

Analyzing the Prose Analysis Essay

Duration

Two 40-minute class sessions

Resources

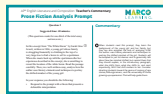
1. Student Handout



2. Study Guide



3. Teacher's Commentary



4. Scoring Rubric for Question 2



Objectives of Lessons

- To apply the Prose Fiction Analysis rubric to a student essay
- To develop a prose analysis essay

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- **LAN 7:** Develop textually substantiated arguments about interpretations of part or all of a text.
- **LAN 7.D:** Select and use relevant and sufficient evidence to both develop and support a line of reasoning.
 - **The following skills are practiced and assessed as progress monitoring, but are not explicitly taught in this lesson.**
 - **LAN 7.A:** Develop a paragraph that includes 1) a claim that requires defense with evidence from the text, and 2) the evidence itself.
 - **LAN 7.B:** Develop a thesis statement that conveys a defensible claim about an interpretation of literature and that may establish a line of reasoning.
 - **LAN 7.C:** Develop commentary that establishes and explains relationships among textual evidence, the line of reasoning, and the thesis.
 - **LAN 7.E:** Demonstrate control over the elements of composition to communicate clearly.

Student Activities

- Dissecting the prompt
- Analyzing the passage in groups
- Developing the prose analysis essay

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How to Use These Lessons

These lessons are designed to monitor students' progress in developing a prose analysis essay. Beginning with the Marco Learning Prose Fiction Prompt provided, students will first work in small groups to analyze the Sarah Orne Jewett excerpt by identifying how the author uses literary elements and techniques to portray the shifted mindset of the young girl. Then, students will develop their own full prose analysis of the excerpt, using Marco Learning's Prose Fiction Analysis Essay Study Guide. This activity allows students to support one another as they work through a difficult task. Additionally, it allows you as a grader to target students' strengths and weaknesses in both reading and writing.

LESSON ONE: ANALYZING THE PROSE PROMPT, DISSECTING THE PROMPT, AND ANALYZING THE PASSAGE

- For this activity, you will need six poster-sized sticky notes or pieces of chart paper, and several packs of regular-sized sticky notes.
- Begin by dividing students into small groups (three to four students is an ideal size).
- Give each student a copy of the Student Handout: Prose Analysis Prompt, and each table a stack of sticky notes.
- To begin this lesson, it is important for students to closely read the prompt and dissect it for information. Ask students to read the prompt and to underline critical information and highlight or circle what their task is. Students may do something similar to what you see below:

In this excerpt from “The White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett, written in 1886, a young girl whose family is struggling financially is climbing to the top of a very large tree to find a heron to sell to a sportsman. When she meets back up with the sportsman after her experience described in the excerpt, she is unwilling to reveal the location of the white heron. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to portray the shifted mindset of the young girl.

- After reading and dissecting the prompt, hand out the “Prose Fiction Analysis Essay Study Guide.” Direct their attention to the introduction and the Common Literary Elements in the top side-box. Explain to students that since this is a practice exercise, they will be working with the elements in this box as the focus of their analysis.
- At the top of each poster, write the literary elements found on the study guide in the “Common Literary Elements” box (syntax, diction, symbolism, simile and metaphor, imagery,

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It would be a good idea and would save class time to have students read the rest of the study guide for homework in preparation for their essay the next day. You want students to have as much time as possible in their groups to focus on the analysis exercise for today.

and personification). Place the posters in places around the room so that students can easily access them. They will need to get to them in the next part of the lesson.

