A Process for the Analysis of Literature
(Novel – Short Story)

Introduction: The Purpose of Analyzing Literature

There are several reasons for analysing literature. Analysing literature
1. strengthens reading and writing skills
2. enables a reader to see that his life and experiences have parallels to those found in literary works
3. enhances a reader’s understanding of the world through the exploration of other’s experiences, of which he/she might not have first hand knowledge
4. improves a reader’s understanding of the relationship between the elements of a literary work and its theme

A theme is a statement of opinion the author is making about life or society. A reader can understand the theme of the literary work when he closely examines the parts of that work. There are eight (8) literary elements that the author considers and manipulates in order to make his theme clear to the reader. Not all eight literary elements will always be equally important in every piece of literature, but it is important to know and understand them.

Themes are seldom stated directly. One way to discover the theme of a work of literature is to think about what happens to the central character. The importance of that event, stated in terms that apply to all human beings, is the theme.

1. PLOT: The plot of a literary work is the series of events in the story. The author emphasizes the more important parts of the plot so the reader can be involved in the story and understand what is happening. The author stresses certain parts of the plot in order to make his theme clear to the reader.

Plot is a sequence of events in a story. It consists of 4 elements:

1) Exposition – is simply the introductory material which gives the setting, creates the tone, presents the characters, and supplies other facts necessary for understanding the story.

2) Complication – is the author’s developing the conflict upon which the plot is based. In this part, the author also proceeds to entangle the characters in the web of this conflict.

3) Climax – is the turning point of the story. It is the moment of highest interest and greatest emotional response on the reader’s part.

4) Resolution – is the concluding part of the story. It rounds out the action and brings the reader down from the high point of the climax.
2. **CONFLICT:** Conflict is a struggle between two or more opposing forces.

There are four (4) types of conflict:

1) **Man vs. Man** -- (Conflict with Other People)
   - pits one person against another.
   In it the reader seeks to know how a character reacts to the stress of conflict.

2) **Man vs. Nature** -- (Conflict with Nature)
   - pits man against the elements.
   In it the reader observes how a run-in with nature tests the limits of a person’s strength and maybe even his will to live.

3) **Man vs. Society** -- (Conflict with Society)
   - Sometimes a person’s values, beliefs, and actions result in conflict with just about everyone in a group, in a community, or in all of society in general. The individual is challenging the values and customs everyone else lives by.

4) **Man vs. Himself** -- (Internal Conflict)
   - Two conflicting elements struggle within a character for mastery.
   This is a good test of a character’s values.

3. **SETTING:** Settings is the time and the place of the story.

   The author describes the geographical location, the physical surroundings, the historical period in which the story is set.

   **Devices Often Used:**
   - sights, sounds, smells
   - actual historical incidents or events
   - details of architecture and transportation
   - images & impressions that are created in a certain place and time.

   The setting of a literary work is the time and place in which the story takes place.

   The author chooses an appropriate setting so his theme is clear and the plot and the characters are realistic. Setting is sometimes extremely important to Theme; for example, in ghost stories or in stories in which the Conflict is Man vs. Nature. Other times the setting is not crucial to Theme development.
4. CHARACTERIZATION: Characterization is the study of a fictional character’s traits.

A character trait is an adjective that describes a character’s personality and motivation. A character trait describes what a person is like: for example, greedy, generous…

Six (6) of the ways a reader can discover a character’s personality are
- what he looks like
- what he does
- what he says
- what he thinks
- how others react to him
- the author directly tells the reader what a character is like

The author may use any or all of these.

Characters may be studied in terms of their depth:

1) Dynamic Characters: They change as result of what happens to them. They grow or progress to a higher level of understanding in the story.

2) Static Characters: They do not change significantly in the course of story.

3) Flat Characters—Stereotypes

4) Round Characters—Complex, multi-faceted

5. POINT OF VIEW: The author must choose a method of relating his story to the reader. Point of view tells the reader from whose perspective the story is told. There are three main types of point of view:

In First Point of View the story is told in first person (“I”) by the main character who is directly involved in the conflict. Because the reader knows only this character’s thoughts, First Point of View is a limited point of view. The pigman is an example of a novel written in First Point of View.

In Second Point of View the narrator tells the story to another character using "you," so that the story is being told through the addressee's point of view. Second person is the least commonly used POV in fiction, though there are a few examples. The Great Gatsby is an example of a novel written in Second Point of View.

In Third Point of View the story is told in the third person (“he,” “she,” “they”) by an anonymous narrator. The only thing the reader knows about the narrator is that he is not at all involved in the story. Third Point of View is considered an unlimited point of view because the author has the option of including the thoughts of all the characters if he wishes. The author usually focuses on the thoughts of the main characters. Most novels are written in Third Point of View because it is the easiest way for the author to reveal characterization and to get across the whole plot.
6. SYMBOLISM: A symbol is anything used to represent something else. In literature, the term symbol usually refers to a concrete image used to designate an abstract quality or concept.

An author uses symbolism when he uses an object or a person to represent an idea or another person.

7. STRUCTURE: The author must choose an appropriate framework for his story. This framework is called structure.

The most common structure used in fiction is chronological order. Chronological is not the only form. Some authors used others. For example, Serpico begins at the end of the story and goes back to the beginning. Go Ask Alice is written in diary form. A novel could also be written as a series of letters. This is called an epistolary form.

Whatever form the author chooses, he does so to clarify his THEME.

8. LANGUAGE AND STYLE: Style is the manner in which an author uses words, constructs sentences, incorporates non-literal expressions, and handles rhythm, timing, and tone.

When asked to discuss style, you are being asked to describe how or explain why the words, sentences, and imaginative comparisons are effective in terms of what is being created.

Diction- Central to an author’s style. Includes:
1. Vocabulary- Choice of words
   a. Simple words- Everyday word choice. (“She was sick for a long time.”)
   b. Complex words- Flexing intellectual muscle (“Garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood.”)
   c. Concrete words- Things we can touch, see, etc. (Jeans, book...)
   d. Abstract words- Words that express intangible ideas (freedom, heritage, something)
2. Syntax- arrangement of words, their ordering, grouping and placement within phrases, clauses, and sentences.
3. Rhythm- The pattern of flow and movement created by the choice of words and the arrangement of phrases and sentences.