

# Template for Crafting the Timed Literary Interpretive Analytical Essay

## A. Respond to ALL parts of the prompt.

Diagram the prompt's parts –

1. [for instance] analyze

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## B. What is/are the secondary level question or questions – in other words, what is the question or what are the questions behind the prompt's question, the one(s) you actually need to answer in order to take a thematically grounded analytical interpretive thesis position?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## C. Read the poem/passage and annotate.

1. Pay close attention to what it starts with and what it ends with. In a poem, map the driving image(s) between the title, the first line and the last line.

2. Circle any unknowns – words or allusions – and either figure out their meaning or let them go completely! (Don't stress over unknowns and don't make up bizarre, incorrect ideas.)

3. Double underline any repetitions and/or patterns in words and/or phrases.

4. Remember to follow the physical trajectory as you read, as well as the emotional one. Follow the actions of the narrator (prose) or speaker (poetry). [For instance, what are all the places that she goes in "Cherry Bomb?"]

5. Decide on/articulate in just a few short words (a short phrase) your thesis idea –

Answer the question: *What is the thematic kernel of truth or meaning about the human condition?*

6. Decide which *three (3) techniques* you are going to explore/analyze to prove your thesis.

Your meaningful/insightful analysis of each of these three techniques will form your three body paragraphs – one technique in each body paragraph.



# Template for Formulaic Interpretive Analytical Timed/On-Demand Essay BODY PARAGRAPH

Remember that in a timed 40 to 50-minute essay, you need to keep your introductory paragraph BRIEF!!!

Hence – the following, **ONE-SENTENCE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH TEMPLATE FOR ESSAY #1/POETRY and ESSAY #2/PROSE** –

[qualifying argument word]  
In this excerpt from her \_\_\_\_\_ short story “Cherry Bomb,”  
[qualifying argument word] [technique #1]  
Maxine Clair uses \_\_\_\_\_,  
[qualifying argument word] [technique #2]  
\_\_\_\_\_, and  
[qualifying argument word] [technique #3]  
\_\_\_\_\_ to reveal how her fifth grade  
[THESIS/INTERPRETATION – exploring *theme and meaning*]  
summer world was characterized by \_\_\_\_\_  
[THESIS/INTERPRETATION – exploring *theme and meaning*]  
\_\_\_\_\_  
[THESIS/INTERPRETATION – exploring *theme and meaning*]  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Then, **BODY PARAGRAPH #1** –

TOPIC SENTENCE #1 = sub-argument/branch/off-shoot/aspect/sub-claim of  
your THESIS/INTERPRETATION – exploring *theme and meaning*. **THEN 2:1**

SENTENCE #2 = state technique and cite it/offer a quotation with your technique.

SENTENCE #3 = meaningfully analyze quotation/quoted words. SENTENCE #4 =

connect your analysis to your opinionated interpretation. REPEAT #2-4 AGAIN.

Dickinson offers an intimate yet also disquieting reminder of how closely eternity shadows the ordinary moments of people’s lives. [TOPIC SENTENCE] Using simple, homebody diction, Dickinson writes about the “bustle” in a home immediately after a death, about the “industries” of “sweeping up” and “putting away” and juxtaposes these simple tasks to one incontrovertible word: “Eternity.” [STATE TECHNIQUE AND CITE IT] The truth is most of us stay busy most of the time and few of us dwell for too long in that place in our imagination where we know that our body will not outlive the domestic clock that keeps every day tidy. [MEANINGFUL ANALYSIS] No matter how hard we try to organize and straighten up, all of us know that with every morning, we move inexorably closer to the stillness of eternity. [CONNECTED BACK TO OPINIONATED INTERPRETATION]

**Template for Formulaic Interpretive Analytical  
Thesis/Thematic Statement  
for  
the Essay #3/Free-Response Open Question (Question 3)**

**For this type of question, focus on organizing a thematically grounded response that clearly highlights three argument points.**

**Important: do NOT organize around three literary, rhetorical or stylistic techniques, as you would for the poetry and prose essay.)**

**Sample PROMPT:**

Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Yet Said has also said that exile can become “a potent, even enriching” experience.

Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character experiences such a rift and becomes cut off from “home,” whether that home is the character’s birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character’s experience with exile is both alienating and enriching, and how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

**Sample THESIS:**

**Approach #1**

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ exile on the sea of life brings him through a series of misadventures and challenges into a confrontation with his deepest demons – and out of this crucible, a man of war, a soldier’s captain and a wild adventurer reshapes his pride, leadership, and lust for life into the loyalty, steadfastness and love he needs to meet his wife again. © N Audino

*What is the subject of this sentence?*

*Highlight/diagram the analytical argument points and the interpretive thesis in different colors.*

OR

**Approach #2**

In his epic tale *The Odyssey*, Homer immortalizes one man’s bitter journey on the cold seas of exile. Through key confrontations with his own hubris, through meetings with mentors both mortal and immortal, and through solitude, Odysseus builds reservoirs of wisdom and self-knowledge that guide him back to his son, his woman, and his homeland. © N Audino

*What is the subject of each of the sentences?*

*Highlight/diagram the analytical argument points and the interpretive thesis in different colors.*

**In his iconic American novel *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses Jay Gatsby's enigmatic past, his consuming fascination with money and status, and his unshakeable, idealistic desire for Daisy to develop the American Dream as an enigmatic paradox of materialism and idealism.**