

Book Review Introduction

Book Review: Introduction

Spark



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Today's online world is driven by reviews—after everything we buy, every venue we visit, virtually every experience we have, we're expected to leave a review. People want to know what to expect before they invest time, money, or emotional energy into something. Creators and business owners thrive on these reviews, which have the ability to make or break them in terms of profit, visibility, and/or credibility.

So when people read reviews, what do they want to know? At the very least, they want to know the basics—they want answers to the who, what, where, when, and why questions that are typically answered in news articles. More than that, however, they want a critique. A critique doesn't carry the negative connotation of criticizing. Look up synonyms for the word *critique* and you'll spot words like *assessment*, *evaluation*, *appraisal*, and *analysis*—all words for practices that convey opinion. People read book reviews to get informed opinions about a particular text.

Activate Prior Knowledge

As part of this unit, you'll choose a work of fiction, read and analyze it, and share that analysis in a written review. Consider all the fictional literary texts you have examined over the course of the lessons you have completed. How did you evaluate those texts, and were you correct in your assessment of them? In other words, were the texts you chose as worthwhile as you expected them to be based on your initial examination, or would you have benefited by knowing more about them before you began?

Writing book reviews is different from reading them, but you arrive at the same result: a thoughtful and thorough analysis of the text. A book review should provide a summary of the text and an analysis of the text from the reviewer's point of view. The best book reviews contain insightful commentary and textual support to back it up. They dissect each element of the story in order to assess its effectiveness.

Question

Consider a literary text you have read and the main things you would want prospective readers to know about it. Use the graphic organizer to write one statement that conveys your general assessment of each element of the literary text.

Concept Web

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

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Spark

1. Throughout this unit, your student will read a self-selected work of fiction and then write a review of that text in the portfolio section of the unit. Your student will also examine a variety of published book reviews and use them as models for their writing. As they read and examine the texts, they will be asked to analyze and

evaluate complex ideas and to write about their observations and conclusions.

- 2.** Have your student read the Spark section. Discuss the kinds of reviews they read and/or are familiar with. Why do they read these reviews, and how do they ultimately find them helpful?
- 3.** Tell your student that over the course of this unit, they will read a selection of book reviews and use them as models for writing. Encourage them to pay attention to the format and language of these reviews and which elements they find most informative and/or persuasive.

Activate Prior Knowledge

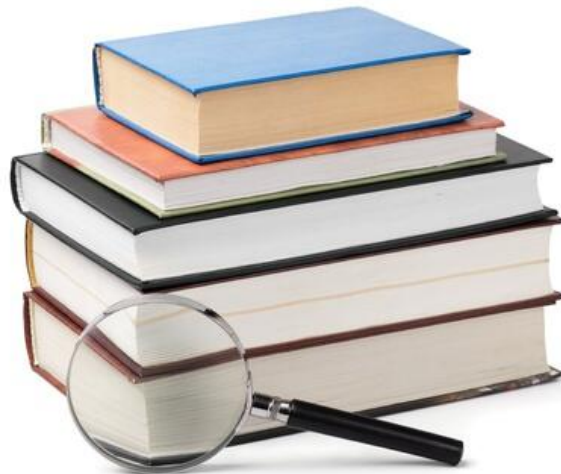
- 1.** Have your student read the two paragraphs in the section. Point out the difference between “reviews” written by readers, critics, and the book’s author and/or publishers. Tell them that when they look for reviews, they should be aware of who is writing them and who is publishing them. Are they written or published by a representative of the author of the book or the creator of the product being reviewed or by an objective outsider? Do these reviews effectively analyze the book or product, or are they primarily product pitches designed to sell?
- 2.** Point out that credible book reviews include supporting evidence from the work that is used to back up the writers’ claims about the text. Note that the problem with giving opinions you can’t back up is that it negatively impacts the credibility of the reviewer and the review source; in addition, it gives the reader no information that helps them learn about the text.
- 3.** Explain that while reviewers are supposed to give their opinions and that reviews, by nature, are subjective, good reviewers make that subjectivity known to their readers. For example, they can

reject a text because they don't like something about it but still recognize that others might appreciate it for the same reason.

4. Have your student access the graphic organizer and respond to the prompts with the name of a literary text they have read and a statement that expresses their assessment of each element: character, themes, plot, setting. Discuss their responses with them, providing any needed support.

Book Review: Introduction

The Basics of Book Reviews



Source: Anton Starikov. 123RF

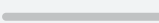


Writing a book review involves critically analyzing and evaluating aspects of a particular text using the tips and techniques you learned in earlier units when you read and analyzed literary texts that you were either assigned or chose yourself. It also involves conveying your analysis in written form in a way that addresses your audience

and anticipates the need of that audience to know what the book is about, how they might benefit or learn from it, and your assessment of it.

Readers of literary text consult book reviews to learn about the story and to gain critical insight that not only helps them determine whether they'd enjoy the plot, but how they might interpret its meaning and apply its significance on a broader scope. The more we immerse ourselves in a story, the more we internalize it—the more we process ideas, improve our critical thinking, and expand our worldview. The stories that are popular in book clubs and discussion groups are provocative and entertaining, the kind that hold deep truths and subtle meanings that are fun to tease out. As you will learn once you begin working on your own book review during the portfolio lessons of this unit, your job as a critical reviewer is to tease out these truths and meanings, to examine the text part by part and expose its complexity.

To learn more about the value of book reviews to the authors of a text as well as to readers, listen to this interview between an author of fiction and a journalist.

Audio: Author Interview

▶ 0:00 / 0:00   

Activity

Consider the following questions, and jot down your thoughts:

- When you check reviews before reading a book, watching a movie, or purchasing a product, do you pay attention to star ratings, and how much do they influence your decision?
- Do you read beyond the star ratings? If so, what parts do you seek out?
- What kind of information in a review is most likely to influence you to accept the opinion of the reviewer?

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

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The Basics of Book Reviews

- 1.** Have your student read the first paragraph, and then review what they have learned about analyzing literary text. Discuss the main elements of fiction (characters, setting, plot, and themes) as well as how your student might analyze the language in a text to shed light on these elements.
- 2.** Emphasize the importance of including specifics. Book reviews are a form of informative text, which means that every detail they include should carry information that relates to the text being reviewed and the process of crafting that text.
- 3.** Point out that to an author, reviews are a form of feedback. Like any feedback, reviews of an author's work and craft don't have to be positive to be helpful or appreciated; they have to be truthful and informed. Invite your student to listen to the podcast to hear about reviews from an author's perspective.

Previewing the Unit Text

Select a Text

Now, it's time to select the fictional literary text that you'll be reading and reviewing in this unit. Examine the texts for ones that spark your interest. Remember that you'll be writing a book review focused on the text later in the unit, so make sure you choose a book with content that intrigues you enough to examine it in detail.

As you consider the titles available to you, keep the following strategies in mind:

- Read the first few paragraphs of the book to see if it engages your interest. Do you find the author's style enjoyable and comfortable to read? Do the first paragraphs spark questions or ideas about the plot or characters that make you want to read on?
- Consider the appeal of the characters as well as the story's plot. Are the characters complex and interesting enough for you to care about what happens to them?
- Consider your taste in genre. If you have a preference for science fiction, for example, you might have knowledge and insight about the genre that will add interest and complexity to your review.

Pace and Prepare Yourself

You will have approximately seven days (or a couple more if you include weekends) to read your self-selected text. Consider your schedule, and pace yourself so you can read at a comfortable pace.

Here's one way you might set up a rough reading schedule:

- Examine your text and determine the number of chapters or pages it contains.

- Divide that number by the number of days you have available to complete the book. Remember to consider your schedule and any other commitments you might have so you can allot a sufficient amount of time to get your reading done without feeling stressed.
- Allow for flexibility. We all have to juggle commitments and responsibilities, so choose a time to read when you can devote full attention to your reading. If you're distracted for one reason or another, better to come back to it than to struggle through and not understand it.
- Read in a place where you feel comfortable and relaxed. Sometimes our environment plays a huge role in our focus. Do you focus better in the morning or at night, at home or somewhere else? Be aware of those things and know what works for you.

After you finish each day's reading, answer these questions in your Reading Log:

- What have I learned about the characters? How complex are they? How are they growing or changing?
- What is notable about the language?
- Is the plot well developed? Does it move at an appropriate pace? Consider how events have unraveled.
- How does the author use figurative and sensory language to describe what is happening—and how effective is this use of language?
- What major themes has the author developed?

As you consider these questions each day and review the notes you took from the day's reading, examine the notes you took on previous days and group the information you have by the elements of literary text that you plan to include in your review (e.g. characters, setting, plot, themes, language). Sometimes it helps to use differently colored highlighters to group ideas accordingly.

