

# *Writing Spaces*

## Assignments & Activities Archive

### Literary Analysis via Songs

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# Literary Analysis via Songs

Sean Oros

## Overview

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students a pathway for applying literary analysis skills to modern songs of their own choosing. The rationale for this is twofold: first, it is partially a response to avoiding copied responses from Spark Notes or Lit Notes and the like due to some student's aversion to literary analysis. Second, and more importantly, it promotes student buy-in of the assignment and retention of the skills literary analysis teaches. This lesson was originally designed for a genre-based first-year college writing course at a four-year institution, but can be easily adapted for any other composition class setting. This assignment has been taught as the second genre of the course, generally weeks 3-6 of the semester, as it is designed to also help develop successful writing process habits.

The assignment is built for a 3-week segment, beginning with lessons in poem and short-story analysis for the first week and introduction of the assignment prompt and rubric. In the second and third weeks, students are provided a series of lessons and pre-writing worksheets. These worksheets will guide students through song selection, theme and thesis statement refinement, lyrical citation styles, outlining, and peer review. All worksheets are provided below in the appendices. Ultimately, with teacher guidance, students can develop their analysis skills and build successful writing process habits.

## Time Commitment

2-3 weeks

## Materials

Please review the appendices at the end of this assignment. A full collection of the assignment sheet and accompanying worksheets are included. Users are permitted to copy and modify for your own uses.

## Assignment Process

- Students are introduced to the genre and assignment prompt sheet.
- Next, students will take part in an introductory lesson of literary analysis. The class will work together to analyze a poem on the board. Students are encouraged to search for information online during this.
- Students conclude the introductory week with a workshop analyzing a past, anonymized student sample from this assignment, examining it for successful techniques.
- Next, students begin the two-week workshop process. They use the first worksheet to identify three different songs and to identify the theme of each song, giving them several options to pick from for analysis.
- Students use the second worksheet to identify and refine their claim of the song's theme through branching diagrams, using a sample branching diagram of Langston Hughes's "I, Too." They will then use this to create a working thesis statement based on their refined theme.
- Students then use a third worksheet to learn poetry/lyrical citation styles, using Spotify or suggested alternatives as a reliable base for song lyrics. They will generate a full citation for their song and several in-text citations of lines that support their main theme.

- Students use a fourth worksheet to help them take these in-text citations and prepare a detailed outline of their essay, using a suggested sample outline. Students will create topic sentences for body paragraphs and match these up with supporting lines of evidence.
- Students conclude the workshops with a fifth worksheet, a guided peer-review workshop, focused on identifying and analyzing thesis and topic statements of peers to help support students in refining their identification and examination of themes, giving them space to practice and reflect upon their analytical skills.
- Finally, at the start of the following week, the class will submit their final essay drafts and move on to the next genre.

### Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of literary analysis
- Think critically about how analysis can be applied in their everyday lives
- Develop successful writing process habits

### Learning Accommodations

- Students may work individually or in small discussion groups on the assignment sheets, with the teacher moving around the room and any additional information on the board, in order to maximize engagement and accommodate different learning styles.
- Material should be presented in multiple formats to include in-person instruction and asynchronous, digital delivery. All

worksheet files should be accessible in an LMS, if available.

## Appendices of Assignment Materials

Appendix                      1:                      Assignment                      Sheet

### **Genre #2: Literary Analysis**

**Length:** 2-3 pages

**Points:** 150 (15% of final grade)

**First-Draft Due Date\*:** Last Class of 6<sup>th</sup> Week

**Final-Draft Due Date:** First Class of 7<sup>th</sup> Week

**\*Must have reached the minimum word count for the first draft or will receive a 5% reduction from your final grade for the essay (minimum 2 full pages).**

**Required Format:** MLA style. 12-point Times New Roman double-spaced with the proper heading. Include your name and page numbers in the header. Avoid additional space between paragraphs.

Please include a full copy of the poem (on a separate page) after the essay. If using a short story, you do not need to provide a full copy.