Analyzing the Passage

- After analyzing the prompt, students are ready to work through the passage. Remind them that they are looking for which literary elements and techniques portray the shifted mindset of the young girl and that *they should be able to defend what mindset she is shifting from, what mindset she is shifting to, and WHY it matters to her as a young person growing up.*
- For this activity, students are looking for evidence of literary techniques that demonstrate this shift in thinking. They should focus on looking for the elements listed on the posters: syntax, diction, symbolism, simile and metaphor, imagery, and personification (and yes, all of them appear in this excerpt). When students find a piece of evidence that supports the young girl's shift in perspective, they need to:
 1. Determine which elements this evidence falls under.
 2. Write the evidence on the sticky note.
 3. Write a sentence explaining HOW this quote proves her shift in perspective, on the back of the sticky note.
- With five minutes left in the period, students should have at least one sticky note for each poster. They should put their notes on the posters, then take a walk around the room to look at what other groups used for evidence. They can flip the notes over to read the analysis on the back if they need to see the logic behind the choice (especially for some of the less obvious but more sophisticated pieces of evidence).
- This activity is great because students develop a visual representation of the primary methods of development they could use to defend their evidence.
- For Homework: Ask students to draft a statement that addresses:
 1. What the young girl's mindset once was
 2. What the young girl's mindset shifted to
 3. How the author demonstrated this shift
 4. Why this shift is significant to the growth of the young girl
- This statement will be the basis of the introductory paragraph that students write during the next lesson.

This could be completed independently, but you may want students to complete this part of the lesson in their small groups. This will allow them to have discussions about which pieces of evidence are most effective in demonstrating specific literary techniques. Encourage students to try to find unique evidence and to avoid replicating evidence between groups by analyzing different evidence in a new way. This could lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the young girl's shift in perspective.

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LESSON TWO: ANSWERING THE PROSE PROMPT; REVIEWING THE STUDY GUIDE AND THEIR HOMEWORK STATEMENTS

- Encourage students to take out their homework and share their statements with their shoulder partners. Have the partner green-light the statement or offer revision suggestions. This should take about three minutes. Students who did not do their homework will not be able to participate in this part of the lesson, but they can still write the essay even if they didn't do their homework; they just don't have the head-start that the other students do.
- Ensure that each student has a copy of the "Prose Fiction Analysis Study Guide" and the "Student Handout" of the prompt. They will need to reference these as they write their essays. If you haven't reviewed the study guide with students, now would be a good time to do so.

Writing the Prose Analysis Essay

- As students prepare to write the essay, make sure that the posters are on display. Encourage students to get up and look at the posters during the essay if needed. Allowing them to view the posters while they write will hopefully result in better analysis and it will allow you, the grader, to more effectively monitor students' abilities to create commentary. They have illustrated that they can identify the shift and how it is demonstrated, but can they explain those connections? Can they evaluate how the choices Jewett makes demonstrate the growth of the young girl? This should be evident in student essays.
- For this essay, we recommend that you time the students. It is imperative that students start working under a time constraint early in the year—perhaps not in the first few weeks, but once they develop a comfort level with the content. Students have already read the passage and developed somewhat of an outline with the posters; therefore, we believe 40 minutes is an appropriate amount of time to accomplish this task. As always, modify as you see fit.

Remember, the prose analysis essay is incredibly difficult for many students. Therefore, we recommend that you allow students to use resources to help them work through the essay. As the semester continues, you may add parameters such as allowing students only one resource of their choice and so on.

As students finish their essays, we recommend that you ask them to highlight their thesis statements in one color, their evidence in another color, and their commentary in a third color. This simple task allows the students to see the balance of evidence and commentary within their essay. Additionally, it will help you grade more efficiently!

Prose Fiction Analysis Prompt

Question 2

Suggested time: 40 minutes

(This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

In this excerpt from “The White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett, written in 1886, a young girl whose family is struggling financially is climbing to the top of a very large tree to find a heron to sell to a sportsman. When she meets back up with the sportsman after her experience described in the excerpt, she is unwilling to reveal the location of the white heron. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to portray the shifted mindset of the young girl.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

There was the huge tree asleep yet in the paling moonlight, and small and silly Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it, with tingling, eager blood coursing the channels of her whole frame, with her 5 bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird’s claws to the monstrous ladder reaching up, up, almost to the sky itself. First she must mount the white oak tree that grew alongside, where she was almost lost among the dark branches and the green leaves heavy and wet 10 with dew; a bird fluttered off its nest, and a red squirrel ran to and fro and scolded pettishly at the harmless housebreaker. Sylvia felt her way easily. She had often climbed there, and knew that higher still one of the oak’s upper branches chafed against the pine trunk, just where 15 its lower boughs were set close together. There, when she made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin.

She crept out along the swaying oak limb at last, and took the daring step across into the old pine-tree. The 20 way was harder than she thought; she must reach far and hold fast, the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff as she went round and round the tree’s great stem, higher and higher upward. 25 The sparrows and robins in the woods below were beginning to wake and twitter to the dawn, yet it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree, and the child knew she must hurry if her project were to be of any use.

The tree seemed to lengthen itself out as she went 30 up, and to reach farther and farther upward. It was like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth; it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit

wending its way from higher branch to branch. Who 35 knows how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way! The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of 40 the solitary gray-eyed child. And the tree stood still and frowned away the winds that June morning while the dawn grew bright in the east.

Sylvia’s face was like a pale star, if one had seen it from the ground, when the last thorny bough was 45 past, and she stood trembling and tired but wholly triumphant, high in the tree-top. Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions. How low they looked in 50 the air from that height when one had only seen them before far up, and dark against the blue sky. Their gray feathers were as soft as moths; they seemed only a little way from the tree, and Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds. Westward, the 55 woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there were church steeples, and white villages, truly it was a vast and awesome world.

The birds sang louder and louder. At last the sun came up bewilderingly bright. Sylvia could see the 60 white sails of ships out at sea, and the clouds that were purple and rose-colored and yellow at first began to fade away. Where was the white heron’s nest in the sea of green branches, and was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having 65 climbed to such a giddy height? Now look down again, Sylvia, where the green marsh is set among the shining

birches and dark hemlocks; there where you saw the
white heron once you will see him again; look, look! a
white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up
70 from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and
comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with
steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck
and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot
or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and
75 consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron
has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours,
and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his
feathers for the new day!

Write or type your response in this area.

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THE PROSE FICTION ANALYSIS ESSAY

The Prose Fiction Analysis essay includes a prompt that gives a preview of the passage, then asks a specific question about how the author uses literary elements and techniques to accomplish a particular goal. The prompt will instruct you to do the following four things in your essay:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

How to Approach it

You have 40 minutes to write each essay. The following gives a guideline for how much time to spend on each of the following steps, but these are not set in stone. As you practice, you can experiment with whether you'll do better with a little more time for reading, a little more time for planning, exactly the suggested times, or something else.

1. Read the Prompt—2 minutes

- Read carefully, and identify what the question is asking. Read twice to be sure you understand.
- There's no need to read the four bullet points (reproduced above)—they'll be the same on every exam.

2. Read the Passage—8 minutes

- While reading the passage, focus on the task presented in the prompt. Your essay needs to address the question in the prompt to earn points.
- Read the passage through once, focusing on a basic understanding. Translate difficult language to yourself as you go, and if there are parts you can't make any sense of (or get bored with), skip over them.
- Read the passage through a second time, looking for evidence you can use in your essay. Look for literary elements that you can identify and underline them, then make notes in the margins about what you notice. Don't worry about interpretation at this point, just focus on identifying things that stand out to you.
- It doesn't matter if you can attach a fancy name to any particular technique the author uses, you just need to be able to identify it. You might note that the author uses the text of letters that characters write to each other without being able to name that "epistolary intrusion," and you'll still get your point across.

COMMON LITERARY ELEMENTS

As you read the text, here's a partial list of literary elements you can look for. You won't find all of these things in every passage, nor is this list exhaustive; it's just meant to help you get started thinking about how to read a prose fiction passage:

- **Syntax:** is the sentence structure consistent or varied? Does this contribute to the way in which meaning is conveyed in the passage?
- **Diction:** how does the author's word choice contribute to your understanding of the passage?
- **Symbolism:** are there things in the passage that represent something other than what they are literally?
- **Simile and Metaphor:** does the author use comparisons to enrich your understand of characters or situations?
- **Imagery:** does the passage include descriptive language that appeals to your physical senses?
- **Personification:** does the author give human characteristics to inanimate objects?

NOTES

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3. Write a Thesis—3 minutes

- Look at your notes about the evidence that you identified in step 2, and look for trends.
- Look back at the question in the prompt, and think about how the evidence you identified structures an answer to that issue.
- Write down a 1–2 sentence draft thesis statement. Don't worry about perfection here—you can revise it as you write your essay in step 5.

