

High School Literary Analysis Samples (5+ Examples) PDF

Sample 1: Analysis of Theme in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Essay Title: The Green Light and the American Dream: Illusion vs. Reality in *The Great Gatsby*

Course: American Literature, 11th Grade

Thesis Statement: In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses the symbol of the green light to represent not just Gatsby's longing for Daisy, but the corrupted and ultimately unattainable nature of the American Dream in the Jazz Age, revealing it as a pursuit of illusion over reality.

Analysis Paragraph (Body):

Fitzgerald first introduces the green light at the end of Chapter 1, establishing its dual meaning. As Gatsby reaches toward the "single green light" at the end of Daisy's dock, the light is concretely his dream of recapturing a romanticized past with her. However, Nick's observation that it is "minute and far away" immediately frames it as distant and elusive. This physical distance mirrors the social and spiritual gap between Gatsby's present and his dream. By the novel's conclusion, Nick recontextualizes the symbol, recognizing that it stood for the "orgiastic future" that forever recedes before us. This shift from a personal to a universal symbol is critical. Gatsby's dream is not unique; it is the national myth of self-invention and boundless opportunity. His failure—dying alone, his dream unfulfilled, his mansion empty—serves as Fitzgerald's definitive critique. The green light, once a beacon of hope, is revealed to be a mirage, signifying a dream rooted in material acquisition (Daisy's world of "old money") and a past that cannot be replicated, thus proving the American Dream of the era to be a destructive illusion.

Conclusion: Through the evolving symbolism of the green light, Fitzgerald masterfully charts the trajectory of Gatsby's personal aspiration and, by extension, the national ethos. The light's

promise is forever out of reach, underscoring the novel's tragic message that the pursuit of a dream based on illusion must end in disillusionment.

Sample 2: Character Analysis of Hamlet in *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Essay Title: The Anatomy of Delay: Hamlet's Feigned and Authentic Madness

Course: AP English Literature

Thesis: Hamlet's "antic disposition" is not merely a plot device but a complex psychological response that blurs the line between performance and reality, ultimately becoming the medium through which he confronts his moral paralysis and the corrupt world of Elsinore.

Analysis Paragraph (Body):

While Hamlet initially announces he will "put an antic disposition on," the play consistently questions how much of his madness is an act and how much is the genuine unraveling of a sensitive mind under unbearable pressure. His behavior with Ophelia and Gertrude is excessively cruel, suggesting a loss of control that goes beyond strategic feigning. In his soliloquies, however, we see a mind of piercing clarity and rationality, dissecting his own inaction in "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!". This dichotomy is key: the feigned madness allows him to speak uncomfortable truths ("You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife") under the cover of insanity, while the authentic spirals of his psyche reveal a man tortured by existential doubt. His inaction, then, is not simple cowardice, but the intellectual and moral paralysis of a thinker who cannot reconcile the ghost's command with his Christian conscience. The madness, both real and performed, becomes the external manifestation of this internal fracture, a space where he can simultaneously investigate the crime and express his disgust for a world that "rankly abused" him.

Sample 3: Analysis of Dystopian Elements in *1984* by George Orwell

Essay Title: Linguistic Tyranny: How Newspeak Enforces Totalitarianism in *1984*

Course: Political Science / Literature

Thesis: In *1984*, George Orwell posits that control of language is the ultimate tool of totalitarian control. The Party's development of Newspeak is not a side project but the central mechanism for eliminating dissent by systematically destroying the capacity for independent, rebellious thought.

Analysis Paragraph (Body):

The Appendix on "The Principles of Newspeak," though placed at the end of the novel, is fundamental to understanding Orwell's warning. Newspeak aims to "narrow the range of thought" by drastically reducing vocabulary and eliminating nuanced words. Concepts like "freedom" and "justice" are removed, making the very ideas unspeakable and therefore unthinkable. Syme, the Newspeak enthusiast, chillingly boasts, "Orthodoxy is unconsciousness." This reveals the Party's goal: not just forced compliance, but a transformation of human consciousness itself. When Winston Smith writes in his diary, he struggles to express his rebellion because Oldspeak (Standard English) is itself insufficient, already contaminated by Party slogans like "WAR IS PEACE." His thoughtcrime begins with language, and his "re-education" is complete only when he learns to love Big Brother—a linguistic and conceptual surrender. Thus, Newspeak is the logical endpoint of the telescreens and the Thought Police; it makes policing unnecessary by engineering a populace that cannot conceive of dissent.

Sample 4: Poetic Analysis of “Sonnet 18” by William Shakespeare

Essay Title: Eternalizing the Fleeting: Art, Nature, and Time in Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”

Course: Poetry Seminar

Thesis: Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18” transcends the conventional Petrarchan love poem by arguing that the beloved’s beauty is not merely superior to a summer’s day, but can be made eternal *only* through the immortalizing power of poetry itself.

Analysis Paragraph (Body):

The poem turns on the volta at line 9: “But thy eternal summer shall not fade.” The first eight lines establish a comparison, cataloging the imperfections of a summer’s day—“rough winds,” brevity, and excessive heat. The beloved is “more lovely and more temperate.” However, the solution to nature’s impermanence is not found in the beloved’s inherent qualities, but in the poet’s craft. Lines 9-12 shift from description to declaration: the beloved’s “eternal summer” is contingent upon being captured “in eternal lines.” Death, which will inevitably “brag thou wander’st in his shade,” is thwarted not by life, but by art. The final couplet seals this argument as a self-fulfilling prophecy: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” The poem’s existence guarantees the beloved’s immortality. The subject of the poem becomes, paradoxically, the poem’s own power, making “Sonnet 18” a brilliant meta-commentary on the function of art.

Sample 5: Analysis of Symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Essay Title: The Evolving Symbol: The Multilayered Meaning of the Scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter*

Course: Early American Literature

Thesis: The scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* is not a static symbol of punishment, but a dynamic stage that charts the moral and psychological development of the main characters, reflecting shifts in sin, guilt, confession, and ultimately, redemption.

Analysis Paragraph (Body):

Hawthorne structures the novel around three scaffold scenes, each marking a pivotal transformation. In the first scene (Chapter 2), Hester stands alone in a “world of shame,” holding Pearl, forced into a confession that is public and unwilling. Dimmesdale, though called to speak, hides his guilt, and Chillingworth begins his silent observation. The scaffold here is a platform of exposure and isolation. The second scene (Chapter 12) occurs at night, a “vain show of expiation.” Dimmesdale, consumed by private guilt, stands alone with Hester and Pearl, but no public revelation occurs. The scaffold now symbolizes tortured, hidden conscience and the failure of private atonement. The final scene (Chapter 23) brings the symbolism to its climax. Dimmesdale, dying, publicly confesses with Hester and Pearl at his side. The scaffold transforms into a place of brutal truth and paradoxical liberation. While it brings death to Dimmesdale, it frees him from his guilt, reunites the family symbolically, and restores his soul. Thus, the scaffold’s meaning evolves from enforced shame, to secret anguish, to painful but necessary redemption.