#### **Requirements:**

- A literary interpretation and analysis (this is not a book report; you have to create an interpretation of it via analysis)
- At least one cited literary source you will be analyzing
- Optional: one school of literary theory and criticism (i.e. formalism, historicism, feminism, etc.) to help focus your argument

**Genre:** literary analysis focuses on taking a literary selection and closely examining it to create an argument about the source's meaning. You will use selected quotes from the primary document

(i.e. the literary piece[s] you're examining) as evidence to support your thesis. You will want to choose a theme (i.e. the importance of friendship, the costs of racism, etc. whatever you think the story was written to convey) and work to demonstrate how it is shown in the story.

There is no single right answer with literary analysis. You will simply pick a theme and work to demonstrate how it is present within the literary selection.

**Analysis:** A detailed examination of something to identify its key parts and typically follow it with the analyzer's opinions and judgment regarding the piece.

**Goal:** Write a thesis-driven essay that includes textual support from a literary text in this unit. You will argue an interpretation of the text or a particular analysis thereof, proving why your interpretation of what "theme" the piece is about is accurate via textual examples. The essay should consist of 2-3 pages, not including the works cited page (and a page to include the full poem).

**Tropes:** Keep your eyes open for "tropes," literary tools and techniques authors and poets use when writing. These include a wide range, such as setting, stanzas, rhyme scheme, meter, personification, dialogue, alliteration, first-person narrator, repetition, etc.

Keep your eye open for details, such as intentional grammatical errors, distinct capitalization, or particular colors or images that could be symbolic.

**Example Literary Theme:** One of the elements of human nature that literature reveals is the complexity and variety of relationships. Explore your literary piece and highlight segments that help you to better understand the type of relationship that exists in the selection

between one of the characters and his or her family, peers, friends, or nature.

## Literary Analysis Essay Rubric

*\*Essays that do not meet the assigned requirements will earn a failing grade.*

30pts	<b>Thesis:</b> Provides a clearly defined statement that demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose in response to the assignment.
30pts	<b>Development:</b> Uses relevant, sufficient, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, convey the writer's understanding, and shape the whole work to a consistent theme.
30pts	<b>Evidence:</b> Integrates relevant quotes from the literary selection to support analytical thesis. Introduces and incorporates information smoothly and appropriately. Documentation is clear and free of errors.
30pts	<b>Organization:</b> Applies logical and effective order to the full essay; effectively structures individual paragraphs; employs logical and effective transitions between sentences and paragraphs.
30pts	<b>Style and Mechanics:</b> Skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency; appropriately uses language, diction, and conventions of standard written English, including punctuation, verb tense agreement, grammar, spelling, and mechanics.
Total: 150 pts	

## Worksheet 1: Literary Analysis Selection

### Piece 1:

Title:

Year Written In:

Author:

Length (optional):

Theme of the Piece (what you are going to prove it's about):

Brief Summary:

### Piece 2:

Title:

Year Written In:

Author:

Length (optional):

Theme of the Piece:

Brief Summary:

### Piece 3:

Title:

Year Written In:

Author:

Length (optional):

Theme of the Piece:

Brief Summary:



Appendix 3: Thesis Statement Brainstorming

## Worksheet 2: Thesis Statements

Take your selected literary piece. Identify one thing you want to say about it. Start by thinking about a theme in the work; use branching diagrams below to help map out ways to narrow that theme further (use back page if you need more space).

First, copy down what you wrote as the main theme in your selection worksheet. Then, write three sub-themes, or ideas in the song/poem that support this main theme. Then, select one of these sub-themes and use it as your new primary theme, repeating this process and creating three new sub-themes based on that. Repeat as necessary. This will help you create a better focus for your essay.

	<p><b>Example:</b> “I, Too,” by Langston Hughes</p> <p><b><u>Race in America</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Mistreatment</u></b>/ Economics/ Frustration</p> <p>Discrimination / Exclusion / <b><u>Attention to Problem</u></b></p>
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Now that you’ve narrowed your topic, put this into words in a

sentence to create your working thesis statement. You can then try to add more detail to that thought in a second take.

