

Prestwick House Pre-AP: Readings and Exercises



Introduction to Literary Analysis

CHAPTER 5

UP UNTIL NOW, MUCH of what you're read, discussed, and written about in English class has probably focused on interpretation—what the story, poem, play means. What is the theme? What idea is the author exploring?

You've probably also spent a good deal of time identifying story elements (this event introduces the conflict; this event is part of the rising action; this event is the climax . . .) and language and narrative devices. We've dealt with reasons for needing to be able to identify those devices in Chapters 2 and 3.

Your Advanced Placement exams, however, will almost never ask you merely to interpret a story. The writers and scorers of the exam *assume* you understand what you're reading. Primarily, both the AP Literature and Composition and the Language and Composition exams will ask you to *analyze* literature.

Essentially, analysis is the process of figuring out not what a piece means, but how it has been constructed to communicate that meaning to the reader.

Is the story funny? What makes it funny?

Is the plot so suspenseful that you couldn't put the book down? How did the writer structure the plot to keep you reading?

Was the editorial's argument so skillfully and subtly laid out that you found yourself nodding in agreement without even realizing it? How did the writer organize and present that argument?

Analysis, then, is not interested only in the meaning or impact of a piece of literature—meaning and impact are taken for granted. Analysis is the examination of *how the writer does it*.

Of course, you cannot intelligently discuss a writer's technique if you don't know the right terms, so all of those "identify and define" exercises weren't a waste of time and energy, after all. In fact, if you *aren't* conversant with terms like "parallelism," "interior monologue," "indirect dialogue," "rising action," "falling action," "climax," and so on, you need to devote some time to learning them.

Your inability to use these terms in your writing will lower your AP score as surely as your inability to read and understand a written piece without your teacher's assistance.

Analyzing (not merely interpreting) prose fiction

In the previous chapters, we've isolated individual elements of a literary analysis, but we haven't stepped back to look at the big picture—the complete analysis. The following two stories will help you to see that process. As we've done in the previous chapters, the first story, Dorothy Parker's "The Standard of Living," is annotated to show the kinds of thoughts and questions that would probably occur to a student taking an AP exam. The multiple-choice and free-response items illustrate how the AP exam looks more toward analysis than interpretation.

The second story, Marietta Holley's "An Unmarried Female," is for you to practice on.

The Standard of Living

DOROTHY PARKER (1893 – 1967)

ANNABEL AND MIDGE CAME OUT of the tea room with the arrogant slow gait of the leisured,¹ for their Saturday afternoon stretched ahead of them. They had lunched, as was their wont,² on sugar, starches, oils, and butter-fats. Usually³ they ate sandwiches of spongy new white bread greased with butter and mayonnaise; they ate thick wedges of cake lying wet beneath ice cream and whipped cream and melted chocolate gritty with nuts.⁴ As alternates, they ate pasties, sweating beads of inferior oil, containing bits of bland meat bogged in pale, stiffening sauce; they ate pastries, limber under rigid icing, filled with an indeterminate yellow sweet stuff, not still solid, not yet liquid, like salve that has been left in the sun.⁵ They chose no other sort of food, nor did they consider it. And their skin was like the petals of wood anemones, and their bellies were as flat and

Sample Student Commentary

- ¹ Parker's word choice creates a vivid image of the girls' walk and is the first clue to their overall characters.
² Parenthetical asides like this one create an informal, conversational tone. Parker is known for her sarcastic wit, so this tone may be colored by sarcasm.
³ The story begins in medias res, with the girls leaving the tea room. This single word signals the beginning of the exposition.
⁴ Parker creates a vivid image of the girls' habitual food by providing a few, but very specific, details. Note the word choice that emphasizes wetness and decadence: spongy, greased, wet, melted. Note also the simple list of foods known to be delicious but also fattening.
⁵ Another vivid image created by a list of precise nouns and explicit adjectives. Note that from this and the previous list, we get not only a clear picture of the food the girls eat, but we also continue to develop a strong impression of the girls themselves.

their flanks as lean as those of young Indian braves.⁶

Annabel and Midge had been best friends almost from the day that Midge had found a job as stenographer with the firm that employed Annabel. By now, Annabel, two years and fifty cents a week; Midge was still at sixteen dollars. Each girl lived at home with her family and paid half her salary to its support.

The girls sat side by side at their desks, they lunched together every noon, together they set out for home at the end of the day's work. Many of their evenings and most of their Sundays were passed in each other's company. Often they were joined by two young men, but there was no steadiness to any such quartet; the two young men would give place, unlamented, to two other young men, and lament would have been inappropriate, really,⁷ since the newcomers were scarcely distinguishable from their predecessors. Invariably the girls spent the fine idle hours of their hot-weather Saturday afternoons together. Constant use had not worn ragged the fabric of their friendship.⁸

They looked alike, though the resemblance did not lie in their features. It was in the shape of their bodies, their movements, their style, and their adornments. Annabel and Midge did, and completely,⁹ all that young office workers are besought not to do. They painted their lips and their nails, they darkened their lashes and lightened their hair,¹⁰ and scent seemed to shimmer from them. They wore thin, bright dresses, tight over their breasts and high on their legs, and tilted slippers, fancifully strapped. They looked conspicuous and cheap and charming.¹¹

Now, as they walked across to Fifth Avenue with their skirts swirled by the hot wind, they received audible admiration. Young men grouped lethargically about newsstands awarded them murmurs, exclamations, even—the ultimate tribute—whistles.¹² Annabel and Midge passed without the condensation of hurrying their pace; they held their

Sample Student Commentary

- ⁶ These similes assume the reader knows how smooth or blemish-free wood anemone petals are, but, clearly, any comparison to flower petals would evoke beauty and softness. Parker also assumes we can imagine the leanness and strength of a "young Indian brave" in order to picture the smooth leanness of the girls' bodies. It is important to note that the girls' leanness is in stark contrast to the fatty foods they consume.
⁷ More parenthetical asides, these more sarcastic than the first.
⁸ A common enough, easy-to-understand metaphor. Perhaps the simplicity of this metaphor helps to emphasize the girls' basic simplicity and the effortlessness of their friendship.
⁹ Another parenthetical aside. Parker wants to emphasize that, not only did the girls do this, they did it to its fullest extent.
¹⁰ Rhetorically, this is antithesis. It probably emphasizes that, in their cosmetic efforts, the girls leave nothing of their appearances unchanged. They violate the convention of standard office wear "completely."
¹¹ Here is a particularly effective blend of polysyndeton, alliteration, antithesis, and climax. The polysyndeton and alliteration maintain Parker's lighthearted tone. The antithesis sets the reader up for surprise: we think Parker is criticizing the girls, but she is actually delighted by them. The climax delivers the surprise.
¹² Note how the dashes emphasize the aside. The commas that separate the others more or less de-emphasize their content. Here, through the dashes, Parker wants to make it absolutely clear that that these young women enjoy the attention they receive from the young men.

heads higher and set their feet with exquisite precision, as if they stepped over the necks of peasants.¹³

6 Always the girls went to walk on Fifth Avenue on their free afternoons, for it was the ideal ground for their favorite game. The game could be played anywhere, and indeed, was, but the great shop windows stimulated the two players to their best form.

