**Your Literary Essay Guide**

**Writing an Introduction**

The introduction should lead your reader into your thesis by establishing the topic.

Start with a sentence that states the title of the novel and its author:

“The short story “The Flowers”, by Alice Walker, follows the journey of a girl named Myop over the course of a particular morning.”

Follow up with another sentence or two that narrows the topic.

“Although the story opens with Myop playing happily in her yard, she decides to take a walk. Little does she realize that the path she has chosen will lead her away from the naïveté of her childhood toward the complexity of adulthood.

(this gives more information about the nature of the journey)

This will lead to your thesis:

“In the short story “The Flowers”, the imagery of the settings Myop encounters on her walk echo her journey from innocence to experience.

Next, further explain how you are going to develop your thesis by outlining the basic structure of your essay:

“The language applied to Myop’s interaction with the setting moves from positive to negative as she moves farther from home, and this change continues until the moment Myop’s environment forces her to see beyond the comfort of what is familiar to a darker reality.”

**What to Avoid**

Vague or self-evident language: “this essay will discuss…” (this should be obvious), “the use of language is interesting and important” (of course it is – that is why you are writing about it!)

Sweeping statements that can’t be proven or are not explicitly connected to the text: “All people experience..” or “In history it is shown that….”

Off-topic comments: “In all of the author’s works….”

Too much summary; give the basic information that is relevant to your thesis (like the character Myop and that she is going on a journey)

**Incorporating Quotations**

A literary essay develops a point of view/argument about the **purpose and effect** of themes, character development, and other literary devices within the text.

Quotations are used as **evidence** to support the arguments you are making about the purpose and effect. Specific quotations give weight to your argument and proves your point.

* DO NOT use quotations to SUMMARIZE the plot.

**For Clear Quotation Use**

**Introduce your quotations**

* Introduce a quotation either by indicating what it is intended to show or by revealing who said it, or both.
* In a novel, attribute the quotations to "the narrator“ (but in TKAM the narrator is Scout, so use her name).
* Identify characters as you quote them.
* **Do not use two quotations in a row, without using words of your own, and never leave a quotation on its own – always give context.**

**Pay attention to verb tense**

* Always write in the present tense; the events in the novel are always happening in the present and simultaneously.
* That being said, events in a narrative take place in sequence. You will often need to use a past tense to refer to events that took place before the moment you are presently discussing:

After the verdict was read…

Before Scout realizes what is happening….

**Punctuating Quotations**

Generally speaking, you need to keep the quotation from the text exactly as it is written, although the following changes can be made:

**Changing the closing punctuation**

* Change the end punctuation if you need to include it into your own sentence:
* “Don’t eat things you find, Scout," Jem advises. (33)
* Commas and periods go inside the closing quotation marks; the other punctuation marks go outside.
* Jem advises,“Don’t eat things you find”; however, Scout had already eaten the stick of gum.
* Why does Jem advise, "Don't eat things you find"?

**Punctuating a quotation within a quotation**

When you are using a quotation that includes speech, or any use of quotation marks, use single quotation marks within the regular quotation marks: “‘\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’”

Example:

Atticus explains to Jem, “No jury in the world’s going to say, ‘We think you’re guilty, but not very,’ on a charge like that.” (Lee 219)

- Atticus is relating what “people” wouldn’t say. In the novel it is written, “We think you’re guilty, but not very,” but because this is within what is being quoted from the novel “\_\_\_” is changed to ‘\_\_\_\_’.

**Other punctuation options:**

**Use ellipses points for words that are taken out:**

* If you don’t need to include an entire sentence or passage, use “…” to replace the words that you have removed.

Atticus explains to Jem that, “There’s something in out world that makes men loose their heads…when it’s a white man’s word against a black man’s the white man always wins.” (Lee 220)

If you are working a quotation into a sentence, you can use square brackets [ ] and change the word inside of them:

* Change the verb tense or the pronoun so that the quotation makes sense within your sentence.
* In the following quotation “s” is added to “doubt” to change the verb tense, and “we’d” is changed to “they’d” to fit with the 3rd person point of view.

When Atticus considers women having a place on a jury, he “doubt[s] if [they’d] ever get a complicated case tried,” because “the ladies’d be interrupting to ask questions.” (Lee 221)

**Some Final Notes**

**Choose quotations carefully**

Only quote the bits that are relevant to that specific point.

Think of the text in terms of units--words, phrases, sentences, and groups of sentences (paragraphs, stanzas)--and use only the units you need.

If there are particular words or phrases that "prove" your point, you do not need to quote the sentences they appear in; rather, incorporate the words and phrases into sentences expressing your own ideas.

Ex: Scout’s description of the courtroom foreshadows the guilty verdict. She “shivers”, and describes the atmosphere as “cold”, and “no different than a winter morning”.

**Ways to incorporate a quotation:**

**An introducing phrase or orienter plus the quotation**:

In this poem it is creation, not a hypothetical creator, that is supremely awesome. [argument sentence].

* + The speaker asks, "What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?“ [data sentence; orienter before quote]
  + Gatsby is not to be regarded as a personal failure. [argument sentence]
  + "Gatsby turned out all right at the end" (176), according to Nick. [data sentence; orienter after quote]
  + "I know you blame me," Mrs. Compson tells Jason (47). [data sentence; orienter after quote]
  + Is she expressing her own sense of guilt? [argument sentence]

**An assertion of your own and a colon plus the quotation**:

* + Vivian hates the knights for scorning her, and she dreams of achieving glory by destroying Merlin's: "I have made his glory mine" (390).
  + Cassio represents not only a political but also a personal threat to Iago: "He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly . . ." (5.1.19-20).

**An assertion of your own with quoted material worked in**:

* + For Nick, who remarks that Gatsby "turned out all right" (176), the hero deserves respect but perhaps does not inspire great admiration.
* Rule of 3
  + Satan's motion is many things; he "rides" through the air (63), "rattles" (65), and later explodes, "wanders and hovers" like a fire (293).

**Writing a Conclusion**

* Your conclusion must not just go back to the thesis, it must DRAW a CONCLUSION. What can be learnt from your investigation?
* Example: “Echoing Myop’s personal growth through the setting reinforces her journey from innocence to experience.”
* Do not introduce new points in your conclusion!
* Do not use quotations in your conclusion!
* Do not start with “in conclusion”!