- i.e. “I, Too” shows the harsh realities faced by African Americans

which turns into:

- Langston Hughes wrote “I, Too” to express and bring attention to the harsh realities African Americans faced in America by drawing attention to exclusion and discrimination

## Appendix 4: Citation Generation and Lyrical Citations

### Worksheet 3: Creating Lyrical Citations

For this activity, you will practice citing lyrics in MLA format. Additionally, you will look at examples of in-text citations for anything lyrical (songs and poems alike).

Use the links on (Learning Management System) to [ZBib](#) and [Purdue OWL](#). (FYI: Zotero also has a desktop application for a full data management system)

Find your song lyrics on the [Spotify Web Player](#) (alternatively, Apple Music, YouTube Music, or Amazon Music, as long as you can find lyrics, album, record label company, and other citation details). If using poetry, use [PoetryFoundation.org](#).

Upload your song entry HTML through ZBib, then double check the citation on Purdue OWL. Afterwards, you will cite your evidence, identifying lines for the in-text citations.

#### Full Citation:

- Generate your base citation on ZBib based on Spotify's information regarding your song
- Find "A Song or Album" under the MLA citation guide on Purdue OWL; look at the information for the sample Spotify citation
- Double check: does your citation have all the pieces of information needed? If not, can you find it on Spotify?

#### In-Text Citations:

- Lyrics to a song are cited by line (like poems) rather than by page. Each in-text citation will

look like this:

- (Hughes, line 1)
- When writing out multiple lines in your essay, each line is separated by a backwards slash /, as demonstrated below:
  - “They send me to eat in the kitchen /  
When company comes,” (Hughes, lines 3-4).
- Look at the lyrics on Spotify again and count out each line. (For an easier process, copy and paste the lyrics into a numbered list on Microsoft Word; it should number each line separately.)
- Now, identify three lines in your song selection that support your main theme. Create in-text citations for each line. You will use these in the next activity to outline your essay.

## Appendix 5: Essay Outline

### Worksheet 4: Essay Outline

Directions: create an outline of your essay with evidence. Follow the model below as a sample outline, putting together all the pieces from your other worksheets for this assignment.

#### Goals:

- Identify your thesis statement
  - o Identify the theme of your literary piece and prove this theme via evidence
- Identify the topic statements for each paragraph
- Ensure that each topic statement supports the main thesis
- Ensure you have enough evidence to support each topic sentence

#### Sample Outline:

- Intro Paragraph: title
  - o What literary piece you're examining
  - o What is your literary piece's primary theme?
  - o Summary of piece/poem (could be first paragraph instead)
  - o Main point of your essay (thesis)
    - i.e. stating in a full sentence how your poem demonstrates this theme and why that's important
- Body Paragraph: title
  - o Introduce first topic statement to support your thesis
  - o Give evidence; include support (in-text citation)
  - o What does this evidence show? Analyze
  - o Additional support/reflections

- Body Paragraph: title
  - o Introduce next topic statement to support your thesis
  - o Give evidence; include support (in-text citation)
  - o What does this evidence show? Analyze
  - o Additional support/reflections
- (repeat body paragraphs as needed)
- Conclusion: title
  - o Concluding thoughts; restate your thesis statement in new terms
  - o Emphasize the significance of your thesis; why does this matter?
  - o Concluding statement that readers will remember

### **Student Essay Outline:**

**Student Name:**

**Working Essay Title:**

**Main “Theme” of Selected Song:**

**Identify 3 lines or parts that illustrate the theme:**

1):

2):

3):

**Outline (use reverse side of paper if needed):**

Appendix 6: First-Draft Peer Review Workshop

## Worksheet 5: Peer Review Exercise

Briefly answer the below questions regarding each other's essays. Complete each block fully and complete one sheet for each student you review, or you will not earn full participation for the day. You may still proofread each other's essays, but try to focus on these questions.

Underline/Highlight the thesis statement. How does the essayist introduce the main theme being analyzed?

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Underline/Highlight each topic sentence. How do these support the main theme, paragraph by paragraph?

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How convincing is this analysis? What proof is offered, and is there enough support? Where is it strong, and where could it use a closer look?

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Overall, what is your reaction as an audience? Are you convinced by this analysis?

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