4. Plan the Essay—3 minutes

- **Introduction:** your first paragraph should provide a brief summary of the situation in the passage as it relates to the prompt. Include your thesis at the end; the thesis statement can earn you a point, so make it easy for the graders to find it.
- **Body paragraphs:** plan to write two well-developed body paragraphs in which you cite the evidence you identified in the passage and provide commentary on how it contributes to your interpretation of the passage. In planning your essay, note what the main focus of each paragraph will be (this can either be a specific literary element, or it can be a theme of the passage that is achieved through more than one element). In your outline, also jot down specific line numbers, so you know where to find the relevant evidence while you're writing.
- **Conclusion:** the most important part of the conclusion is that you have one. If it's really well-written, it can contribute to a point for sophistication, but there is no credit just for having a conclusion, so don't get stuck trying to compose the perfect wrap-up to your essay.

5. Write—24 minutes

Monitor the time you spend writing, as the proctor won't tell you when to move on to the next essay.

- Write as fast as you can while still keeping your handwriting legible. Also write as much as you can—longer essays tend to earn more points.
- Don't worry if your body paragraphs don't seem to logically flow from one to another—your graders understand that this essay is essentially a rough draft.
- Focus more on explaining how the evidence you cite connects to your interpretation of the passage than on your writing style or vocabulary. Evidence and commentary are worth up to four points, while sophistication is only worth one point, and you have limited time.

SCORING THE ESSAY

Thesis: 0–1 points

Evidence & Commentary: 0–4 points

Sophistication: 0–1 points

NOTES

Write or type in this area.

Prose Fiction Analysis Prompt

Question 2

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In your response you should do the following:

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Commentary

① When students read this prompt, they learn the background of the young girl and her family, but they are also assigned the task of analyzing HOW the author uses literary elements and techniques to portray the shifted mindset of the girl. Students will be tempted to just list devices and to generically talk about how her mindset shifted, but remind them that they should explain, in the introductory paragraph, what she shifts from, what she shifts to, and most importantly, WHY that shift matters to her. Consider directing students toward the genre of coming of age stories, bildungsromans, and the universality of those growing-up experiences. That will help guide them.

② This opening line already works to establish the **personification** of the tree as it is “asleep” waiting for her, and the personification of nature is furthered when the squirrel “scolded pettishly” at her as she invaded its home. It isn't angry with her; it is almost playfully scolding, as if they are friends, as if nature is familiar with Sylvia invading her space. Sylvia's fingers are even compared through **simile** to a “bird's claws,” further establishing her connection to nature. What is interesting here is that the squirrel thinks of her as a “harmless housebreaker,” when in reality, she is climbing the tree to find a heron's nest so she can sell the information to a hunter. Her intentions aren't pure, but as the prompt explains, she changes her mind and doesn't sell the information. It is almost as if the squirrel knew that she wouldn't betray their connection.

She crept out along the swaying oak limb at last, and took the daring step across into the old pine-tree. The way was harder than she thought; she must reach far and hold fast, the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff as she went round and round the tree's great stem, higher and higher upward. The sparrows and robins in the woods below were beginning to wake and twitter to the dawn, yet it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree, and the child knew she must hurry if her project were to be of any use.

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3 Students may look at this paragraph a number of ways. They may focus on the **imagery** and the depiction of Sylvia's immense struggle to climb the tree. But they may also see this as a larger metaphor. Getting money for the family is usually an adult's job, and Sylvia is a young girl. This tree-climbing, where she takes a "daring step" into the unknown world of the larger pine, could be a metaphor for the transition from childhood into adulthood. In this **metaphor**, the larger tree could **symbolize** adulthood and the knowledge that comes with it (knowledge that the value of a life isn't worth any amount of financial gain).

4 In this paragraph, looking at specific word choice, or **diction**, we can see that these words project a loving, kind, and warm tone, including the words "amazed," "advantage," "light," "loved," "sweet-voiced," "brave," "dawn," and "bright." The tree is thinking fondly of and working with Sylvia furthering the **personification** of nature and its acceptance of Sylvia. Even the "least twigs," the tiniest support, are holding firm in order to support her weight. The narrator speculates that "the old pine must have loved his new dependent" more than any of the other creatures in his branches, portraying him as a doting and protective father-figure who "frowned away" the wind so that she could not only be safe but continue on her journey. It is as if the world wants her to grow up, to reach the top of the tree, and learn a life-altering lesson.