Begin Reading

Consult the reading schedule you created and begin reading your selected text. Use the questions above to analyze the first day's reading and write some short initial observations in your Reading Log. Remember that as you proceed, you will have daily opportunities to elaborate and expand upon your observations and add to your notes.

Reading Log

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

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Select a Text

1. Point out the suggestions for selecting a text and discuss them as needed.
2. Allow your student sufficient time to examine the available literary selections and make their choice. As they examine the list, remind them to consult the bulleted suggestions for guidance.

Assist them if they ask, but remind them that the selection is their own.

Pace and Prepare Yourself

1. Discuss the information in this section with your student. Allow them sufficient time to create their schedule.
2. Review the bulleted questions with your student. Explain that as they read their selected text, these questions will help them analyze a literary text so that they can write a book review of it later.

Begin Reading

Guide your student into reading the first day's text as indicated in the reading schedule. Make sure that they have their Reading Log available for notetaking. Discuss with your student what they have read. Guide your student through the process of analyzing the reading using the questions in the Pace and Prepare Yourself section. Remind them that this is the procedure they will follow as they read and analyze the text. Note information to include in their book review, and assure them that you will be there to help them through the procedure as needed.

Book Review Reading Day

Reading Day

Please use today's lesson to read from the designated text for this unit. Use your reading log to take notes based on the guidance in the unit introduction reading preview. Refer to the pacing guide to plan your reading time during the rest of the unit. In the final lesson of the unit, you will be asked to apply skills learned during the unit to analyze the designated text.

Summarizing

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will provide an objective summary of a literary text including elements of fiction (plot, setting, character, and theme).

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **summary** – a brief description that includes the main points or elements of a text
 - **unbiased** – showing no favoritism toward something
-

Summarizing

In a book review, writers provide a critical assessment of a book. They analyze the book's contents and evaluate how well the author communicates their ideas. Before a reader can understand a book review writer's comments, however, they need to be introduced to the basic details about the book. That way the reader will have the information they need to follow the review writer's argument and decide if they agree with the writer's final evaluation of the book or not.

Providing an Objective Summary of a Text

A summary should give the reader a brief, objective overview of a text. It should include only the most essential details, including the literary elements of plot, character, setting, and theme. Any information beyond these basics will be distracting. To stay objective, the summary will present these details in an unbiased way. Opinions and judgment should not be expressed in the summary.

Watch the video to find out more about how to craft an objective summary to include in a book review.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question 1

How can a writer craft an objective summary of a literary text?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The writer should include only the essential details about literary elements such as the text's plot, characters, setting, and theme. The writer should leave out opinion words or judgments.

Question 2

How does an objective summary help the reader of a book review?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: It tells them the basic facts about the book's contents so that they are prepared to understand and properly judge the reviewer's analysis and evaluation of the book.

As you read a literary text and prepare to write a summary of its contents, keep in mind these strategies for making sure that your work is clear, objective, and focuses only on what is most essential for the reader to know about the story.

- Search the book to identify the literary elements of plot, character, setting, and theme. Pay particular attention to the main conflict of the story and its resolution.
- Decide which elements in the text are essential and which could be left out. Ask yourself: Can someone understand the story without this detail?
- Tell the details in the order in which they are presented and paraphrase them briefly in your own words.
- Do not express any personal opinions or judgments about the story and its contents yet.

- Consider whether your reader will be able to follow the points you plan to make next as you analyze and evaluate the story in your book review. Ask yourself: Do I need to add any more information about the book's contents to this summary?

Check-In

Read the short story “Toy Shop” by Harry Harrison to answer the questions. Remember to read the text thoroughly, noticing the literary elements. Look for essential details that an unfamiliar reader would need to know about the story’s setting, plot, characters, and theme.



Source: RATOCA. Shutterstock

Activity 1

Identify which details about the story’s setting and characters would be most important to include in an objective summary.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The story is set during a time when people are working to develop reliable space flight. The most important locations include a toy shop where a mysterious device is sold and a gathering where missile men experiment with this device. The most important characters are Colonel Biff Hawton, the young man and the older man who have invented the coils that power the device, and Teddy Kaner and the other missile men.

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Activity 2

Identify which details about the main conflict or problem in the story and how it is resolved would be most important to include in an objective summary.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The problem facing the young man and the older man is that they have invented coils that can lift small amounts of weight into the air, helping to power flight, but when they brought proof of their invention to scientists, no one believed them or was interested in investigating their discovery. To solve this problem, they have placed the coils in a toy and tricked several missile men and professors to buy it, thinking that it is just a fun magic trick. This will solve the problem because when the scientists notice that the device should not actually be able to fly, they will begin to investigate how it works and do the research and experimentation necessary to figure out why the coils work and how to improve them.

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Activity 3

Identify how a writer could explain the theme of this story as part of an objective summary.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The writer might say, “This story shows how sometimes even the most intelligent people must be cleverly tricked to make them pay attention to new discoveries that could benefit humanity.”

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Practice

Read the short story “The Endless Tale” by James Baldwin to complete the activity.

Activity

Provide an objective summary of “The Endless Tale,” including the literary elements of plot, character, setting, and theme. Be sure to avoid including opinions and judgments.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: In the short story “The Endless Tale,” a king in the Far East is cured of his need to hear stories all the time. Because he finds all stories too short, he uses a contest to find someone who can tell him a story that has no end. The prize for the contest is to marry his beautiful daughter and become his heir, but the punishment for failure is death. Therefore, it is a long time before a stranger tries the contest. The stranger succeeds by telling a story that does, indeed, go on and on with seemingly no end in sight for two years, until the king declares that he will be driven mad if he hears any more of it. The king gives the kingdom and his daughter to the stranger and decides he does not care to hear stories anymore. The theme of the story is to be careful what you wish for because by overdoing something that you love, you may become sick of it.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to all parts of the prompt by writing an objective summary that includes elements of fiction and excludes any personal views.

2. _____ I determined which details and elements of fiction (plot, setting, characters, and theme) were essential to the objective summary.
 3. _____ I presented the details from the text in the correct sequence and avoided including any opinions or judgments.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling to summarize the text in my own words.
-

Evaluation

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will evaluate author's use of narrative techniques to develop plot and character.

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **characterization** – the process by which an author creates, reveals, and develops a character
 - **denouement** – the final part of a narrative, where the plotlines are resolved
 - **flashback** – a literary device that moves the reader from the present in a chronological description to the past
 - **foreshadowing** – a literary device in which authors hint at something that is going to happen in the future
 - **narrative techniques** – methods and devices writers use to create an effect
 - **point of view** – the narrator's connection to the story being told
-

Evaluation



Source: DeiMosz. Shutterstock

Authors use a variety of narrative techniques to develop the characters and plots of their stories. One task facing the writer of a book review is to evaluate how well an author uses these techniques and what effect they have on the story. The book review

writer should identify which techniques the author uses and then find examples from the story to support their evaluation.

Evaluating the Author's Plot Structure

The way an author structures a plot affects the way the reader experiences the story. In some cases, the narrative might be linear. Events are presented in chronological order, or the sequence in which they occurred. In some cases, however, the narrative might be nonlinear, with events presented out of order. For example, an author might use a flashback to go back in time. A flashback fills in details or provides an explanation by narrating a past event before returning to the present. An author can also use foreshadowing to give readers hints or warnings about something that is going to happen in the future. By manipulating time and withholding or teasing information about events to come, the author can create effects such as suspense or tension to move the plot forward in exciting or meaningful ways.

Consider the basic parts of a plot:

- **Exposition:** The section of a story that introduces the characters, setting, and main conflict.
- **Rising Action:** The section of a story where the author develops the conflict and begins to build suspense and interest.
- **Climax:** The turning point of the story, when the action reaches the most exciting moment and the conflict is faced and solved.
- **Falling Action:** The section of the story where the tension from the conflict is released and the results of the climax begin to be shown.
- **Resolution:** The end of the story, or denouement, where any loose ends from the plot may be tied up or resolved.

The writer of a book review should examine the shape of the overall narrative arc and consider how much time the author spends on each part of the plot. Then, the reviewer can assess how this affects the experience the reader has. For example, a long time

devoted to the rising action provides the author with many opportunities to keep building suspense and tension before the climax of the story. Or a short amount of time devoted to falling action and resolution may leave the reader feeling unsettled or unsure by the climax even though the story is over.

Evaluation



Source: Oliver Denker. Shutterstock

Evaluating the Author's Character Development

The thoughts, words, and actions of the characters move the plot of a story along.

Therefore, readers must pay attention to how an author uses a point of view to develop the characters.