7 Annabel had invented the game; or rather she had evolved it from an old one. Basically, it was no more than the ancient sport of what-would-you-do-if-you-had-a-million-dollars? But Annabel had drawn a new set of rules for it, had narrowed it, pointed it, made it stricter. Like all games, it was the more absorbing for being more difficult.

8 Annabel's version went like this: You must suppose that somebody dies and leaves you a million dollars, cool. But there is a condition to the bequest. It is stated in the will that you must spend every nickel of the money on yourself.¹⁴

9 There lay the hazard of the game. If, when playing it, you forgot and listed among your expenditures the rental of a new apartment for your family, for example, you lost your turn to the other player.¹⁵ It was astonishing how many—and some of them among the experts, too—would forfeit all their innings by such slips.

10 It was essential, of course, that it be played in passionate seriousness. Each purchase must be carefully considered and, if necessary, supported by argument. There was no zest to playing it wildly. Once Annabel had introduced the game to Sylvia, another girl who worked in the office. She explained the rules to Sylvia and then offered her the gambit “What would be the first thing you’d do?” Sylvia had not shown the decency of even a second of hesitation. “Well,” she said, “the first thing I’d do, I’d go out and hire somebody to shoot Mrs. Gary Cooper,¹ and then...” So it is to be seen that she was no fun.

11 But Annabel and Midge were surely born to be comrades, for Midge played the game like a master from the moment she learned it. It was she who added the touches that made the whole thing cozier. According to Midge’s innovations, the eccentric who died and left you the money was not anybody you loved, or, for the matter of that, anybody you even knew. It was somebody who had seen you somewhere and had thought, “That girl ought to have lots of nice things. I’m going to leave her a million dollars when I die.” And the death was to be neither untimely nor painful. Your benefactor, full of years and comfortably ready to depart, was to slip softly away during sleep and go right to heaven.¹⁶ These embroideries¹⁷ permitted Annabel and Midge to play their game in the luxury of peaceful consciences.

¹ Gary Cooper was a popular movie star of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.

Sample Student Commentary

¹³ Simile. Note that Parker has not used many adjectives to describe their characters (such as “young,” “self-confident,” “immature”), but her vivid descriptions of their clothing, their food, and their manner of walking create an unmistakable impression of their characters.

¹⁴ Annabel’s stipulation suggests that the reader is supposed to like her. She finds it hard to be selfish, so she arranges the rules of the game so that the players must be.

¹⁵ Further establishes that it is not in the girls’ nature to be selfish, so the rules of the game must require them to be.

¹⁶ Here it is established that Midge, too, is a nice girl, likeable, deserving of reader sympathy.

¹⁷ Metaphor. Midge’s extra “touches” do not change the nature of the game; they merely embellish it.

12 Midge played with a seriousness that was not only proper but extreme. The single strain on the girls’ friendship had followed an announcement once made by Annabel that the first thing she would buy with her million dollars would be a silver-fox coat. It was as if she had struck Midge across the mouth. When Midge recovered her breath, she cried that she couldn’t imagine how Annabel could do such a thing—silver-fox coats were so common! Annabel defended her taste with the retort that they were not common, either. Midge then said that they were so. She added that everybody had a silver-fox coat. She went on, with perhaps a slight loss of head, to declare that she herself wouldn’t be caught dead in silver-fox.¹⁸

13 For the next few days, though the girls saw each other as constantly, their conversation was careful and infrequent, and they did not once play their game. Then one morning, as soon as Annabel entered the office, she came to Midge and said she had changed her mind. She would not buy a silver-fox coat with any part of her million dollars. Immediately on receiving the legacy, she would select a coat of mink.

14 Midge smiled and her eyes shone. “I think,” she said, “you’re doing absolutely the right thing.”¹⁹

15 Now, as they walked along Fifth Avenue, they played the game anew.²⁰ It was one of those days with which September is repeatedly cursed: hot and glaring, with slivers of dust in the wind. People drooped and shambled, but the girls carried themselves tall and walked a straight line, as befitted young heiresses on their afternoon promenade. There was no longer need for them to start the game at its formal opening. Annabel went direct to the heart of it.

16 “All right,”²¹ she said. “So you’ve got this million dollars. So what would be the first thing you’d do?”

17 “Well, the first thing I’d do,” Midge said, “I’d get a mink coat.” But she said it mechanically, as if she were giving the memorized answer to an expected question.

18 “Yes,” Annabel said. “I think you ought to. The terribly dark kind of mink.” But she, too, spoke as if by rote. It was too hot; fur, no matter how dark and sleek and supple, was horrid to the thoughts.

19 They stepped along in silence for a while. Then Midge’s eye was caught by a shop window. Cool, lovely gleamings were there set off by chase and elegant darkness.²²

20 “No,” Midge said, “I take it back. I wouldn’t get a mink coat the first thing. Know what I’d do? I’d get a string of pearls. Real pearls.”²³

21 Annabel’s eyes turned to follow Midge’s.

Sample Student Commentary

¹⁸ While we are still in the plot exposition, Parker does not want to waste a lot of time and space on recreating the girls’ conversation, so she employs indirect dialogue. This technique allows Parker to maintain her tone and provide a specific example of how the girls get along without interrupting the casual flow of the narrative.

¹⁹ Here, however, Parker does provide a direct quotation. This is clearly a clue to something, even if we don’t know what yet.

²⁰ We are leaving the exposition and returning to the action of the story that began in the first sentence. The direct quotation at the end of the previous paragraph was the beginning of this transition.

²¹ Having returned to the “present,” the actual day of the story, Parker now shows the reader the action as it happens. So, now the dialogue is presented directly.