5 In this paragraph, Sylvia gets to see the horizon from the top of the tree, looking toward the horizon and her now-found transition into adulthood. Looking at the last line in this paragraph, we see the emphasis on the hopeful tone of her future. When analyzing the **syntax**, the use of the semicolon to separate "the woodlands and farms" from the "church steeples, and white villages" shows how she is hyper-focusing on the pillars, the staples, of a community in the late 1800s. Then, her final phrase, "truly it was a vast and awesome world" is set off by a comma, making it stand out as the epiphany that it is.

6 In this final paragraph, she finally sees the nest of the white heron, but she also gets a directive, whether from the tree or nature it is unclear, but the directive is a large, run on sentence instructing her to take in the majesty of nature, to remind her of who she is and what her place is in the world. It is in this moment, when she sees the heron plume "his feathers for the new day!", that we realize that she is not revealing his nesting site to the sportsman. Her sense of wonder and appreciation is too great now that nature has accepted her. The shifting narrative to the second person intensified her already strong relationship with nature.

steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck
and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot
or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and
75 consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron
has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours,
and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his
feathers for the new day!

NOTES

Write or type in this area.

Prose Fiction Analysis

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|--------------|--------------|
| THEESIS | 0 POINTS | | 1 POINT | | | ROW A | |
| | Does not meet criteria for any of the following reasons: <input type="checkbox"/> No defensible thesis <input type="checkbox"/> Simple restatement of prompt only <input type="checkbox"/> Summary of passage with no connection to prompt <input type="checkbox"/> Describes passage features without making a defensible claim | | <input type="checkbox"/> Defensible interpretation of the passage <input type="checkbox"/> Responds to the prompt | | | | |
| EVIDENCE & COMMENTARY | 0 POINTS | 1 POINT | 2 POINTS | 3 POINTS | 4 POINTS | ROW B | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Simple restatement of thesis (if existing) OR <input type="checkbox"/> Incoherent writing OR <input type="checkbox"/> Prompt not addressed OR <input type="checkbox"/> No textual references made | EVIDENCE: <input type="checkbox"/> Generalized evidence AND COMMENTARY: <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on overall plot or description of the passage rather than on specific details or techniques <input type="checkbox"/> Literary elements and devices mentioned but not explained | EVIDENCE: <input type="checkbox"/> Some specific evidence <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant evidence AND COMMENTARY: <input type="checkbox"/> Some evidence tied to argument <input type="checkbox"/> Mixes specific evidence and broad generalizations <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks a line of reasoning and progression of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Simplistic, repetitive, or inaccurate explanations | EVIDENCE: <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient and relevant evidence AND COMMENTARY: <input type="checkbox"/> Uniformly offers evidence to support argument <input type="checkbox"/> Words and details from passage build the interpretation <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple claims are included <input type="checkbox"/> Slight lapses in support of key claims | EVIDENCE: <input type="checkbox"/> Specific and relevant evidence AND COMMENTARY: <input type="checkbox"/> Offers support for all claims <input type="checkbox"/> Well-organized line of reasoning with multiple supporting claims and clear explanations <input type="checkbox"/> Explains the significance of specific words and details, and connects them to the interpretation <input type="checkbox"/> Explains writer's literary techniques with multiple examples that are tied to the interpretation | | |
| | 0 POINTS | | 1 POINT | | | | ROW C |
| | Does not meet the criteria for any of the following reasons: <input type="checkbox"/> Sweeping generalizations of context <input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective use of language <input type="checkbox"/> Oversimplifies the passage's complexities <input type="checkbox"/> Thematic interpretation not consistently developed <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative interpretations missing or only hinted at | | <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates sophisticated thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Develops a complex literary argument <input type="checkbox"/> Explores complexities and tensions in passage <input type="checkbox"/> Places interpretation into a larger context <input type="checkbox"/> Employs a vivid and persuasive writing style <input type="checkbox"/> Engages in multiple interpretations of the passage | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

TOTAL POINTS EARNED: / 6