Authors can choose different points of view:

Types of Points of View in Narration

Point of View	Type of Narration
first-person point of view	narration told through one person's perspective using the first-person pronouns <i>I</i> or <i>me</i>
second-person point of view	narration that uses the pronoun <i>you</i> , implying that the reader is the main character and the events are happening to them
third-person point of view	narration by a voice outside of the action that uses the third-person pronouns <i>he</i> , <i>she</i> , or <i>they</i>

Third-person point of view can be narrated in three ways:

- An objective third-person point of view is neutral and reports on events without revealing characters' thoughts or feelings.
- A limited third-person point of view focuses on a particular character and is "limited" to revealing only that person's thoughts and feelings.

- An omniscient third-person point of view is all-seeing and knows everything about all characters and their thoughts and feelings.

Sometimes authors develop plot and character by switching between several different points of view. Moving between different perspectives allows an author to hide information to build suspense or to reveal new details that change a reader's understanding of who a character is or what is happening in the story. When evaluating an author's use of point of view, pay attention to when the point of view changes and consider the significance of each shift and its effect on the reader's experience.

The writer of a book review should also examine how an author uses characterization. That means looking at how the author creates, reveals, and develops a character by providing information about who the character is and why they act as they do. The author might do this in two ways:

- direct characterization—telling the reader exactly what the character is like through statements by the narrator or explicit descriptions of the character
- indirect characterization—requiring the reader to use information from the story to make deductions and draw their own conclusions about the character from the things the character thinks, does, and says

Evaluation

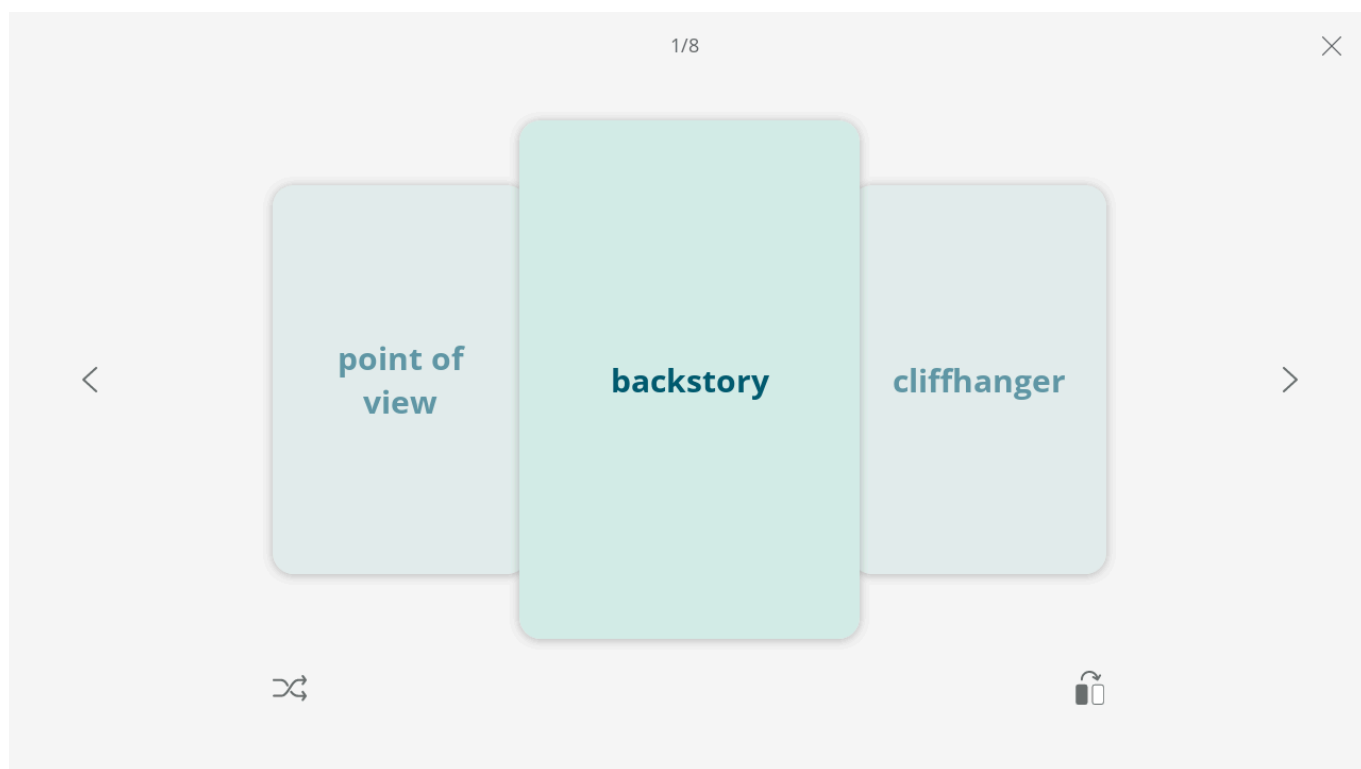


Source: Jakub Jirsak. 123RF

Narrative Techniques

To evaluate the narrative techniques an author uses to develop plot and characters, the writer of a book review needs to recognize them first to understand the effect they might have on the story.

Use the flashcards to review the roles of some narrative techniques.



To perform the evaluation necessary to write a book review, a writer should consider which of these narrative techniques the author used and why. Then they should determine how effective this use was in developing the plot and characters.

Watch the video. Listen as two students discuss a short story they recently read and model how to evaluate the narrative techniques that the author used to develop plot and

character.

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Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 1

What type of narrator do the students decide this short story has? What effect do they determine this type of narration has on the reader?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The students decide the story has an omniscient narrator, which means the narrator is outside of the story and knows everything about the characters. They note that the effect is that the reader learns how the protagonist, Mathilde, thinks and feels.

Question 2

What are some observations the students make about the relationship between the role of the character Mathilde and the development of the plot?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The students decide that the plot is “character-driven,” or moved forward by Mathilde’s behavior, feelings, and desires. They note that she is the main character, and it is the goal she struggles to achieve that keeps the plot going. They describe the conflict between Mathilde and her husband, including their differing attitudes and feelings toward life. They note how Mathilde’s search for a solution to the problem of the missing necklace, including looking for the necklace and not finding it, then falling into poverty, and saving money to purchase a replacement, creates suspense.

Question 3

What do the students observe about the shape of the overall narrative arc and its effect on the reader, especially concerning how the story ends?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The students note that the author spends time on the introduction and rising action and very little time on the denouement. They point out their surprise at finding out that the lost necklace was fake at the end of the story, leaving the reader with a sense of uncertain closure. The reader is left wondering what happens next because the author does not provide any information about Mathilde’s reaction to this news.

Think about the way the students in the video move from identifying narrative techniques, such as the type of narration and the structure of the plot, to evaluating the effect these techniques have on the reader’s experience. Consider how you can conduct similar analysis when evaluating an author’s use of narrative techniques when writing a book review of your own.

Check-In

Read excerpts from the short “Zero Hour” by Alexander Blade. Then use what you’ve learned about evaluating an author’s use of narrative techniques to develop plot and character to answer the questions.



Source: Khakimullin Aleksandr. Shutterstock

Question 1

How would you evaluate the author’s use of characterization?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The author uses both direct and indirect characterization to develop this story. The direct characterization comes from statements the characters make about each other. However, the reader must evaluate what the characters say explicitly about each other and then make inferences about whether the observations are true or not. For example, Bobby's thoughts reveal that he thinks his father is most likely a very smart scientist, and later facts in the story back this assertion up, but Bobby is mistaken in thinking that his father (or anyone) will be traveling on the rocket to the moon. John Kendall, in turn, thinks that kids live in a dream world, and is completely oblivious to his son's true accomplishments and actions, including the fact that his son almost took a ride on the real rocket. Through indirect characterization, the author supplies the reader with enough information from Bobby's thoughts and actions to help the reader to conclude that the boy is extremely bright, brave, and curious. The reader can also tell that the boy is thoughtful, shown by his awareness that if both he and his father go the moon, there will be no one left on earth to take care of his mother if something happens.

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Question 2

How would you evaluate the author's use of a shifting point of view to narrate this story and the effect that these changing points of view might have on the reader, particularly between the second and third sections of the story?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The author narrates this story from a series of limited third-person points of view, which allows the author to move in and out of various characters'

perspectives and thoughts but never comment on the action from the perspective of a narrator located completely outside of the events. The reader's impressions of the events are all filtered through the eyes of the different characters, and the reader must draw their own conclusions about the characters and their actions. The story opens by narrating events from Bobby's point of view, then switches to his mother's point of view. The second section is narrated solely from Bobby's point of view, while the third section switches to his father's point of view. Using a series of limited third-person points of view allows the author to help the reader get to know each character and his or her outlook on the plot events by putting the reader in the characters' shoes and letting the reader see their thoughts. For example, the reader learns a lot about the rocket from Bobby's point of view and a lot about the restricted government area in which the family lives from Mrs. Kendall's point of view. When the reader reads the third section from Mr. Kendall's point of view, they receive new information about the rocket program that helps them reevaluate Bobby's point of view. The reader can also use Mr. Kendall's point of view of Bobby and his capabilities to deepen their understanding of both characters.