²² The image is heightened by the contrasts of “lovely” and “chaste” and “gleamings” and “darkness.”

²³ Since this is the first real departure from the way the girls have played the game, Midge’s first sight of the pearls is probably the inciting incident. This small event is the beginning of the rising action.

- 22 "Yes," she said, slowly. "I think that's a kind of a good idea. And it would make sense, too. Because you can wear pearls with anything."
- 23 Together they went over to the shop window and stood pressed against it. It contained but one object—a double row of great, even pearls clasped by a deep emerald around a little pink velvet throat.²⁴
- 24 "What do you suppose they cost?" Annabel said.
- 25 "Gee, I don't know," Midge said. "Plenty, I guess."
- 26 "Like a thousand dollars?" Annabel said.
- 27 "Oh, I guess like more," Midge said. "On account of the emerald."
- 28 "Well, like ten thousand dollars?" Annabel said.
- 29 "Gee, I wouldn't even know," Midge said.
- 30 The devil nudged Annabel in the ribs. "Dare you to go in and price them," she said.²⁵
- 31 "Like fun!" Midge said.
- 32 "Dare you," Annabel said.
- 33 "Why, a store like this wouldn't even be open this afternoon," Midge said.
- 34 "Yes, it is so, too," Annabel said. "People just came out. And there's a doorman on. Dare you."
- 35 "Well," Midge said. "But you've got to come too."
- 36 They tendered thanks, icily, to the doorman for ushering them into the shop. It was cool and quiet, a broad, gracious room with paneled walls and soft carpet. But the girls wore expressions of bitter disdain, as if they stood in a sty.
- 37 A slim, immaculate clerk came to them and bowed. His neat face showed no astonishment at their appearance.²⁶
- 38 "Good afternoon," he said. He implied that he would never forget it if they would grant him the favor of accepting his soft-spoken greeting.
- 39 "Good afternoon," Annabel and Midge said together, and in like freezing accents.
- 40 "Is there something—?" the clerk said.
- 41 "Oh, we're just looking," Annabel said. It was as if she flung the words down from a dais.
- 42 The clerk bowed.
- 43 "My friend and myself²⁷ merely happened to be passing," Midge said, and stopped, seeming to listen to the phrase. "My friend here and myself," she went on, "merely happened to be wondering how much are those pearls you've got in your window."
- 44 "Ah, yes," the clerk said. "The double rope. That is two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, Madam."

Sample Student Commentary

- ²⁴ Rising action: the game's stakes increase when there is no longer a hypothetical mink coat, but an actual string of pearls.
- ²⁵ Rising action: the situation intensifies when the girls actually enter the store.
- ²⁶ The clerk's reaction combines understatement and litotes. To appreciate the man's expression, we need to remember the earlier description of how the girls are dressed and made up. Parker used words like "conspicuous" and "cheap" to describe them.
- ²⁷ Hearing the characters' own words gives us the opportunity to arrive at our own conclusion. We probably both wince and smile at Annabel's futile attempt to put on airs.

- 45 "I see," Midge said.²⁸
- 46 The clerk bowed. "An exceptionally beautiful necklace," he said. "Would you care to look at it?"
- 47 "No, thank you," Annabel said.
- 48 "My friend and myself merely happened²⁹ to be passing," Midge said.
- 49 They turned to go; to go, from their manner, where the tumbrel³⁰ awaited them.³⁰ The clerk sprang ahead and opened the door. He bowed as they swept by him.
- 50 The girls went on along the Avenue and disdain was still on their faces.
- 51 "Honestly!" Annabel said. "Can you imagine a thing like that?"
- 52 "Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" Midge said. "That's a quarter of a million dollars right there!"
- 53 "He's got his nerve!" Annabel said.
- 54 They walked on. Slowly the disdain went, slowly and completely as if drained from them, and with it went the regal carriage and tread. Their shoulders dropped and they dragged their feet; they bumped against each other, without notice or apology, and caromed away again. They were silent and their eyes were cloudy.³¹
- 55 Suddenly Midge straightened her back, flung her head high, and spoke, clear and strong.³²
- 56 "Listen, Annabel," she said. "Look. Suppose there was this terribly rich person, see? You don't know this person, but this person has seen you somewhere and wants to do something for you. Well, it's a terribly old person, see? And so this person dies, just like going to sleep, and leaves you ten million dollars. Now, what would be the first thing you'd do?"³³

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³⁰ A tumbrel was the type of cart used to transport condemned prisoners to their execution, especially to lake victims of the French Revolution to the guillotine.

Sample Student Commentary

- ²⁸ Note again that Parker refuses to describe the reaction to the reader. We hear Midge's words and are left to build our own conclusion. Also note, we might be tempted to see this event as the turning point—the climax—of the story, but Midge's reaction is ambiguous, and the end of the story is still not determined.
- ²⁹ This is the third iteration of this phrase. Given what we have been led to believe about Midge and Annabel, we can guess fairly accurately how the tone of each iteration has changed.
- ³⁰ Suggests a new timidity? Are the girls defeated?*
- ³¹ Again, by describing only the girls' gait and posture, Parker leaves no doubt of what they are thinking and feeling.
- ³² Here is the climax of the story, the turning point, the highest point in the rising action. This is the moment at which the outcome of the story is determined. The girls will not sink home, defeated, but the game will be resurrected. This incident also constitutes something of a reversal. Just when we believe the girls are defeated and their game ruined, Midge finds a way to rescue it, and the story has a completely different resolution from the one previously expected.
- ³³ The denouement, or resolution, maintains the lighthearted tone and establishes the girls as likeable, but static, characters. There has been no change or growth as a result of the events in this plot. In fact, the girls may be even more committed to their carefree, unselfish, confident optimism at the end of the story than they were at the beginning.

Sample Multiple-Choice Questions:

- The images in the opening paragraph suggest that Midge and Annabel are
 - wealthy.
 - poor.
 - attractive.
 - carefree.
 - careless.
- Parker uses all of the following techniques to develop her characters EXCEPT
 - qualitative description.
 - indirect dialogue.
 - quotation.
 - action.
 - imagery.
- The overall tone of this story can best be described as
 - comical.
 - cheerful.
 - didactic.
 - sarcastic.
 - dismissive.
- The primary effect achieved by the *italics* in the 37th paragraph is to
 - suggest the clerk's arrogance.
 - emphasize the girls' cheapness.
 - underscore the situation's incongruity.
 - evoke reader sympathy for the girls.
 - evoke reader sympathy for the clerk.
- The author's attitude toward Annabel and Midge can best be described as
 - critical.
 - condescending.
 - laudatory.
 - empathetic.
 - amused.

