

Character Analysis Essay

Assignment: Your assignment is to write a character analysis of a major character in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Once you have chosen a character to analyze, choose three adjectives that describe that character. These adjectives, or **character traits**, will be the basis of your **five-paragraph essay**.

Requirements:

- Your thesis statement should be stated directly in your introduction and be proven throughout your body paragraphs.
- You must use at least one quotation from the novel in each of the three body paragraphs to support your ideas.
- These quotations must be correctly documented according to MLA guidelines... refer to “Format for Quotations” below.
- The paper must be typed in 12 point font and double-spaced.
- The paper must have a title...do not underline it or put it in quotes.
- Length – The paper should be at least one full page typed, but no more than two pages.
- Deductions will be made for the following errors:
 - Contractions (except in direct quotations from the story)... they are informal
 - 1st and 2nd person pronouns... keep your paper in 3rd person.
 - Slang and non-specific words (thing, guy, a lot, kid, etc.)... also informal
 - Grammar, spelling, and usage errors
 - Typing errors
 - Tense shifts...write in all present or all past tense...be consistent.
 - Not underlining or italicizing book titles

Character Choices:

- Atticus Finch
- Aunt Alexandra
- Boo (Arthur) Radley
- Dill
- Jem Finch
- Miss Caroline
- Miss Maudie Atkinson
- Mrs. Dubose
- Scout Finch

Writing Your Thesis Statement...

As we’ve discussed, a thesis statement is a sentence or two that tells the reader what the rest of the essay is about. Good thesis statements do not simply announce a topic; they say something about the topic, and it provides the framework for your paper. Never start a thesis with, “In this paper I will discuss...”

A thesis statement makes a promise to the reader about the scope, purpose, and direction of the paper. It summarizes the conclusion that the writer has reached about the topic.

For Example: *Through Miss Maudie Atkinson’s open-mindedness, optimism, and compassion, she helps Jem and Scout better understand Atticus and their community.*

Notice the three character traits here...

Detailed Outline:

Paragraph #1

Introduction – general comments about the character and/or novel lead you to your **thesis statement** (described above). Be sure you have identified the author and title of the book and the character you will be analyzing. Some questions you could address in your introduction include:

- Why did you pick this character?
- What do you like and/or dislike about this character?
- Do you identify with this character on any level?
- Do you know someone similar to him or her? Explain.

Paragraphs #2 - #4

Three Body Paragraphs – the **topic sentence** for each body paragraph includes one character trait you chose to describe your character. For example, “Atticus Finch is a man of great integrity.” Follow the topic sentence with **evidence from the novel**: examples from the story that support your topic sentence, and at least one direct quotation from the novel in each body paragraph. Next, **explain** how your examples support your topic sentence, and conclude each body paragraph with a summarizing “clincher” sentence to wrap-up your ideas.

Paragraph #5

Conclusion – restate your thesis statement and add some final thoughts about your character and/or the novel...leave the reader in awe of your wisdom!

Format for Quotations

Example #1 Basic Quotation

Create an intro to your quotation that helps the reader understand its meaning. This is called a “tag line.”

A change in Jem’s attitude toward the Radleys is shown when Scout reports, “Less than two weeks later we found a whole package of chewing gum, which we enjoyed, the fact that everything on the Radley Place was poison having slipped Jem’s memory” (Lee, 60).

After every quote, write the author’s last name and the page number that the quote is found on in parenthesis, followed by period.

Example #2 A Quote within a Quote

Double quotation marks around the entire quote; single quotation marks to show where the quotations exist already in the text.

Jem’s frustration with the injustices of the world is shown in the courtroom. “‘Doesn’t make it right,’ said Jem stolidly. He beat his fist softly on his knee. ‘You just can’t convict a man on evidence like that – you can’t’” (Lee, 220).

Author’s last name and page number.

Example #3 Changing a word or two in a quotation to clarify its meaning.