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Question 3

How would you evaluate the author's overall plot structure and use of narrative techniques such as foreshadowing, flash-forward, backstory, flashback, and cliffhanger?

Show answer
Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Although the overall structure of the plot is linear, the author breaks the events up with flashbacks and skips over an important event to create suspense. The story opens on the day of a big event, and the first couple of paragraphs foreshadow the event before revealing that Bobby believes that his father will be rocketing to the moon and that he will be traveling along. Bobby also indulges in an imagined flash-forward in which he pictures himself talking to his mother by radio from the moon. The foreshadowing and flash-forward create a sense of anticipation in the reader, who wonders if Bobby is correct and whether this exciting event will take place. When the narrative switches to Mrs. Kendall's point of view, she reveals through backstory that the family lives in an extremely guarded area, which emphasizes for the reader how completely Bobby's parents would never suspect that he could be able to reach the actual rocket. In the second section, the author uses flashbacks so Bobby can reveal the story of how he discovered the real rocket's existence and hatched his plan of riding along on the launch. This section ends on a huge cliffhanger, with the reader uncertain what happens next and assuming that Bobby did, in fact, take off with the rocket. This makes the reader feel surprised and horrified in the third section of the story when they find out that the rocket was sent unmanned to the moon and is programmed to explode and throw dye on the moon's surface. The tension rises as the reader anticipates what Mr. Kendall's reaction will be when he goes to Bobby's room and discovers that his son isn't there. The author was able to create this extreme tension by skipping over any narration of Bobby's decision to return home before the rocket launched. As the story resolves, the author allows the reader some time to feel relief that Bobby is safe while also marveling at how much Mr. Kendall does not know about his son and feeling worried that a future tragedy might occur if Mr. Kendall does not ever discover that Bobby was planning to ride on the real rocket. Ultimately, the author is very successful at creating anticipation, suspense, surprise, and tension through his use of narrative techniques to control when he reveals information to the reader about different plot events.

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Practice

Read the short science fiction “Sentry” from the series *Two-Timer* by Fredric Brown. Then complete the activity.



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Activity

In a couple of paragraphs, evaluate the author’s use of narrative techniques to develop plot and character.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: In this story, the author uses point of view, characterization, and a narrative arc without any falling action or much denouement to create a surprising effect that inspires the reader to think more deeply about humanity. The author tells the story from a limited third-person point of view, so the reader perceives all of the action from the perspective of the unnamed narrator. The author uses direct characterization to tell the reader how the narrator feels (wet, muddy, hungry, cold), and because the reader receives so much detailed information about the narrator's situation, the reader may not notice that the author does not provide any information about the narrator's physical appearance. The reader can also piece together from direct statements that the narrator is a foot soldier who is fighting to hold a post against an attack from a terrible enemy, a group of aliens who are "cruel, hideous and repulsive monsters." Because the reader is limited to only the narrator's perspective, the reader must decide for themselves if the narrator's opinion about the enemy is valid or not. The narrator does provide an additional piece of information that could help the reader form their own opinion about the enemy: the war began because the enemy shot first at the narrator's race without even trying to negotiate or make peace.

The author structures the story by opening with the narrator's situation of being posted fifty thousand light-years from home, provides backstory about how war started between the two intelligent races in the Galaxy, and then returns to the narrator's current situation for a final climactic event and plot twist. The direct description of the narrator's fallen enemy reveals that this terrible alien foe is a human being. Most likely, thanks to the lack of any physical description of the narrator, up until this point, the reader has been assuming that the narrator himself is human. Now the reader realizes that humans are the "cruel, hideous and repulsive monsters." The story closes without any further commentary or resolution, leaving the reader to reflect on how much one's sympathies and judgment of a situation depend on one's preconceptions and viewpoint.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified narrative techniques used by the author to develop plot and character.
 2. _____ I evaluated the effectiveness of the author's use of these narrative techniques.
 3. _____ I selected examples from the text to support my evaluation.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

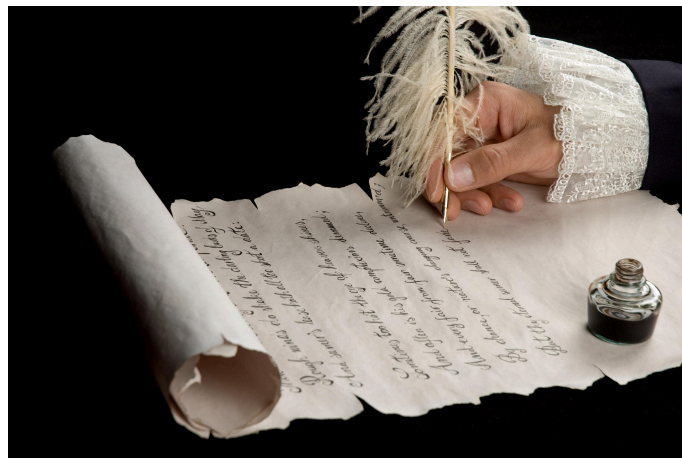
Objective

In this section, you will evaluate author's use of language (figurative and sensory).

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **figurative language** – expressions used for a descriptive effect that are not literally true but imply ideas indirectly
 - **sensory language** – descriptive words and phrases that appeal to the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell
-

Evaluation



Source: Slaven. Shutterstock

An essential aspect of a [book review](#) is evaluating the author's use of language. Authors use [sensory language](#) and [figurative language](#) to communicate their ideas more clearly and to craft vivid pictures of characters, settings, and events in their stories. Strong descriptions and interesting comparisons can establish mood, generate humor, and create meaning.

Soon, you will write your own book review. Keep reading to discover some things writers think about and do when they evaluate an author's work in a book review.

Evaluating Sensory Language

To evaluate an author's use of sensory language, a book review writer should examine the words an author has chosen to use. Then, the reviewer considers the effect that these particular words have. On one level, the words should help the reader visualize clearly what things look, sound, smell, taste, and feel like. Some words may have connotations that evoke a neutral, positive, or negative feeling. An author may also consider various shades of meaning when choosing language to evoke specific reactions from the reader. Carefully selected words shape sensory details and imagery. They capture the reader's imagination and guide their emotional response to a text.

When writing with sensory language, an author will:

- use vivid adjectives or adverbs.
- provide specific descriptions instead of vague ones.
- opt for strong and exact verbs and nouns.
- avoid clichés or overused terms.

When evaluating the sensory language in a text, a book review writer should consider:

- How does the author incorporate sensory details and imagery while describing characters, events, experiences, and settings?
- To which senses do these descriptions appeal?
- What pictures can I visualize from these descriptions?
- What emotions do these descriptions evoke?
- What ideas do these descriptions spark?
- Why has the author chosen this language?

- Does the use of sensory language advance the author's purpose?

Evaluating Figurative Language

Authors use figurative language to convey an idea in an unexpected way. Figures of speech enrich a text by creating complex imagery and multiple layers of meaning. Pausing and thinking about the deeper relationship expressed in a phrase, description, or remark engages the reader's mind and gives meaning, evokes an emotion, or emphasizes a point.

Authors may incorporate different figures of speech in a literary text to meet their intended purpose:

Common Types of Figurative Language

Type of Figurative Language	Explanation
simile	makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>
metaphor	makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things without using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>

personification	creates vivid pictures in the reader's mind by giving human traits or characteristics to something nonhuman
onomatopoeia	a word that imitates the sound it suggests
allusion	an indirect or implied reference to a famous person, event, myth, or literary work
hyperbole	exaggeration is used for emphasis or other effect

Question 1

How can you tell if an author has used sensory language effectively?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: You can examine how well the author has used words to shape sensory details that appeal to the reader's five senses and help them to visualize characters, events, experiences, and settings. Along with evaluating if the author has used strong, specific language and avoided clichés, consider what emotions and ideas the descriptions call to mind.

Question 2

How can you tell if an author has used figurative language effectively?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Figurative language calls to mind striking and interesting relationships. When writing a book review, interpret each relationship and evaluate what effect is created, emotion evoked, or point made or emphasized by using the figure of speech.

Evaluation



Source: Khamidulin Sergey. Shutterstock

Evaluating an Author's Use of Language

To evaluate an author's overall use of language throughout a story, a book review writer should focus only on the author's most impactful use of sensory details and figures of speech. Although the reviewer should closely scrutinize how the author uses language throughout the text, the final evaluation should focus on the most meaningful examples rather than a list of every sensory word or use of figurative language.

To determine how to focus the evaluation, the book review writer should consider the author's purpose for writing a text and the message or meaning the author is trying to convey. Then the reviewer should evaluate how well the author's use of language serves this purpose, supporting the analysis with text evidence.

