sentence to tell what is happening.

3. **Analysis:** THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART: **Why does it matter? Why** did you choose to quote this part? Why do you think this is **important**? How might the **story** or **character(s)** be **affected**? What might be the **author's intent**? Why does this **matter** to the story? GO BEYOND THE OBVIOUS!

Here are suggestions for how you could write your analysis:

What do you notice? Suggestions:

- A new or increasing conflict
- A character's thoughts or actions
- A relationship between characters
- A setting (or comparisons between settings)
- Something unusual or confusing
- Something universal (we can all relate to it - it's part of the "human condition")
- A pattern (in the plot or character's actions/thoughts or of human nature, history, etc.)
- Something unexpected (or a change)
- A connection between the story and your life (or the world in general)
- A theme (Theme is a lesson about life the author wants to share with the reader. An author may state a theme openly, but more often, readers must find and identify theme on their own.)
- Author's word choice, especially metaphors ("If you can picture a little dark puppy that had been kicked too many times ... you'll have Johnny." The Outsiders, p. 49)

Why does it matter? Suggestions:

- How might it **affect** a character? Or the plot?
- What does it **show** us about a character? Or about the **setting**? Or the **story**?
- What can you **infer** based on that information?
- What does this **teach us** about life in general? (about the "human condition"?)
- What might be the **author's reason** (or purpose or intent) for this?
- WHY is this **universal**? Why do **most people** do/think/feel this?
- What can you **predict** based on this? **WHY** do you predict that?

Examples of literary analysis paragraphs:

“He’s got eyes that are like two pieces of pale blue-green ice. ... He looks older than twenty--- tough, cool, and smart. He would be real handsome if his eyes weren’t so cold.” (page 7)

At this point in the story, Ponyboy is describing his family and friends. S.E. Hinton uses specific details to show Darry’s eyes, and from these details I notice that although Ponyboy loves his older brother, there is some tension between them. Ponyboy says Darry’s eyes are “like... ice,” and “cold,” which shows me that he sees Darry as a cold, maybe angry person. He also says Darry looks older than his age. I think the author is showing us this part of Darry because she wants us to see that there may be some difficulties in the brothers’ relationship, which may bring more conflict in the future. Also, since their parents died, maybe Darry seems colder and more grown up because he has to be the parent in the family. He has a lot of responsibility, making sure his brothers don’t get in trouble, and that would make someone grow up faster. In this particular scene, Ponyboy is scared because he was jumped by the Socs, and he wants his brother to comfort him. When Darry seems angry, that upsets Ponyboy. Those “ice cold” eyes hurt Ponyboy, but maybe they just mean that Darry is afraid for his brother.

“He tried to swear, but suddenly started crying... I had seen Johnny take a whipping with a two-by-four from his old man and never let out a whimper. That made it worse to see him break now.” (p. 33)

In this scene, Ponyboy is telling Cherry about how upset Johnny was when he got jumped by the Socs (and how he had always been beat by his parents). Based on the last sentence of the quote, Johnny doesn’t show his feelings to anyone, not even his parents. This shows that he thinks of the Greasers more of family than his parents. I think the author chose to reveal this information because she wanted the readers to know that the negative attention his parents give him strengthens his friendship to the Greasers. This scene mattered because getting beat up by the Socs was more traumatizing than getting beat up by his dad and getting ignored by both his parents, which I don’t think affects him very much. Therefore, Johnny considers the Greasers his actual family because of his emotional scarring caused by his parents and the Socs.

“...a week’s supply of baloney, two loaves of bread, a box of matches... a paperback copy of Gone with the Wind...” (p. 71)

When Johnny and Ponyboy run away to the church, Johnny brings these items back from the store. S.E. Hinton using this setting of the church to reveal a lot about Ponyboy and Johnny. In that setting we are able to see how mature, responsible and thoughtful Johnny is. Not only did Johnny think to get food for them, but he also picked up a book and deck of cards so they could keep busy, plus he bought peroxide so they could bleach Ponyboy’s hair, helping him hide from the police. Hinton shows us in this scene that even in a scary situation, Johnny acts responsibly, plans for the future, and takes care of his friend. Before we saw Johnny in this setting, he was portrayed as quiet, afraid and young, like the gang’s “pet.” Here in the church setting, though, we see that he is also responsible and mature.

“A copper haze hung over the water, and the sun beat on it and made it vibrate blindingly.” (p. 14)

Kino and Juana are getting ready to go pearl diving, and I noticed that this sentence has personification in it because the sun can’t literally beat on the water and make it vibrate. I noticed this figurative language because when I read it the imagery of it played in my head. This phrase is confusing because I have heard of the sun beating down on something, but this is the first time I have heard of the sun making something vibrate. I think this is important because maybe the ripples, or vibrations, in the water symbolize Kino and Juana’s feelings that day. If they were calm, maybe the water would be calm. Since they were worried, the ripples and vibrations symbolized their worries.