Answers and Explanations:

- While it is not yet explained in the opening paragraph where the young women work or how much they are paid, there are also no details to suggest wealth (A). Certainly the lunches we are told they consume, described with words like "inferior" and "bland" do not suggest wealth. There is no reason, however, to conclude that they are poor (B) either. They are, after all, apparently able to buy their lunches on a fairly regular basis. Certainly, while the descriptions of their skin and figures might suggest (C), this is not the best answer, as the bulk of the paragraph deals with the food they eat and the way they walk down the street. (E) might also be tempting as it is clear the young women routinely eat food commonly believed to contribute to skin and weight problems, but the fact that we are told they did not have such problems excludes (E). The way the girls walk, however, their arrogant swagger, the way they eat what they want with abandon, and the fact that we are told their entire Saturday afternoon lay before them, **all strongly suggest (D)**.
- Virtually all of the dialogue communicated to the reader in the exposition of this story is in the form of indirect dialogue (B) in which the content of the conversation is summarized but not quoted word for word. The exposition ends, however, with a direct quotation, and all of the girls' conversation during the actual time of the story is presented as direct quotations (C). (D) is the first technique the reader encounters—the girl's arrogant gait, their lunch habits, and so on. (E) likewise, is used early in the story—the descriptions of the food, their clothing, their cosmetic habits. Dorothy Parker does not, however, impose a single qualitative adjective on the reader. She never once describes her characters as "nice," or "perky," or name any other trait except as it can be inferred from one of the above techniques. **Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**
- The story is certainly lighthearted, and Parker seems genuinely amused by the Midge and Annabel, but there is nothing truly comical (A) in the story. (C) is clearly inappropriate as there are no lessons to be learned either by the characters or the reader, and certainly Parker does not seem to have a message to send with this story. While there may be a few elements of sarcasm (D), the story is not sarcastic overall. In fact, Parker seems to like her characters, and she seems to want her reader to be amused by them. (E) is unlikely; although she does say the girls look "conspicuous and cheap," she also says they are "charming." While obviously amused by these characters, Parker is certainly not dismissive of them. Parker's careful word choice, however, her use of asides, and the denouement she provides for her plot combine to create an overall lighthearted or cheerful tone. **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**

4. Litotes, in general, is used to suggest a weak positive or an understatement. The clerk does not act arrogantly toward the girls, nor does he ignore them or refuse to serve them; in fact, his failure to seem surprised at their entrance into the store is far from arrogance. Thus, (A) is easily eliminated. Likewise, (B) would be achieved by the clerk's showing surprise, not by his showing no surprise. (D) would be possible if the clerk were somehow rude or unkind to the girls, but he is not. (E) is mildly tempting because, clearly, we are not to dislike the clerk; his role is so minor that it is unlikely Parker wants the reader to care either way. Only (C) addresses the purpose and function of litotes. **Thus, (C) is the best answer.**

5. This question is not terribly different from question 3—and it is unlikely that there will be two so similar questions on your AP exam—but it does provide us with the opportunity to examine Parker's word choice and use of literary and rhetorical devices to support whatever inference we reach. While Parker does call the girls "conspicuous and cheap," she does conclude that they are "charming." While they may border on the silly, they are apparently kind and unselfish. Thus, (A) is clearly incorrect. Nor can Parker be said to be condescending (B) toward the young women. Again, they are "charming." They handle the calls and whistles from the men with dignity. They even handle the epiphany of the price of the necklace with dignity. And they end the story as optimistic as they ever were. Thus, (B) is eliminated. Some students might be tempted by (C), but while Parker seems to genuinely like these girls and does not criticize them or condescend to them, she does not overtly praise them or express admiration for them, either. Likewise, a feeling of amusement and a general sense of approval cannot be mistaken for empathy (D) and nothing in the story suggests that Parker feels a sense of solidarity with her two working-class characters. **(E) is the best answer.** Parker's attitude is clearly positive, but it cannot be read as reaching the point of admiration. She is amused by these girls, their friendship, and their spirit.

Sample free-response item (text-based):



Carefully read Dorothy Parker's short story "The Standard of Living" and write a thoughtful and well-organized essay in which you analyze Parker's language, especially her word choice, and the impact it has on the overall tone of the story. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Creative writers often use their language to show, not tell, the reader what happens in the story.¹ Through descriptive word choice and carefully chosen literary devices, authors can create a stylish depiction of their characters' personalities, actions, and dialogue without explicitly stating every detail. Much of the narrative is left to the reader's interpretation, guided by literary and verbal cues. In Dorothy Parker's short story "The Standard of Living," she uses her language to lead the reader to know her characters, understand them, like them, and then admire them.² She uses specific literary devices, such as simile, antithesis, and litotes, to portray their outward appearance and bearing, which then sheds light on their inner thoughts and attitudes. Because Parker herself seems to like these characters, her word choice and stylistic devices give her tone a sarcastic wit.³

In Dorothy Parker's first paragraph,⁴ instead of blatantly describing her two characters, Annabel and Midge, as "nice" or "friendly" or "silly," she creates a powerful image of their personalities. The first depiction of the two girls is done in medias res,⁵ following them as they leave the tea room "with the arrogant slow gait of the leisured." How the girls walk is the first clue to the reader that they might be haughty and possibly spoiled. The sentences of exposition that follow do not give the readers facts about Annabel and Midge, but about what they had just eaten: "[they] had lunched, as was their wont, on sugars, starches, oils, and butter fats." Parker's word choice of what the two ate argues to the reader that Annabel and Midge are decadent and do not eat or do what is necessarily good for them. The phrase, "as was their wont" is a parenthetical aside, which creates an informal and casual tone, suggesting to the reader that Parker is divulging a tidbit of information or possibly a secret about the girls.⁶ At the end of the paragraph,

Scorer Commentary

¹ Here, the student uses a parenthetical aside to emphasize his point.

² The student introduces his argument, claiming that the author has a reason for writing the way she does, that style is not merely habit. It is important to explain, not only what an author is doing, but also why she may be doing it. This creates a "thesis driven" and argumentative paper.

³ The student presents his thesis at the end of the first paragraph, which helps to lead him into the following section of his paper. Here, he lists three literary terms he is planning on discussing.