Imagine you are writing a book review for the short story "A Thing That Glistened" by Frank R. Stockton. In this story, a diver descends into the ocean to search for a diamond bracelet that has been dropped overboard by an opera singer. Instead of the necklace, he encounters a shark who, attracted by things that glitter, eats the diver's lamp. When the electrocuted shark floats to the surface, the diver has it cut open, thinking perhaps that the shark ate the glittering bracelet too. Instead, he discovers a message in a glowing bottle, a confession written by a man who committed a murder for which the diver's brother was blamed and sentenced to death. When the diver goes to tell the opera singer that he could not locate her bracelet, she reveals that she discovered later that she had never dropped the bracelet. To reward him for his bravery, though, she gifts him a diamond pin which he and his wife sell for money to furnish their home, including a room for his now freed brother.

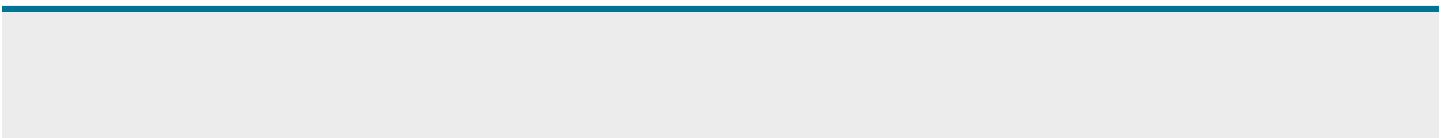
You decide to focus particularly on the passages below when writing a book review. Read the passages.

Passage 1

Passage 2

Passage 3

Now read the following evaluation of the passages you just read and notice how it focuses on the author's use of sensory and figurative language:



Stockton uses sensory language and similes to create an exciting atmosphere and to help the reader visualize the stranger moments of this event. The reader can understand what the terrifying underwater encounter with the shark must have felt like from sensory details that narrate how the shark begins to “swoop” nearer and nearer to the diver and tell how “there was a violent jerk which nearly threw [the diver] from [his] feet.” The author also contrasts images of light and darkness to create tension, describing the look of the shark’s “vast mouth, glistening with teeth” in the lamplight and how “all was blackness” once the shark swallows the lamp. To help the reader picture the objects being retrieved from inside the dead shark, the author uses similes, stating how the lamp’s “wires were severed as smoothly as if they had been cut by shears” and noting how the container that ends up holding the important letter is a “pint bottle which glimmered like a glow-worm.”

Stockton also uses sensory details and figurative language to communicate a message about what is most important to value in life. When the diver is given the diamond pin as a reward by the signora, he uses a simile to note that, “after having seen the Signora’s bracelet, this stone seemed like a pea in a bushel of potatoes.” This down-to-earth comparison shows how plainspoken and practical the narrator is. It also draws attention to his final thoughts about the pin. Even though the pin is so small, he is “filled with profound respect for things that glitter” as he looks around himself at all of the household items that the sale of the pin has allowed him and his wife to purchase. The author helpfully includes a long list of these items to emphasize the extent to which the narrator has been able to transform a tiny shining rock into a comfortable home and existence.

Question 3

What was important to focus on when evaluating Stockton’s use of sensory and figurative language?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The focus was only on sensory language and similes that support how Stockton uses this language to describe an exciting encounter with a shark and to make a point about the best attitude to take toward glittering things.

Question 4

When evaluating an author's use of language in a text, why is it important to focus on only a few targeted examples instead of listing every use?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: When writing a book review, you want to evaluate how well the author's use of language has served their purpose in writing the text and conveying a particular message. Therefore, you do not want to include any extra or distracting details. A book review should describe and include examples of uses of sensory and figurative language that relate to the main points they plan to make in their evaluation.

Check-In

The passage below is from Nathaniel's Hawthorne's short sketch "The Old Manse." It is taken from the preface to a book of short stories that were written and collected while Hawthorne lived in this house, which was named "The Old Manse." A vegetable garden next to the house had been planted for Hawthorne as a wedding gift by his friend, Henry David Thoreau.



Source: Krzysztof Slusarczyk. Shutterstock

Consider what you would do if you were evaluating the author’s language in this passage as part of a book review. Think about how you would examine each paragraph in depth to explore how and why the author is using sensory and figurative language.

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Question 1

What main point is Hawthorne making about gardening at the beginning of the first paragraph? How does he use sensory and figurative language to support this point?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Hawthorne is proposing that people who have not raised children can find pleasure and satisfaction in the work of raising vegetables in a small kitchen garden. Throughout the paragraph, he relies on a metaphor that compares the relationship of a parent taking care of a human child to the relationship of a gardener raising “vegetable progeny.” To help the reader visualize and understand the experience of watching plants grow, he uses a mixture of sensory details and personification to narrate how a gardener will be bewitched by the sight of “a hill of beans thrusting aside the soil” or “a row of early peas just peeping forth sufficiently to trace a line of delicate green.”

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Question 2

How does Hawthorne use his description of bees in his garden to make a key observation? How would you evaluate his use of sensory and figurative

language to support this point?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: On the surface, it looks like Hawthorne is just describing how bees are sipping nectar from the flowers in his garden and then making honey with that nectar in an unknown hive that he cannot access; it seems that he does not end up receiving back any benefit from having provided the bees with the nectar to make the honey. His larger point is that he is happy to contribute to something sweet being added to the world, even if he does not personally get to enjoy that specific thing. He uses a metaphor, speaking at first about real, physical honey, but then using “honey” to name any sweet blessing that he can contribute to the world to make it a less sour and bitter place.

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Question 3

What is Hawthorne’s main subject in the second paragraph? What are some ways he uses sensory and figurative language to support his ideas?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: In the second paragraph, Hawthorne uses sensory and figurative language to express his thoughts and feelings about summer-squashes. He metaphorically equates the squashes to “urns and vases.” He declares that sculptors should copy their forms in marble. He also declares that if he were provided with great amounts of gold or porcelain, he would sculpt dishes in the shapes of these vegetables. At several points, he uses hyperbole to emphasize how amazing he finds the shapes of the squashes and how much he values them, such as when he says they present “an endless diversity” of shapes or when he

claims that a “hundred squashes” are worth being preserved in artworks. Taken together, his use of language emphasizes how supremely lovely he finds the shape and surfaces of these squashes, comparing them over and over to works of art.

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Question 4

What is Hawthorne’s main subject in the final paragraph? How does he use sensory and figurative language to support his ideas?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: In the final paragraph, Hawthorne uses sensory language and personification in much the same way as he did in the first paragraph to describe the experience of raising winter-squashes and cabbages as if they were children. Specific details like “first little bulb, with the withered blossom adhering to it” help people who have never gardened visualize more clearly what the growing plants look like, while personification such as “big, round fellows, hiding their heads beneath the leaves,” reminds the reader of Hawthorne’s ongoing metaphor equating these vegetables with children. Hawthorne uses a vivid description of a cabbage “swell[ing] to a monstrous circumference” and personification “its ambitious heart often bursts” to emphasize his final point that a gardener can feel proud and accomplished from having partnered with “the earth and sky” to have produced such an amazing object. Then he uses the sensory image of “vegetable children . . . smoking on the table” to undercut the seriousness of his point with the humorous observation that the most pleasurable aspect of this event is eating what you have grown.

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Question 5

When writing a review of this passage, what thesis statement might you craft to evaluate Hawthorne's overall use of language?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: While describing different aspects of his kitchen garden, Nathaniel Hawthorne skillfully uses vivid sensory details and figurative language such as metaphors to help the reader visualize the objects produced by the garden and to understand the feelings kindled in the gardener from helping to bring into the world everything from honey to squashes.

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Practice

Read this passage from another section of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short sketch “The Old Manse.” So far in this text, Hawthorne has guided the reader around various areas of the property, introducing and describing each place, but not yet telling the reader about the house, “The Old Manse,” itself.



Source: Arthur Ng Heng Kui. Shutterstock

Recall what you have learned about evaluating an author’s use of sensory and figurative language. Think about what message or big idea Hawthorne wishes to

communicate to the reader in this section of the text.

After reading the passage, complete the activity below.

