**How to Analyze a Novel**

A literary analysis essay requires basic knowledge of literary elements. The following article will give you an understanding of such basic elements.

A novel can be defined as “a long narrative in literary prose” which the author has organized chronologically or in flashbacks. The novel can be divided into seven genres or categories: romantic, historical, detective, thriller, adventure, horror, and science fiction.

**Setting:** *Setting* is a description of where and when the story takes place.

* What aspects make up the setting?
* Geography, weather, time of day, social conditions?
* What role does setting play in the story? Is it an important part of the plot or theme? Or is it just a backdrop against which the action takes place?
* Study the time period which is also part of the setting
* When was the story written?
* Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
* How does the time period affect the language, atmosphere or social circumstances of the novel?

**Characterization:** *Characterization* deals with how the characters are described.

Are the characters portrayed:

* through dialogue?
* by the way they speak?
* physical appearance?
* thoughts and feelings?
* interaction - the way they act towards other characters?
* Are they static characters who do not change?
* Do they develop by the end of the story?
* What type of characters are they?
* What qualities stand out?
* Are they stereotypes?
* Are the characters believable?

**Plot and structure :** The *plot* is the main sequence of events that make up the story.

* What are the most important events?
* How is the plot structured? Is it linear, chronological or does it move back and forth?
* Are there turning points, a climax and/or an anticlimax?
* Is the plot believable?

**Narrator and Point of view :** The *narrator* is the person telling the story. The *point of view* tells us whose eyes the story is being told through.

* Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
* Is the narrator the main character?
* Does the author speak through one of the characters?
* Is the story written in the first person “I” point of view?
* Is the story written in a detached third person “he/she” point of view?
* Is the story written in an “all-knowing” 3rd person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?

**Conflict:** *Conflict* or tension is usually the heart of the novel and is related to the main character.

* How would you describe the main conflict?
* Is it internal where the character suffers inwardly?
* Is it external caused by the surroundings or environment the main character finds himself/herself in?

**Theme:** The *theme* is the main idea, lesson or message in the novel. It is usually an abstract, universal idea about the human condition, society or life, to name a few.

* How does the theme shine through in the story?
* Are any elements repeated that may suggest a theme?
* What other themes are there?

**Style:** The author’s style has to do with the author’s vocabulary, use of imagery, tone or feeling of the story. It has to do with his/her attitude towards the subject.

In some novels the tone can be ironic, humorous, cold or dramatic.

* Is the text full of figurative language?
* Does the author use a lot of symbolism? Metaphors, similes?  
  An example of a metaphor is when someone says, "My love, you *are* a rose". An example of a simile is "My darling, you are *like* a rose."
* What images are used?

Your literary analysis of a novel will often be in the form of an essay or book report where you will be asked to give your opinions of the novel at the end. To conclude, choose the elements that made the greatest impression on you. Point out which characters you liked best or least and always support your arguments. Try to view the novel as a whole and try to give a balanced analysis.