

Short Analysis Essay

Context: I developed this short essay assignment to promote close reading in my 200-level face-to-face course, and I have used it with equal success in online courses as well. Primarily, the assignment seeks to cultivate a focus on symbols as complex connotative figures that enrich the reader's engagement with the text. This activity can be adapted for different texts and for lower and upper-level courses.

Assignment

Identify one symbol in the below passage (e.g., blood-clotted cowskin or blood-stained gate) and think about the ways in which the selected symbol helps illuminate your reading of Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Think deeply about what you feel is the significance of the symbol and then frame a thesis statement (claim) that serves as an organizing principle for an analysis of the whole text. Guided by the thesis, you should compose a three-page essay that unveils the connotative value of the chosen symbol in Douglass's *Narrative*. In your analysis, you are free to explain how the selected symbol aligns with a theme or themes or other symbols in the narrative. You should begin every paragraph with a topic sentence and the paragraph should explain/illustrate how the symbol illuminates the reader's and your understanding of Douglass's narrative. For example, how does the symbol assist one's reflection about the impact of slaveholding on the enslaved and the slaveholder?

Passage (the incident of Captain Anthony's beating of Aunt Hester)

"The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember anything. It was the first of a long series of outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass." (Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*)

No secondary sources are allowed for this analysis; focus solely on *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845).

Your critical analysis should ...

- focus on a selected symbol from the passage.
- frame a thesis statement around the symbol.

- provide a suitable and inviting title.
- begin every paragraph with a topic sentence.
- unveil the connotative value of the selected symbol.
- seek to align the chosen symbol with theme(s) or other symbols in the text.
- draw and analyze specific examples from the text.
- **include and highlight one quote in each body paragraph**
- follow each quote with a synthesis.

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