Activity

In a paragraph or two, evaluate the author's sensory and figurative language use in this passage. Be sure to identify examples, consider their effect, and assess how effective Hawthorne's overall use of language is for his purpose.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: In this passage, the author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, uses carefully selected vivid sensory language and figurative language to help the reader visualize the experience of a rainstorm at the manse. He does this to emphasize the point that the area around the manse is usually so pleasant that it takes this type of weather to drive people indoors to explore the inside of the house. When first introducing the rain, Hawthorne personifies it, calling it "sulky" as he explains how it was this type of rain that first drove him inside for any long period of time. Hawthorne helps the reader both imagine the sound of the rain and how incessantly it fell through the repetitive onomatopoeia "drip-drip-dripping and splash-splash-splashing." To help the reader picture the more positive aspects of the rain, Hawthorne uses the visual detail that the rain made "the mosses of ancient growth upon the walls [look] green and fresh." The rest of the imagery, however, emphasizes the point that the rain is constant and heavy. For example, Hawthorne uses hyperbole to exaggerate that the surface of the river is "blurred by an infinity of raindrops" and a simile to make the point that the entire landscape outside is so soaked with water that it looks like "the earth was wet through like a sponge." Overall, Hawthorne's use of sensory and figurative language transports the reader successfully to the setting of the manse during an extreme rainstorm and supports his point that only such weather could compel people to leave the lovely grounds outside to go indoors.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified and evaluated the author's use of sensory and figurative language.
 2. _____ I supported my evaluation with text evidence.
 3. _____ I assessed the overall effectiveness of the author's use of language in relation to his purpose.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will evaluate an author's development of theme.

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **inference** – a conclusion formed from evidence and reasoning
 - **theme** – a central, unifying idea an author is trying to convey in a piece of literature
-

Evaluation

Access and Evaluate Information



Source: Gearstd. Shutterstock

To write a comprehensive [book review](#), a writer must be sure to evaluate the story's [theme](#). A theme is the central or unifying idea or message that gives meaning to a literary text. Sometimes it is a lesson the characters learn from having faced and solved a problem or it is the moral of the story. Often, it will be a commonly understood idea

about the human condition, one that people from any culture or historical period can relate to.

A story might have one major theme and several minor themes. Some stories have multiple themes that interact and build upon one another. While telling the story, an author will develop, shape, and refine the main theme or themes throughout the text.

Evaluating an Author's Development of Theme

At times, the narrator or a character in the story will directly state the theme, but often it is only implied. Instead of revealing the themes of a literary text explicitly, authors may develop them slowly over the course of the story, through the use of dialogue and details about the characters, setting, and plot. To figure out the theme, therefore, readers must pay attention as they read to access information and notice clues about the theme throughout the text. Then, they should evaluate the clues carefully before making any [inference](#) about what message the author is trying to convey.

Hints and bits of information about the theme can be found in many places. Depending upon the story, different story elements may play larger or smaller roles in providing clues to the story's theme or themes.

In general, readers might take the following actions:

- Check the title and think about both its literal and implied meanings. Consider what the relationship is between the title and what happens in the story.
- Think about who is telling the story. From whose point of view is the story told? Decide what you can tell about the meaning of the story from the point of view toward the characters and their actions.
- Identify who the protagonist is and how or if this character changes or is affected by what happens to them in the story. Pay attention to what the narrator and the other characters think, do, and say. Decide if they are

trustworthy or if there is a disconnect between their perception of events and what is really happening.

- Think about what the main conflict is and how it is solved. Determine if the characters have learned anything new about life by the time the story concludes.
- Find words, images, or ideas that are repeated throughout the text. Consider what these patterns signify or if they convey meaning.

A reader's initial ideas about themes in a story might evolve over time as they glean additional clues from the text and analyze how details are developed. A reader might suspect a certain theme at the beginning of a story, but by the conclusion the theme may have evolved into a totally different message. Sometimes the author will introduce an ironic plot twist at the end of a story that causes the reader to rethink everything they believed up to this point about the theme.

A reader might detect broad, universal themes that could apply to many different stories. They might begin by labeling these themes with a word or a short phrase, such as *justice* or *the importance of forgiveness*. Then, as they access additional information and evaluate the text in more depth, they shape their initial ideas into a formal theme. For example: "To overcome obstacles in life, sometimes a person must first conquer their own shortcomings" or "Attempts to control one's environment through technology can often end in the destruction of the very thing one is trying to preserve."

When writing about the theme of a story as part of a book review, the reviewer should state the main message clearly. Then, they should provide the strongest evidence from the text to support their interpretation, including key examples and perhaps direct quotes from the book. Finally, they should explain how the author develops this theme throughout the story.

Question 1

Why might a reader's conception of the theme or themes of a story evolve over time?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: As the reader accesses more information from the story about the characters and plot events, clues will help them make clearer inferences about the main message the author is trying to communicate. At times, the theme evolves because the author will include an ironic twist that makes the reader rethink their previous ideas about the theme.

Question 2

What are some methods a book review writer can use to help them evaluate an author's development of the theme of a story?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer can consider the literal and figurative meanings of the story's title and how it relates to the events of the story. They can determine if the point of view is significant to the theme. They can examine the protagonist and other characters and consider how they react to and are changed by the story events. They can examine the main conflict and how it is resolved. They can look for patterns of words, images, and ideas.

Check-In

Read the short story “Hearts and Hands” by O. Henry. Then, use it to answer the questions.



Source: Khrystyna Slasna. Shutterstock

Question 1

What does the reader learn about the characters of the two men and Miss Fairchild from dialogue and details in the text? How does the author reveal additional information that changes the reader's perspective on these characters?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: At first, it seems as if the younger man is a trustworthy marshal and the older man is a criminal counterfeiter, and the reader has a positive impression of the younger man and a negative impression of the older man. The author uses an observation made by another passenger on the train in the last lines of the story, however, to reveal that the younger man is actually the criminal. Miss Fairchild seems from initial details to be so high-class as to be disinterested in anyone socially beneath her, and she does not unbend to speak to Mr. Easton until she recognizes him as an old friend from Washington; but at the same time, the author hints that she has the capacity to set aside her "gloss of style and manner" and speak plainly to Mr. Easton about perhaps being willing to leave Washington and try a more adventurous life, if given a good reason to.

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Question 2

How would you describe the main conflict of this story, and how it is resolved?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The main conflict is how Miss Fairchild and Mr. Easton will end up interacting. When she first sees him, she is disinterested, but then she greets him warmly when she recognizes him. Her manner cools again when she thinks he

might be a criminal, but when the older man clarifies matters by pretending to be the criminal, she opens up so much that she begins to speak “truly and simply without the gloss of style and manner” about the possibility of living in the West. The reader can infer from her words that she thinks she might be happy to move to the West and make a future with Mr. Easton. To save the younger man embarrassment from having the truth discovered, the older man demands to be taken to the smoker, which allows the young man and young lady to end the conversation smoothly without the truth coming out and without them committing to making any concrete plans that could not come to fruition. The author conveys this whole situation and its resolution without having any of the three main characters state openly or think silently about their motivations for acting as they do.

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Question 3

Which theme would you identify, and how would you evaluate the way the author develops this theme over the course of this story? Write your answer as if it were part of a book review.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The main theme of “Hearts and Hands” is that first impressions and appearances can be deceiving. Based on the initial appearance of the younger and older man, most people will assume that the younger man is the marshal and the older man is the criminal. Only truly observant people, like their fellow passenger, might be able to tell from the placement of the handcuffs that the marshal is the rougher-looking older man. As it turns out, the older man is not a criminal at all; in fact, he is a kind person who takes compassion on the younger

man by pretending to be the criminal to save the younger man from embarrassment in front of the young lady. By withholding the revelation of the real marshal until the very end of the story, O. Henry strengthens his main point about false impressions by having the readers themselves undergo the unexpected surprise of being deceived by appearances.

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Practice

Read the short story “The Patient Cat” by Laura E. Richards. Recall what you have learned about evaluating an author’s development of theme. Then, complete the activity below.



Source: Freedom_Studio. Shutterstock

Activity

In at least two paragraphs, identify two themes presented in this story.

Evaluate how the author develops them, using details from the story to help

with your analysis. Speculate about the author's purpose for writing the story. Write your answer as if it were part of a book review, providing evidence to support your evaluation.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Two themes that Laura E. Richards develops in "The Patient Cat" are the virtue of patience and the vice of greediness. By showing how these two themes relate to one another, Richards demonstrates the importance of timing and how even a good action can have a bad consequence if it is allowed to continue for too long.

Richards develops these two themes and shows how they build on one another by narrating the thoughts and actions of a cat that has discovered an empty bird's nest. At first, the cat's behavior exemplifies the virtue of patience, because over time the nest becomes filled with eggs, then baby birds, then thin, young birds. The cat's ability to wait and not act has a good consequence. When the cat waits too long out of greed, however, she must face a bad consequence. Because the cat waits one final time for the birds to get fatter, the cat loses out on the opportunity to make a meal of the birds. They have grown up and flown away by the time she returns. Rather than blaming herself for being greedy and waiting for too long for the birds to get very fat, the cat angrily calls the birds names. The vice of greediness leads her to further bad behavior.

