

Literature Essay Four

Works, Themes, and Thesis

You will write an interpretive essay, that is, an essay that attempts to ***persuade your reader of your interpretation*** of one or more literary works. Your interpretation is your assessment of the significance or meaning (***theme and message***) of the literary work(s), although your focus can be (and often will be) on only part of a work's meaning—one of the points it is making, not necessarily the main point it is making.

Pick ***two literary works*** we have read in the course so far that ***disagree*** about something. At least one of the works must be ***one we have read since the last literature essay***, that is, between *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Articulate the ***point each work is making*** about this subject (in such a way that the points clearly are opposed to one another) and make an ***argument*** with ***evidence from the works*** that each work is making the point you say it is making.

Here are some ***examples of themes*** that you could write about:

- The impact of literature / words
- How to be happy / what makes us unhappy
- Class
- Knowledge / education
- Money
- Morality / right and wrong
- Death
- Heaven
- Leadership
- Friendship
- Romantic love
- Love for God

But remember, it's not enough to discuss the theme in general; you want ***two contradictory statements*** (the point one work is making about the theme, and the opposite point the other work is making about the theme).

For example, your ***thesis*** could be something like these (which use fake authors and literary works):

- John Doe's "Elegy" depicts romantic love as physical attraction, but John Swan's "Epithalamion" describes romantic love as mutual mental understanding.
- or:
- John Doe's "Diadem" portrays the reigning monarch as an admirable imitator of the qualities of Christ the king, whereas John Swan's "Tyranny" declares that any unelected earthly leader is usurping a role that belongs exclusively to God.

Structure

Please use the structure of a five-paragraph essay:

- One ***introductory paragraph*** that gives your ***thesis***, with any background that is necessary to explain it.
- Three ***body paragraphs***, each of which provides an argument supporting your thesis. Each paragraph should have a ***topic sentence*** (a kind of mini-thesis for the paragraph, which states the supporting argument of the paragraph), and ***textual evidence*** from the literary work—specific examples (details and quotations, with citations giving author/title and page/line numbers) that support the argument stated in the topic sentence.
- One ***concluding paragraph*** which transitions from a brief restatement of the thesis to a comment on the significance of your thesis—which, in a literature essay, means how it helps us better understand or interpret the literary work(s).