⁴ This student uses numerical ordering as a logical progression for his paper. It is important to use transitional elements when leading into and away from each paragraph.

⁵ Here, the student uses a literary term to describe the action in the story. While it is not wise to use all the literary terms that you have learned just for the sake of using them in your essay, it is very important that you use them when it is appropriate to demonstrate your knowledge to the reader.

⁶ This student embeds the quotation in his own words and follows with an explanatory sentence. It is important to demonstrate the ability to "close read" the text.

Parker finally offers a small hint at the physicality of the two girls, but not through direct description or explicit details. She merely suggests through simile, stating that "their bellies were as flat and their flanks as lean as those of young Indian braves." Annabel and Midge are depicted as fit, strong, and lean characters, which starkly contrasts their leisurely activities and fatty food choices. Parker does not give away anything about her characters; the reader is meant to dissect her language and infer from her word choice what the girls are like.⁷

Later in the story, Parker continues to hint⁸ at the physicality and character of Annabel and Midge, not by describing them but by describing others' reactions to them: "Young men grouped lethargically about newsstands awarded them murmurs, exclamations, even—the ultimate tribute—whistles." These are attractive young women, and they know it. They attract attention, and they seem to enjoy attracting attention.

The most blatant bit of describing Parker does is still more visual and suggestive than expository: "[they] did, and completely, all that young office workers are besought not to do. They painted their lips and nails, they darkened their lashes and lightened their hair." Again, we learn through her contrast in language that the girls behave not as they should. As "young office workers," Annabel and Midge are expected to dress plainly, with little make-up.⁹ Instead, as Parker describes, they are their peers' antithesis. Parker's opposing word choices of "darkening" and "lightening" complement her sarcastically contrary tone. As the girls walk by the jewelry shop, Parker uses the slow exposition of the plot to further challenge the reader to infer what she is really saying about the girls. Parker explains that the two "...stepped along in silence for a while. Then Midge's eye was caught by a shop window. Cool, lovely gleamings were there set off by chaste and elegant darkness." Here, Parker heightens the image by using contrasting language: the words "lovely" and "chaste" and "gleamings" and "darkness." Parker is provoking her audience to be active readers and to look through her descriptions to discover the true nature of the characters.

"Chaste" and "elegant" also provide a sharp contrast to the image Parker has already provided of the bleached-blonde friends. The girls are "conspicuous and cheap"; the necklace is "cool," and its setting is "chaste" and "elegant."

The understated litotes¹⁰ of the clerk's reaction is another example of careful word choice. While not saying anything about the girl's appearance, Parker manages to announce loud and clear how inappropriate they are for their current setting.

Scorer Commentary

⁷ This ending sentence goes back to the student's original argument from his introductory paragraph. You should always make sure that your paper is staying close to your original argument and that it progresses logically through the use of transitional sentences.

⁸ This student uses careful word choices, such as "hint," to suggest his own casual and suggestive tone to his paper. He offers further explanation of his "close-reading" by discussing the expectations of the girls' employment, which was not mentioned in the text. While the grades of the AP exam will not expect you to have any outside knowledge of the text, it is a good idea to demonstrate that knowledge if you do have it.

¹⁰ Here, the student offers the final literary term he outlined in his introductory paragraph.

The foundation Parker has carefully laid pays off at the end of the story, when with a single smile and comment, she communicates to her reader her characters' true personalities. Midge's "my friend here and myself" sounds sophisticated to her ear, but the reader and the clerk both know she is using improper grammar. They look cheap, and they sound cheap.

For one brief moment, they might seem to be defeated. They probably even feel as if they have been "discovered" in their playacting. They leave the store as if they expected to be executed. They are disappointed. They are angry. They may feel humiliated that what had to them seemed like an unlimited amount of money could be spent so easily. That may be what they are admitting when Midge says, "That's a quarter of a million dollars right there!" and Annabel replies, "He's got his nerve!" The two girls, who at the beginning of the story were so confident—almost arrogant—are defeated. Parker does not tell the reader they are defeated, she shows them to be defeated. "the disdain went, slowly and completely as if drained from them, and with it went the regal carriage and tread. Their shoulders dropped and they dragged their feet; they bumped against each other, without notice or apology, and caromed away again. They were silent and their eyes were cloudy."¹¹

The reader can't help but sympathize with these frivolous young women who eat what they want, dress as they please, enjoy the attention of young men, and are now crushed by their first real glimpse into what had been their fantasy world. Their game is ruined.

Then, however, without ever telling the reader what the girls think or feel, Parker makes it clear that the girls' spirits cannot be defeated. They are every bit as confident and pleased with themselves as they ever were. Parker tells the reader, "Suddenly Midge straightened her back, flung her head high, and spoke, clear and strong." By restating the rules of the game, and then increasing the ante to ten million dollars, Parker makes it clear that the girls are not defeated. Their confident bearing and carefree attitude were not pretense.

And Parker has been able to guide her reader to this conclusion without a single direct description asserting what the girls are or how they act. That Parker is amused by Midge and Annabel and wants her reader to be as well is evident in her style, her word choice, and use of common literary devices. She chooses words to show her reader, not to tell.

Scorer Commentary

¹¹ This important paragraph returns us to the opening point about authors' showing rather than telling.

Sample free-response item (independent):

Poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his journal, "In good writing, words become one with things" (July 8, 1831). Choose a story, poem, or novel in which the author's attention to word choice reflects this philosophy. Then write a thoughtful and well-supported essay in which you analyze how the "words become things" and how such attention to language contributes to "good writing." Avoid plot summary.

No short story illustrates Ralph Waldo Emerson's observation, "In good writing, words become one with things," better than Dorothy Parker's delightful "The Standard of Living." Parker's descriptions, especially of the main characters' favorite lunch foods and the pearl necklace in the jewelry shop window, are perfect examples of how words become things.

When describing the girls' lunches, Parker doesn't merely name the foods Annabelle and Midge eat¹; she describes them so clearly the reader can taste them. The girls eat sugars, starch, oils, and fats. Parker describes their hamburgers as patties "sweating beads" of oil and swathed in sauce. The sandwiches are made with "spongy white bread," laden with butter and mayonnaise. Their desserts consist of wedges of cake saturated with ice cream and crusted with nuts and of pastries so plastered with icing, they are "limber."² The nouns Parker uses are vivid, naming the characteristics of the food (beads of oil, sugars, starch, and oil) rather than the food itself (hamburgers). The result is that the reader can picture the hamburger, glistening in fat and sauce, and almost long for a taste. The words she uses to describe the food become the food.