The way Richards develops these themes encourages the reader to think more deeply about when patience is a virtue and when it becomes something else, the vice of greediness. When the cat's patience is paying off with eggs and young birds, the reader most likely agrees with the cat that "It is worth while to be patient!" When Richards reveals at the end that the cat has waited too long for the birds to fatten up, the reader will most likely revise their opinion and conclude that the cat's patience is really something else—the cat is not a virtuous creature but discontented with what it has and greedy for a big meal.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I evaluated how the author developed the themes.
 2. _____ I explained how two themes relate to and build on one another.
 3. _____ I cited specific text details to support my evaluation.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Critiquing with Evidence

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will develop an argument of critique of a literary work.

Key Words

- **argument** – a reasoned point of view about a topic or text
 - **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **claim** – an assertion that something is true
 - **critique** – a critical analysis or evaluation of another piece of writing; also known as a critical response or review
 - **evidence** – the facts and information that support an idea or analysis
 - **reason** – a statement that explains or justifies a point of view
 - **thesis statement** – an author's main idea or argument in a critique of a literary work
-

Critiquing with Evidence

Reason Effectively

The writer of a book review, or critique, must evaluate the contents and purpose of the book being reviewed. To do this, the writer develops an overall argument about the text, what it says, and how well the author has fulfilled their purpose. This thesis statement usually appears in the introduction. Then, the writer makes detailed claims in the body paragraphs and supports them with reasons and evidence. The writer wants to convince the reader to accept their evaluation.



Get Ready to Read

To better understand a book review that analyzes a biography, it helps to have a basic introduction to the subject. The book review you will read examines a profile of Zbigniew Brzezinski, a famous Polish American diplomat whose career had a huge impact on world politics and the development of the United States in the 20th century.

Did You Know?

Born in Poland in 1928, Zbigniew Brzezinski was living in Canada with his family, where his father had been sent as the Polish ambassador, when the Soviet Union orchestrated the communist takeover of Poland in 1945. This event shaped Brzezinski's negative viewpoint toward communism. It kindled his lifelong interest in world politics and in discovering effective ways to encourage the Soviet Union to dissolve and reduce its influence over Eastern European countries. Throughout his long career in foreign policy, Brzezinski wanted the United States always to use the position it held in the world to help maintain global stability and promote human rights. While serving as national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981, Brzezinski accomplished such tasks as helping President Carter negotiate the Camp David Accords. This brought peace between Egypt and Israel and smoothed the diplomatic relationship between the United States and China. These positive achievements were balanced by failures such as an inability to find a solution to the Iran hostage crisis, which led to Carter losing the presidency to Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Take Notes as You Read

In the book review you are about to read, writer Michael D. Mosettig evaluates the biography *Zbigniew Brzezinski: America's Grand Strategist* by Justin Vaisse. This biography includes a critique of Brzezinski's life and accomplishments. Therefore, in his book review, Mosettig presents his own arguments analyzing the claims Vaisse makes about Brzezinski and how effectively Vaisse communicates and supports these claims.

As you read this review, pay attention to the way Mosettig identifies Vaisse's claims and presents and develops his own argument as part of his critique. Record your observations in your Reading Log.

Reading Log: Book Review: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Foreign Policy Sage

Useful Vocabulary

1. **accords:** an official treaty or agreement
2. **cadre:** a small group of people who have been specially trained to prepare them for a particular purpose
3. **prodigious:** extraordinarily great in width, depth, or extent
4. **qualms:** uneasy feelings or doubts about something
5. **sage:** an older person who is distinguished by a wisdom that has come to them from experience
6. **vacillation:** an inability to choose between options with the result that one keeps swinging back and forth without committing to a course of action

Critiquing with Evidence

Developing an Argument of Critique



Source: Robert Kneschke. Shutterstock

Before the writer of a critique can develop their argument, they must understand what the text they are writing about is saying. Their approach to this task will vary depending upon the type of text being reviewed. For example, a writer analyzing a novel might examine elements such as the characters, setting, and plot. Then they might consider the author's audience and purpose for writing this story. A writer evaluating a biography might determine what claims the biographer is making about the life of their subject. Then they would look at which details and biographical events the author has chosen to include and highlight in their work.

Once the writer knows the book's contents, they use effective reasoning to form an evaluative judgment about the book. They assess the book's merit and decide whether the author achieved their goal for writing it. To help provide a focus for crafting the argument of their review, the writer should consider what a reader will gain from reading the book. Finally, they should tell what they like or do not like about the book.

Question 1

What must a writer do before developing an argument of critique?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The writer must become familiar with the contents of the book they plan to analyze, evaluate, and assess.

Question 2

How can reasoning help a writer evaluate whether the argument they plan to develop in a critique is strong?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The writer can use reasoning to check to see whether they have clearly stated their main idea or argument about the contents and value of a book. The writer must ensure they have evidence to support their evaluation.

Question 3

What purpose should a writer keep in mind when writing an argument for a critique?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The writer should remember that the purpose of their argument is to express their judgment of the book, positive or negative, and what a reader will gain from having read the book.

Check-In

Use effective reasoning and what you've learned about developing an argument of critique to answer the questions.

Question 1

When preparing to write an argument of critique, what steps should a book review writer take?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer should familiarize themselves with the book's contents and how the author presents the contents. The reviewer should also think about the author's purpose and audience. Then, the reviewer should use effective reasoning to form an evaluative judgment about the book that can be supported with evidence.

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Read the introduction from “Book Review: How Zbigniew Brzezinski Became a Foreign Policy Sage and Focus of Controversy.” Then answer Question 2.

Question 2

What is the book review writer's overall argument of critique?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The second paragraph presents the reviewer's overall evaluation of the book when it says, “. . . this 505-page work . . . will probably stand for some

time as the definitive portrayal of a sharp mind and sharp tongue. . . .” The book review writer is making the judgment that this book will be used for a long period of time because it presents a good representation of Brzezinski and some of his most remarkable qualities.

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Read this passage from the middle of “Book Review: How Zbigniew Brzezinski Became a Foreign Policy Sage and Focus of Controversy.” Then answer Question 3.

Question 3

What argument is the book review writer making in this section of the review?

For what purpose did they include this information?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: In this section, the writer is arguing that the book has two weaknesses. One problem is that there is the potential that some younger readers will focus on information about networking and miss the fact that Brzezinski put a lot of work into producing articles and books. The second is that although the author, Vaisse, did a great deal of research, he did make a few minor mistakes. By including weaknesses as well as strengths in his review, the book review writer offers a more compelling and well-rounded argument.

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Practice

Read these two passages from Michael D. Mosettig’s “Book Review: How Zbigniew Brzezinski Became a Foreign Policy Sage and Focus of Controversy.” Recall what you have learned about how a writer develops an argument of critique. Then complete the activity.

Activity

In a paragraph or two, use effective reasoning to explain how the title of the review sets up Mosettig’s argument. Then, explain how each passage helps you understand how Mosettig developed this argument of critique.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The title is a clue about some parts of the central argument. From reading Mosettig’s title, the audience knows that the book Mosettig is reviewing must provide an answer to this question: How did Zbigniew Brzezinski become a foreign policy sage and a focus of controversy? To answer the question, Mosettig will present and support claims related to the events of Brzezinski’s life that led to Brzezinski becoming “a foreign policy sage” and a “focus of controversy.”

The first passage, in fact, shows how Mosettig developed the argument of Zbigniew as a controversial figure. In Vaisse’s book, he discusses two chief situations that Brzezinski wrote and spoke about: how to deal with the Soviet Union and what could be done to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians and Arabs. From the importance with which Vaisse treated the topics, Mosettig connects how Brzezinski’s public work with these topics created controversies.

The second passage both sums up why Mosettig makes the second claim that Zbigniew was a foreign policy “sage” and provides the audience with Vaisse’s own argument from the book. By positioning this quote at the end of his review, Mosettig draws attention to how this conclusion is meant to provide a final picture of who Brzezinski was and why his life was so significant.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I showed understanding of the purpose of an argument in a critique.
 2. _____ I gave reasons to support my ideas.
 3. _____ I explained how a writer developed their argument.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will provide textual evidence to support argument of critique of literary work.

Key Words

- **argument** – a reasoned point of view about a topic or text
 - **claim** – an assertion that something is true
 - **critique** – a critical analysis or evaluation of another piece of writing; also known as a critical response or review
 - **evidence** – the facts and information that support an idea or analysis
 - **reason** – a statement that explains or justifies a point of view
 - **thesis statement** – a writer's main idea or argument in a critique of a literary work
-

Critiquing with Evidence

With a strong overall argument, or thesis statement, a well-written book review will explain a reviewer's assessment of the contents and the author's presentation of the book being reviewed. As they develop their critique in the body paragraphs of their review, the reviewer makes claims, or assertions, about the text they are evaluating. The reader will not be persuaded to agree with these claims unless the reviewer supports them with reasons and textual evidence. Including evidence such as facts, examples, or quotations from the book will convince the reader to trust and accept the writer's evaluation.



