


Essays - 5


Essay From Literature

 Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

Purpose


 To discuss the relationship between a personal experience and a piece of literature.

Topic

 Find a story or poem that you can relate to. Your topic is your experience and its relationship with the literature.


Example: *(by Alice) I always told my best friend, Gary, that I was destined to marry my soul mate. Then, after ten years of friendship, I realized Gary was the love of my life. On his wedding day. In Henry James’s “The Beast in the Jungle,” John Marcher spends most of his adult life waiting for “something big” with his close friend, May. Only after May’s death does Marcher realize the thing he was waiting for had been his relationship with May.*

Thesis

 Your overarching assertion for this paper hinges on an interpretation of the literary work that also applies to your personal experience. In other words, the story/poem and your life event share a similar “meaning,” and that becomes the thesis of your paper.

Example: *As James shows in “The Beast in the Jungle,” and as my own experience demonstrates, sometimes a person can obsess over finding something they already have.*

Structure

 There are two main options for this essay:

You may choose to handle the story/poem and your experience separately, drawing connections between the two as you transition from one to the other.

Literature		Life
Life	or	Literature
Literature		Life

Or 2) , you may decide to move back and forth from your life to the literature, pairing examples from each based on their similarities.

Life, Literature; Life, Literature; Life, Literature; etc.

Specifics

👉 Use details and dialogue when narrating the events of your own life.

Example: *The candlelight struck Gary's eye in a way that struck me: I suddenly knew that Gary, standing in his suit and facing a woman I had never met, was the man I loved.*

👉 Use quotations and specific examples from the literature when discussing your interpretation of it. See our handout/tutorial for the Essay About Literature for further discussion.

Example: *The realization of his mistake occurs to Marcher as "[t]he sight that had just met his eyes named to him, as in letters of quick flame, something he had utterly, insanely missed" (James).*

Notes

👉 Do not summarize the story or poem; discuss only the parts that are associated with your personal story.

👉 Instead of merely noting similarities and differences between the literature and your life, work to integrate the "lessons" of the work into your experience. In other words, treat the literature as a way to learn about your experience.

For more information on this topic see
Chapter 7 in The Longwood Guide.

James, Henry. "The Beast in the Jungle." Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg, 6 Feb. 2005. Web. 1 July 2010.