Parker uses the same technique later in the story when one of the girls notices the necklace in the jewelry shop window.³ She never even identifies specifically what type of necklace the girls are attracted to, simply describing it in terms of its brilliance contrasting with the cool darkness of the shop window. Parker uses phrases like "lovely gleamings" and "chaste, elegant darkness"⁴ to create an image far more powerful than if she were simply to identify the necklace as pearls or diamonds. It is only later, after the value and beauty have been established, that

Scorer Commentary

¹ Since this is the independent essay and the student does not have the story in front of her, this minor misspelling of the character's name is forgivable. To use the wrong name would be a more serious error.

² Again, the student does not have the story right before her, so she quotes when she is fairly certain she is using the right word, and she paraphrases when she must. The point is, however, that she does recreate to the best of her ability the details of the story; she does not simply tell her reader that the details are there.

³ The student apparently cannot remember specifically which girl first noticed the necklace. It is better for her to be vague here than to misidentify the character.

⁴ Knowing that you are going to have to write an essay not very different from this one, it might be helpful to keep a file of key words and phrases from the literature you read so you will be able to provide the occasional quotation in your essay.

Parker identifies the necklace as pearls—a double rope. Just as Parker's precise word choice teased the reader into wanting a taste of Annabelle's and Midge's hamburgers and ice cream, her ambiguous but graphic description of the necklace makes the identification of the substance redundant.

As Emerson wrote, in good writing, the words become the things. This is especially true in Dorothy Parker's "The Standard of Living," in which Parker is able to create for her reader unhealthy but delicious food and unimaginably expensive jewelry. For the reader, Parker's words truly become the things she is describing.⁵

Scorer Commentary

⁵ This is a nice essay. It addresses the assigned topic, uses specific and detailed examples, and never strays from a discussion of the point into plot summary. The student quotes when she can but always stays close to the text of the story.

Exercise One:

Questions 1–5. Carefully read the following passage before you choose your answers.

Though largely forgotten by the time she died, Marietta Holley was a best-selling American humorist and satirist during the second half of the nineteenth century. She was so popular that she was often compared to Mark Twain, with whom she shared a close friendship. Known to be shy and retiring, Holley published her first poems in her local newspaper, the Adams Journal. She never married.

An Unmarried Female

MARIETTA HOLLEY (1836–1926)

1 I SUPPOSE WE ARE ABOUT AS HAPPY as the most of folks, but as I was sayin' a few days ago to Betsey Bobbet, a neighborin' female of ours—"Every station-house in life has its various skeletons. But we ort to try to be contented with that spear of life we are called on to handle." Betsey hain't married, and she don't seem to be contented. She is awful opposed to wimmin's rights—she thinks it's wimmin's only spear to marry, but as yet she can't find any man willin' to lay holt of that spear with her. But you can read in her daily life, and on her eager, willin' countenance, that she fully realizes the sweet words of the poet, "While there is life there is hope."

2 Betsey hain't handsome. Her cheek-bones are high, and she bein' not much more than skin and bone they show plainer than they would if she was in good order. Her complexion (not that I blame her for it) hain't good, and her eyes are little and sot way back in her head. Time has seen fit to deprive her of her hair and teeth, but her large nose

he has kindly suffered her to keep, but she has got the best white ivory teeth money will buy, and two long curls fastened behind each ear, besides frizzles on the top of her head; and if she wasn't naturally bald, and if the curls was the color of her hair, they would look well. She is awful sentimental; I have seen a good many that had it bad, but of all the sentimental creeters I ever did see, Betsey Bobbet is the sentimentalist; you couldn't squeeze a laugh out of her with a cheeze-press.

As I said, she is awful opposed to wimmin's havin' any right, only the right to get married. She holds on to that right as tight as any single woman I ever see, which makes it hard and wearyin' on the single men round here.

For take the men that are the most opposed to wimmin's havin' a right, and talk the most about its bein' her duty to cling to man like a vine to a tree, they don't want Betsey to cling to them; they won't let her cling to 'em. For when they would be a-goin' on about how wicked it was for wimmin to vote—and it was her only spear to marry, says I to 'em, "Which had you ruther do, let Betsey Bobbet cling to you or let her vote?" and they would every one of 'em quail before that question. They would drop their heads before my keen gray eyes—and move off the subject.

But Betsey don't get discouraged. Every time I see her she says in a hopeful, wishful tone, "That the deepest men of minds in the country agree with her in thinkin' that it is wimmin's duty to marry and not to vote." And then she talks a sight about the retirin' modesty and dignity of the fair sect, and how shameful and revoltin' it would be to see wimmin throwin' 'em away and boldly and unblushinly talkin' about law and justice.

Why, to hear Betsey Bobbet talk about wimmin's throwin' their modesty away, you would think if they ever went to the political pole they would have to take their dignity and modesty and throw 'em against the pole and go without any all the rest of their lives.

Now I don't believe in no such stuff as that. I think a woman can be bold and unwomanly in other things besides goin' with a thick veil over her face, and a brass-mounted parasol, once a year, and gently and quietly dropping a vote for a Christian President, or a religious and noble-minded pathmaster.

She thinks she talks dreadful polite and proper. She says "I was coming," instead of "I was coming"; and "I have saw," instead of "I have seen"; and "papah" for paper, and "deah" for dear. I don't know much about grammar, but common sense goes a good ways. She writes the poetry for the *Jonesville Augur*, or "*Augah*," as she calls it. She used to write for the opposition paper, the *Jonesville Gimlet*, but the editor of the *Augur*, a longhaired chap, who moved into Jonesville a few months ago, lost his wife soon after he come there, and sense that she has turned Dimocrat, and writes for his paper study. They say that he is a dreadful big feelin' man, and I have heard—it came right straight to me—his cousin's wife's sister told it to the mother-in-law of one of my neighbors' brothers' wife, that he didn't like Betsey's poetry at all, and all he printed it for was to plague the editor of the *Gimlet*, because she used to write for him. I myself wouldn't give a cent a bushel for all the poetry she can write. And it seems to me, that if I was Betsey, I wouldn't try to write so much. Howsumever, I don't know what turn I should take if I was Betsey Bobbet; that is a solemn subject, and one I don't love to think on.

I never shall forget the first piece of her poetry I ever see. Josiah Allen and I had both on us been married goin' on a year, and I had occasion to go to his trunk one day, where

he kept a lot of old papers, and the first thing I laid my hand on was these verses. Josiah went with her a few times after his wife died, on Fourth of July or so, and two or three camp-meetin's and the poetry seemed to be wrote about the time we was married. It was directed over the top of it, "Owed to Josiah," just as if she were in debt to him. This was the way it read:

OWED TO JOSIAH

Josiah, I the tale have hurn,
With rigid ear, and streaming eye,
I saw from me that you did turn,
I never knew the reason why.
Oh, Josiah,
It seemed as if I must expiah.

Why did you—oh, why did you blow
Upon my life of snowy sleet,
The fish of love to fiercest glow,
Then turn a dampar on the heat?
Oh, Josiah,
It seemed as if I must expiah.

I saw thee coming down the street,
She by your side in bonnet blood,
The stuns that grated 'neath thy feet,
Seemed crunching on my vitals, too.
Oh, Josiah,
It seemed as if I must expiah.

I saw thee washing sheep last night,
On the bridge I stood with marble brow.
The waters raged, thou clasped it tight,
I sighed, 'should both be drowned now'—
I thought, Josiah,
Oh, happy sheep to thus expiah.

10 I showed the poetry to Josiah that night after he came home, and told him I had read it. He looked awful ashamed to think I had seen it, and, says he, with a dreadful sheepish look: "The persecution I underwent from that female can never be told; she fairly hunted me down. I hadn't no rest for the soles of my feet. I thought one spell she would marry me in spite of all I could do, without givin' me the benefit of law or gospel." He see I looked stern, and he added, with a sick-lookin' smile, "I thought one spell, to use Betsey's language, 'I was a gonah.'"

11 I didn't smile. Oh, no, for the deep principle of my sect was reared up. I says to him in a tone cold enough to almost freeze his ears: "Josiah Allen, shet up; of all the cowardly things a man ever done, it is goin' round braggin' about wimmin likin' 'em, and follern' 'em up. Enny man that'll do that is little enough to crawl through a knot-hole without

rubbing his clothes." Says I: "I suppose you made her think the moon rose in your head and set in your heels. I daresay you acted foolish enough round her to sicken a snipe, and if you makes fun of her now to please me, I let you know you have got holt of the wrong individual."

12 "Now," says I, "go to bed"; and I added, in still more freezing accents, "for I want to mend your pantaloons." He gathered up his shoes and stockings and started off to bed, and we hain't never passed a word on the subject sence. I believe when you disagree with your pardner, in freein' your *mind* in the first on't, and then not to be a-twittin' about it afterward. And as for bein' jealous, I should jest as soon think of bein' jealous of a meetin'-house as I should of Josiah. He is a well-principled man. And I guess he wasn't fur out o' the way about Betsey Bobbet, though I wouldn't encourage him by lettin' him say a word on the subject, for I always make it a rule to stand up for my own sect; but when I hear her go on about the editor of the *Augur*, I can believe anything about Betsey Bobbet.

13 She came in here one day last week. It was about ten o'clock in the morning. I had got my house slick as a pin, and my dinner under way (I was goin' to have a biled dinner, and a cherry puddin' biled with sweet sass to eat on it), and I sot down to finish sewin' up the breadth of my new rag carpet. I thought I would get it done while I hadn't so much to do, for it bein' the first of March I knew sugarin' would be comin' on, and then cleanin'-house time, and I wanted it to put down jest as soon as the stove was carried out in the summer kitchen. The fire was sparklin' away, and the painted floor a-shinin' and the dinner a-b'ilin', and I sot there sewin' jest as calm as a clock, not dreamin' of no trouble, when in came Betsey Bobbet.

14 I met her with outward calm, and asked her to set down and lay off her things. She sot down but she said she couldn't lay off her things. Says she: "I was comin' down past, and I thought I would call and let you see the last numbah of the *Augur*. There is a piece in it concernin' the tariff that stirs men's souls. I like it evah so much."

15 She handed me the paper folded, so I couldn't see nothin' but a piece of poetry by Betsey Bobbet. I see what she wanted of me, and so I dropped my breadths of carpetin' and took hold of it, and began to read it.

16 "Read it audible, if you please," says she. "Especially the precious remarkhs ovah it; it is such a feast for me to be a-sittin' and heah it rehearsed by a musical voice."

17 Says I, "I s'pose I can rehearse it if it will do you any good," so I began as follows:

18 "It is seldom that we present the readers of the *Augur* (the best paper for the fireside in Jonesville or the world) with a poem like the following. It may be, by the assistance of the *Augur* (only twelve shillings a year in advance, wood and potatoes taken in exchange), the name of Betsey Bobbet will yet be carved on the lofty pinnacle of fame's towering pillow. We think, however, that she could study such writers as Sylvanus Cobb and Tupper with profit both to herself and to them.

19 "Editor of the *Augur*."

20 Here Betsey interrupted me. "The deah editah of the *Augur* has no need to advise me to read Tuppah, for he is indeed my most favorite authar. You have devorhted him, haven't you, Josiah's Allen wife?"

21 "Devorhted who?" says I, in a tone pretty near as cold as a cold icicle.

22 "Mahten, Fahqueah, Tuppah,¹ that sweet authar," says she.

23 "No, mom," says I shortly; "I hain't devoured Martin Farquhar Tupper, nor no other man. I hain't a cannibal."

24 "Oh! you understand me not; I meant, devorhted his sweet, tender lines."

25 "I hain't devoured his tenderlines, nor nothin' relatin' to him," and I made a motion to lay the paper down, but Betsey urged me to go on, and so I read:

GUSHINGS OF A TENDAH SOUL

Oh let who will,

Oh let who can,

Be tited onto

A horrid male man.

Thus said I 'ere

My tendah heart was touched,

Thus said I 'ere

My tendah feelings gushed.

But oh a change

Hath swept ore me,

As billows sweep

The 'deep blue sea.'

A voice, a noble form

One day I saw;

An arrow flew,

My heart is nearly raw.

His first pardner lies

Beneath the turf,

He is wandering now,

In sorrow's briny surf.

Two twins, the little

Deah cherub crotchahs

Now wipe the teahs

From off his classic featchahs.

Oh sweet lot, worthy

Angel arisen,

To wipe teahs

From eyes like hisen.

"What think you of it?" says she, as I finished readin'.