Harper Lee helps her readers understand why this neighbor is so mysterious to the children of the neighborhood when she states that “Mr. Radley kept [Boo] chained to the bed most of the time” (Lee, 16).

If you make a change to the original text (for clarity) put the change in brackets.

Sample Character Analysis Essay

Unexpected Lesson

When great teachers are mentioned, most people think of biology instructors, football coaches, Girl Scout leaders, and others in similar positions. However, some of the greatest teachers may be individuals not normally classified as teachers. Roger, a character in the short story “Thank You, M’am” by Langston Hughes, encounters such an unusual teacher on a city sidewalk. Because she is a fearless, trustful, and generous woman, Mrs. Jones teaches Roger a lesson he will remember.

Roger is a would-be thief. At about eleven o’clock one night, he runs up behind Mrs. Jones and tries to snatch her purse. When he falls down on the sidewalk, Mrs. Jones “simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue jeaned sitter” (78). While some women would have avoided confrontation with a stranger under similar circumstances, Mrs. Jones does not. She shook Roger “until his teeth rattled” and then demanded, “Pick up my pocketbook boy, and give it here” (78). Mrs. Jones shows no fear in her encounter with Roger.

Not only does Mrs. Jones display courage, but she also proves to be a trusting person. She decides that Roger needs to wash and to eat and that she will take him to her home in order to do so. “I got a great mind to wash your face for you,” (78) she tells Roger. “You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are you hungry?” (78). In just a few words, she assumes the role of a teacher and a mother substitute. She not only takes Roger home but she also continues to display a trusting nature once they arrive. When she gets up to prepare supper, Mrs. Jones “did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse which she left behind her on the daybed” (79). Roger begins to respond to Mrs. Jones in a positive way. Hughes tells the readers that Roger “did not want to be mistrusted now” (79). Her trust in Roger is beginning to create a relationship between them.

Mrs. Jones’s generosity to Roger extends beyond her sharing a meal with him. Roger tells her that he tried to steal her purse in order to get money for a pair of blue suede shoes. Mrs. Jones

then does a remarkable thing. She takes money from her purse and says, “Now here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto my pocketbook nor nobody else’s—because shoes come by devilish like that will burn your feet” (78). She bids him goodnight, and Roger wants to express his gratitude but cannot find words more eloquent than a simple “thank you.” However, Hughes leaves the readers with the definite impression that Roger has been profoundly touched by the generosity of Mrs. Jones.

Some teachers are brilliant instructors due to their superior education. Others make excellent teachers because they are adept as communicators. Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones emerges not from a university but rather from a hotel beauty shop to become Roger’s teacher. Her courage, trust, and generosity communicate more to Roger than mere words ever could.

This sample essay is an example of an “A” essay. In the introduction the writer does:

- Use an appropriate attention-getting technique
- Make a good transition to author and work identification
- Weave author and work identification into paragraph
- Provide a thesis statement that does more than merely list traits (establishes position AND character traits)

In the body of the essay, the writer does:

- Use clear topic sentences with variety of placements
- Use strong transitions into support
- Incorporate sufficient quotations with correct citations
- Provide abundant text-based elaboration
- Use strong clincher sentences

In the conclusion, the writer does:

- Review character traits
- Link to introduction about teachers
- Create a final insight that implies life lesson

Tips & Hints for success: First reference to author is by FULL name; subsequent references are by LAST name only. Choose apt quotations and weave them into the paragraph. Final punctuation is AFTER the citation. Use an original title for your essay. BE CONSISTENT. Write about literature in present tense. Use one point of view (likely third person).

Character Analysis Prewriting

Great Starter:

Thesis Statement:

Body Paragraph #1

Adjective #1

Example

Body Paragraph #2

Adjective #2

Example

Body Paragraph #3

Adjective #3

Example

Quote

Quote

Quote

Explain

Explain

Explain

Great Finisher:
