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A HYBRID WRITING/STUDY AID

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Detailed analysis of the literary text is combined with guided writing strategies for proficiency in essay writing and critical comprehension.

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Shelley McNamara

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QWILLER GEEK GUIDE

a hybrid writing/study aid

SHELLEY MCNAMARA



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Approaching a critical study of literature

CHAPTER OUTLINE

By critically studying a literary text you will develop a deeper understanding of the work, critical thinking skills, cultural and historical insights and an enhanced appreciation of artistic expression.

In this chapter you will explore the following:

- understanding the elements of a literary text
- evaluating the worth of a text: textual integrity
- analysing academic readings.

UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF A LITERARY TEXT

This book will assist you in closely studying a literary text. In order to write a sophisticated response, you need to ensure you have a thorough understanding of all elements (or aspects) of the literary text. These are outlined below.

Elements of literary texts to look out for

The language forms and features are the textual distinctive qualities of the text. Consider the following when studying how elements of texts create meaning.

Key ideas and concepts: the main ideas and concepts represented in and through the text that invite a personal and intellectual connection with the text

Structure: the way the text is constructed. The structure is coherent with the details of the text expressed through language forms and features

Context: the historical, social and literary background of the text

Textual form: the medium of text or text type. This includes the conventions specific to a particular type of text, often signalling content, purpose and audience, for example novel, short story, poetry or film form.

Content

Themes: the central topic, subject, or message within a text. Themes can be divided into two categories: a work's thematic concept is what readers 'think the work is about' and its thematic statement being 'what the work says about the subject'

Characterisation: the way that a character is presented that makes them appear authentic and recognisable

Place/Setting: the physical, spiritual and metaphysical place and time represented in texts. It also includes the time of day and day/s of the year, seasons and weather

Language (written, visual, verbal, digital)

Figurative language: visual imagery created through devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, anamorphism and sound imagery created through devices such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, rhythm and rhyme. There are many more figurative devices unique to each text

Narration: the point of view, as shown through first (I, me, us), second (you, your) and third person (he, she, they) narration

Voice: the voice of a character or persona appears when the composer clearly shows through their choice of language and word choice who the character or persona is—without directly telling the reader. It is through the voice of character/s or persona/s that the reader gains a sense of the author's attitudes, feelings and ideas

Positioning: the textual details and features will affect the reader in some way and position the reader to respond

Evaluating worth: to evaluate the worth of a text we make informed judgements on the success of the text by looking at how well-crafted it is for its subject, purpose and audience.

Activity

Below are some key questions to answer when responding personally to the elements of a literary text.

- What is your personal response to the literary text?
- How can I express an informed personal interpretation of the significance and meaning of the literary text's distinctive qualities?
- How do the characteristics of the literary text express its distinctive qualities?
- How does the composer portray people, ideas, settings and situations in the literary text?
- How do the elements of the literary text affect those responding to it?
- What are the literary text's specific language forms and features?
- How do these language forms and features express complex ideas?

EVALUATING THE WORTH OF A TEXT: TEXTUAL INTEGRITY

One way to critically analyse a literary text is to investigate and explore questions of textual integrity and significance.

To evaluate the worth of a literary text we make informed judgements on the success of the text by looking at how well-crafted it is for its subject, purpose and audience. Craft also implies artistry. That is, how effectively do the distinctive qualities of the text work together to achieve its purpose? This is what is meant by textual integrity.

How textual integrity is shown

Textual integrity is shown through the coherence of the text. That is, how form and language create an integrated whole in terms of meaning and value.

Consider the following when studying textual integrity in

the literary text that is the focus of this book:

- features and distinctive qualities of the text
- the extent to which the text has overall unity through an integrated structure and unifying concepts
- close analysis of textual details to evaluate how features and distinctive qualities function in different ways

the way features lead to the text's enduring values.

Activity

1. Brainstorm some ideas under the following headings about what you liked or valued about the literary text that is the focus of this book:
 - structure (the way it was put together)
 - form (the type of text)
 - textual distinctive qualities (content and language)
2. The questions below will help you to understand how textual integrity is shown in the literary text that is the focus of this book.
 - How do you personally perceive textual integrity is shown through the text's construction, context, language and other features?
 - What view of reality does this text produce? How? Whose reality? How does it/might it vary according to the gender, race, socioeconomic status, culture, experience of the reader?
 - Where are gaps and contradictions? What might be missing from the picture?
 - Whose interests are served?

Activity continues on next page.

Activity

- What are the assumptions about gender/culture/class? Does it reinforce or create stereotypes?
 - How can this text be challenged, criticised, transformed or resisted? What action needs to occur for these changes to take place?
3. Use your brainstormed notes about structure and textual distinctive qualities to write two 300-word paragraphs about what makes the literary text that is the focus of this book worthwhile.

ANALYSING ACADEMIC READINGS

Often in senior essays, you are required to give your own informed and critical reading of a literary text. To help you do this, it's a good idea to experience other people's readings of the literary text.



Research essays that reflect different perspectives in relation to your specific literary text. Below is a list of places to begin your research. Here you will find academic journals, resources and books about various examples of literature.

- Jstor www.jstor.org
- Google Scholar <https://scholar.google.com/>
- general search engine search
- local library.

As you read these essays, highlight the key ideas that stand out to you. Make notes that answer the questions outlined in the activity section below.

Activity

1. What perspectives about the literary text are offered in each reading?

Consider:

- the thesis or argument being developed about the literary text
- your interpretation and perspective on the writer's reading of the literary text.

2. What are the contextual shaping distinctive qualities identified in the reading?

Consider the social, cultural and historical contexts represented.

3. What textual references are made in the reading to exemplify these contextual shaping distinctive qualities?

Consider:

- the way the text is constructed through textual references to context
- the effects of social, cultural and historical contexts on the construction of the literary text and the way it is received by the audience.

4. What 'questions of value' does the writer suggest are explored in the literary text?

Consider:

- the questions of value that are asked
- the effects of these questions on aspects of texts
- the reasons the composer deems the 'questions of value' worth asking
- the ways that changes in context lead to changed values reflected in literary texts.

Activity continues on next page.

Activity

5. How does the writer's perspective give you an insight into the integrity of the literary text?

Consider how the text is coherent in its form and language to create an integrated whole in terms of its meaning and value.