¹ Martin Farquhar Tupper (1810-1889) was a British poet whose work, though once wildly popular, is remembered as second-rate, inflated verse enjoyed only by the uneducated masses. He also survives in other poets' spoofs and parodies of his trite and overly sentimental rhymes.

26 I looked right at her 'most a minute with a majestic look. In spite of her false curls and her new white ivory teeth, she is a humbly critter. I looked at her silently while she sot and twisted her long yellow bunnet-strings, and then I spoke out. "Hain't the editor of the Augur a widower with a pair of twins?"

27 "Yes," says she with a happy look.

28 Then says I, "If the man hain't a fool, he'll think you are one."

29 "Oh!" says she, and she dropped her bunnet-strings and clasped her long bony hands together in her brown cotton gloves. "Oh, we ahdent soles of genius have feelin's you cold, practical natures know nuthing of, and if they did not gush out in poetry we should expliah. You may as well try to tie up the gushing catarack of Niagrah with a piece of weiting-cord as to tie up the feelin's of an ahdent sole."

30 "Ardent sole!" says I coldly. "Which makes the most noise, Betsey Bobbet, a three-inch brook or a ten-footer? which is the teater? which is the roarer? Deep waters run stillest. I have no faith in feelin's that stalk round in public in mournin' weeds. I have no faith in such mourners," says I.

31 "Oh, Josiah's wife, cold, practical female being, you know me not; we are sundered as fah apart as if you was sitting on the North Pole and I was sitting on the South Pole. Uncongenial being, you know me not."

32 "I may not know you, Betsey Bobbet, but I do know decency, and I know that no munny would tempt me to write such stuff as that poetry and send it to a widower with twins."

33 "Oh!" says she, "what appeals to the tendah feelin' heart of a single female woman more than to see a lonely man who has lost his relic? And pity never seems so much like pity as when it is given to the deah little children of widowehs. And," says she, "I think moah than as likely as not, this soaring sole of genius did not wed his affinity, but was united to a mere woman of clay."

34 "Mere woman of clay!" says I, fixin' my spektacles upon her in a most searchin' manner. "Where will you find a woman, Betsey Bobbet, that hain't more or less clay? And affinity, that is the meanest word I ever heard; no married woman has any right to hear it. I'll excuse you, bein' a female; but if a man had said it to me I'd holler to Josiah. There is a time for everything, and the time to hunt affinity is before you are married; married folks hain't no right to hunt it," says I sternly.

35 "We kindred soles soah above such petty feelin's—we soah far above them."

36 "I hain't much of a soarer," says I, "and I don't pretend to be; and to tell you the truth," says I, "I am glad I ain't."

37 "The editah of the *Augah*" says she, and she grasped the paper offen the stand, and folded it up, and presented it at me like a spear, "the editah of this paper is a kindred sole: he appreciates me, he undahstands me, and will not our names in the pages of this very papah go down to posterety togetah?"

38 "Then," says I, drove out of all patience with her, "I wish you was there now, both of you. I wish," says I, lookin' fixedly on her, "I wish you was both of you in posterity now."

"An Unmarried Female," from *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's: Designed as a Beacon Light, To guide Women to Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, But which May Be read by Members of the Sterner Sect, Without Injury to Themselves or This Book.* Josiah Allen's Wife. Hartford, Conn. : American Publishing Company, 1873.

Multiple-Choice Questions 1–5:

1. One of the chief sources of humor in the first paragraph is the

- A. use of alliterative character names.
- B. misuse of the word "spear."
- C. narrator's obvious lack of education.
- D. narrator's homespun philosophy.
- E. characters' apparent dislike of one another.

2. All of the following provide clues to the setting of this passage EXCEPT

- A. the dialect.
- B. details of daily life.
- C. attitudes toward women's rights.
- D. the published poems.
- E. references to clothing.

3. The tone of the second paragraph can best be described as

- A. understated.
- B. sarcastic.
- C. naughty.
- D. sincere.
- E. sympathetic.

4. As they are used in this passage, the words *pole* (paragraph 6), *pathmaster* (paragraph 7), *owed* (paragraph 9), and *tenderlines* (paragraph 24) are all examples of

- A. wordplay.
- B. dialect.
- C. idioms.
- D. puns.
- E. malapropisms.

5. The tone of this passage devolves from

- A. guarded to bitter.
- B. saccharine to sarcastic.
- C. benign to impetuous.
- D. conciliatory to confrontational.
- E. jocular to tart.

Free-Response Item (text-based):

Carefully read Marietta Holley's "An Unmarried Female." Then write a thoughtful, well-developed essay in which you analyze the techniques Holley uses to communicate to the reader her attitude toward her subject(s). Do not merely summarize the plot.

Before you write your essay:

1. Make sure you understand exactly what you're being asked to write about.
 - List all of the verbs in the prompt.
 - Underline the verb that describes the essay.
 - Write the direct object of that verb.
2. Choose an appropriate selection.

If you're using this book, your teacher probably wants you to write your essay on whatever story, article, or poem, etc., the writing prompt follows.
3. Make sure you have something to say about both the topic and your selected literature.
 - Jot down key plot events.
 - Think in terms of plot structure: rising action, climax, falling action, and so on.
 - List characters.
 - Think in terms of function or role—protagonist or antagonist.
 - Think in terms of type—hero, anti-hero, foil, clown, etc.
 - Make sure you jot down notes that pertain to the assigned topic.
 - Jot down quotations or at least close paraphrases.
 - Jot down everything you know and remember about the assigned topic.
4. Make sure you are clear about what you are going to say.

Write a sentence or two that make a positive and focused statement about the topic.

Make sure these sentences address all of the issues and subpoints specified in the prompt.
5. Write your essay.

Free-Response Item (independent):

First person narratives often reveal as much—or more—about the narrator as they do about the supposed subject of the narrative. Choose such a literary selection and write a well-organized and supported essay in which you analyze the techniques the author uses to identify and create a vivid sense of the character study's true focus.

Before you write your essay:

1. Make sure you understand exactly what you're being asked to write about.
 - List all of the verbs in the prompt.
 - Underline the verb that describes the essay.
 - Write the direct object of that verb.
2. Make sure you have something valid to write about.
 - Write a sentence or two that make a positive and focused statement about the topic.
 - Make sure these sentences address all of the issues and subpoints specified in the prompt.
3. Review the selection and find your textual support.
4. Write your essay.

Keep referring to the prompt and whatever you underlined or highlighted in the selection to make sure you're on track and addressing everything the prompt wants you to address.