



DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Literary Analysis

A literary analysis consists of an in-depth analysis of specific themes, plot details, and symbols based on a thorough reading of the selected/assigned work(s). It should not just be a plot summary.

Getting Started

Step 1: When selecting a topic, read the chosen work(s) carefully, annotating and highlighting any themes, symbols, or ideas that incite interest.

Ex. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, popular themes might include the appearance of the eyes of T.J. Eckleberg on the billboard or what the green light represents to Jay.

Step 2: As you read, notice patterns that the writer seems to have followed.

Patterns often have the purpose of emphasizing a point the author is trying to make.

Ex. The eyes on the billboard always seem to be mentioned when someone in the story lies or does something wrong.

Step 3: Choose a topic that is interesting and has enough textual evidence to be effectively supported. As the reading progresses, develop a broad question about the text, based on one (or more) of the topics you highlighted in your reading, to serve as a guide in the research/writing process.

Ex. What do the eyes of T.J. Eckleberg represent and why did Fitzgerald decide to include them in the story? The billboard is only mentioned in two or three places, so it would work well for a shorter essay, but a longer essay would need a more frequently mentioned theme or image.

Step 4: If any additional research is necessary, do that before beginning the paper, as new information will help further narrow and support the topic.

Ex. Use the databases or the reference desk in the library to find sources that discuss the eyes of T.J. Eckleberg in *The Great Gatsby*.

Step 5: When all of the above steps are complete, write a working thesis statement that encompasses the main theme, symbol, or idea, as well as each important main point that will be discussed in the paper.

Ex. In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses the symbol of the eyes of T.J. Eckleberg to represent God always looking down on the sinful choices of Jay and Daisy. (This Thesis would be better for a shorter paper because it covers a more specific idea.)

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses the narrating voice of Nick Caraway and the symbolic eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleberg to represent his judgment on the hedonistic lifestyles of Daisy and Jay.

Tips for Writing the Paper

- When introducing new ideas, be sure to include only a small amount of necessary plot summary. The rest of the paper should be analysis and application of the selected topic.
- Once a quote has been used, be sure to discuss why that quote has been used. A general guideline is one sentence introducing the quote, then two or three after the quote explaining why the quote supports your point.
- Look for the “why” behind the author’s choices. Why did he or she choose to use the selected image or theme?
- Notice how the author’s choices tie into the ending. For example, Daisy is pictured as a very wild and carefree person, which ultimately leads to tragic events later in the book. What is the author trying to say by making Daisy’s overly carefree nature her downfall?
- In the conclusion, tie all of the previous points back together. Do not include any new information, but discuss the importance and application of what has already been said. Why are the author’s themes important, or what do they say about humanity in general? Emphasize the importance of what the author says and why it is important for readers to come away with that message. If there were any scriptural elements mentioned in the previous paragraphs, bring those into the conclusion as well. However, only make scriptural ties if they are necessary and applicable and if they are used throughout the paper.