Read Strategically

A book review writer should ask themselves questions to focus their evaluation. Asking questions will help them monitor their comprehension as they read and identify ideas that are confusing or that need further explanation. They should consider how the author tells the story. They should decide whether the author's presentation is effective, and why or why not.

A book review writer might ask questions such as these before writing their review:

- Why did the author present this information?
- Is the author's presentation effective? Why or why not?
- What is my overall argument of critique for this book?
- What claims will I make about the contents or author's presentation?
- How will I support my claims?

Take Notes as You Read

As you read Michael Mosettig's "Book Review: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Foreign Policy Sage," ask yourself questions. Look for the textual evidence Mosettig uses to support the various claims he makes about the author, Justin Vaisse's, biography. Notice the reasons he gives to back up his judgments. Record your findings in your Reading Log.

Useful Vocabulary

1. **accords:** an official treaty or agreement
 2. **cadre:** a small group of people who have been specially trained to prepare them for a particular purpose
 3. **prodigious:** extraordinarily great in width, depth, or extent
 4. **qualms:** uneasy feelings or doubts about something
 5. **sage:** an older person who is distinguished by a wisdom that has come to them from experience
 6. **vacillation:** an inability to choose between options with the result that one keeps swinging back and forth without committing to a course of action
-

Critiquing with Evidence

Providing Text Evidence to Support an Argument



Source: Lucky Business. Shutterstock

When evaluating a book, a book review writer should only make claims that relate to their overall argument, or thesis statement. Extraneous claims would confuse and distract their reader. To support these claims, reviewers can use many types of evidence, including direct quotations from the text and examples or descriptions. Reviewers might also supply their reader with crucial background details, or they might clarify a challenging concept. Sometimes, a reviewer may count on their reader to

make an inference themselves from the evidence supplied in a review. Overall, the stronger and more carefully selected evidence is, the more persuasive the argument of critique will be.

To check whether the writer of a book review has provided enough textual evidence to support their argument of critique, a reader should identify the reviewer's main assessment of the book as well as other claims about the book, including how the author presents the content. They should notice reasons, or why the writer holds a certain point of view, and evidence, or facts and details that support the argument.

Watch the video and listen as one student describes how a writer presents textual evidence to support an argument.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question 1

What process does the student follow to find text evidence in a critique?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: First, the student selects one of the claims that Mosettig is making in this review of Vaisse's biography. Second, the student locates the text evidence that Mosettig uses to support this claim. Third, the student considers how well the evidence supports the claim.

Question 2

How convincing does the student think the text evidence is? Explain how you know.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Mosettig claims that "Vaisse offers a balanced but sympathetic rendering of the Carter-Brzezinski policies and actions." The student concludes that the text evidence in support of this claim is convincing. The student points out that Mosettig recognizes where the author provided both positive (the Camp David accords, the Panama Canal treaty) and negative (the period being often characterized by vacillation and failure, the problematic Iran hostage saga) assessments of the Brzezinski policies. So, the student decides that they have been convinced by Mosettig that Vaisse has presented a balanced portrayal of the subject.

Think about the process the student used in this video. Keep in mind that the student identified a claim the reviewer made and searched for evidence the reviewer used to support this claim. Consider how the student assessed whether the evidence was convincing. Use this process yourself when examining how a book review writer provides textual evidence to support an argument.

Check-In

Read the excerpt from “Book Review: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Foreign Policy Sage.” Then, answer Questions 1 and 2.

Question 1

What argument is the book reviewer making about Vaisse’s biography?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer is claiming that Brzezinski is an example of a person who began as a scholar and wanted to become more involved in direct actions—in this case, in politics—and that Brzezinski was an excellent networker.

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Question 2

What evidence does the reviewer use to support his claim?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Mosettig, the reviewer, cites details from Brzezinski’s life that the author, Vaisse, selected to include in this part of his biography. For example, to support the idea that Brzezinski was glad to shift his interests from academia to politics, Mosettig points out that it worked out well for Brzezinski when he moved to Columbia after Harvard denied him tenure because then he was close to Washington and the foreign policy networking opportunities it offered him. The reader can make the inference from the evidence that Brzezinski was happy with the move and the networking opportunities because the next paragraph supports

both that idea and the claim that Brzezinski was an excellent networker. Mosettig lists the various important positions Brzezinski quickly went on to hold and how they led him to make one of his most life-changing connections, meeting Governor Carter.

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Read another excerpt from the book review, and answer Question 3.

Question 3

What argument is Mosettig making about the book he is reviewing in this passage, and how does he use textual evidence to support his argument?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Mosettig is making the argument that when examining Brzezinski and his life, what separated Brzezinski from Kissinger was a fierce independence and a willingness to speak his mind, one that was particularly evident during the events of the second Iraq War. To support the argument, Mosettig highlights times in Brzezinski's life where he acts according to his beliefs, even when these actions separate him from previous allies or affect his career. For example, Mosettig compares how Kissinger stayed loyal to politicians based on their party to how Brzezinski refused to support Democratic presidential nominees in two years because his beliefs differed from theirs. Mosettig also notes how Brzezinski refused to court the media, which the reader can deduce is something an independent-minded person would do, whereas most people would try to win the media over. Additionally, Mosettig notes that during the second Iraq War Brzezinski chose to

oppose the neo-cons and side with liberals with whom he had disagreed previously during the Cold War in the 1970s, again choosing principles over party.

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Practice

Read the passage from “Book Review: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Foreign Policy Sage.”
Then, complete the activity.

Activity

In this part of the critique, what argument does the book review writer, Mosettig, make about the book? What text evidence does Mosettig provide to support this claim? How well do you think Mosettig supports the argument he makes?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: In this part of the book review, Mosettig argues that “[w]hat separates the Vaisse book from the pack is a detailed and perceptive study of the rise of an academic complex in the making of U.S. foreign policy . . . and its role as the successor to the New York WASP establishment that began disintegrating with the Vietnam War.” To prove this assertion, Mosettig demonstrates that the author (Vaisse) provides such an explanation of how a new academic complex rose and replaced the New York WASP establishment in shaping U.S. foreign policy. For example, Mosettig describes how the U.S. government provided money to universities after World War II that allowed young academics to pay for their educations and then move into government roles. Then he identifies Brzezinski and Kissinger as two such academics, contrasting their ethnic identities and backgrounds with those of the “Wall Street lawyers and bankers” who had steered foreign policy previously up to the 1960s. I think Mosettig does an adequate job of supporting his argument by succinctly summarizing the kinds of details that Vaisse includes in the biography to describe the process by which this academic complex grew and produced men like Brzezinski and Kissinger. These details support Mosettig’s claim that what sets Vaisse’s book apart from other such books is how it contains “a detailed and perceptive study” of this rise of this academic complex and its effect on U.S. foreign policy.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified the argument of critique in this passage.
 2. _____ I explained how the passage provides text evidence that supports the argument.
 3. _____ I evaluated how well Mosettig supported his argument.
 4. _____ I put exact words used as text evidence in quotation marks.
-

Critical Response

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will provide a summary of the argument presented in a critical response to a work or body of literature.

Key Words

- **argument** – a reasoned point of view about a topic or text
 - **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **critical lens** – the perspective from which a reader understands a work of literature
 - **critical response** – a reaction to a book or other piece of writing; also known as a critique
 - **summary** – a brief description that includes the main points or elements of a text
-

Critical Response



Source: ogichobanov. 123RF

Before a reader can decide if they agree with a reviewer's critical response to a text, they must understand what the reviewer is saying about the book. Making a summary of the reviewer's argument in a book review can be very useful. It can help the reader make sure they have grasped the most important points that the reviewer intended to make. Then the reader can determine how persuasive they find the reviewer's argument.

A book review writer uses a critical lens to interpret the text. Knowing the perspective a reviewer uses to examine the book can be helpful when you summarize their argument about the book.

Reading the Text Through Critical Lens

Critical lens	How to read the text from this perspective
gender	examining gender-related issues and attitudes toward gender, examples or critiques of gender stereotypes, and the role gender plays in the plot
historical	examining the historical context and time period in which the text was produced, including the author’s life, worldview, and background, and how the events happening at the time when the author was writing may have affected their work
psychological	examining the text for what it helps the reader understand about how the mental state of the characters affects their motivations and reactions, including their thoughts and behaviors, personalities,

	emotional responses, and moral and ethical choices
socioeconomic	examining social and economic issues in the text and the problems that follow from them, such as the income levels, education levels, class status, employment opportunities, and community environment of the characters

Watch the video as these students explore arguments in a critical response.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 1

How does the book review writer summarize what the book tells about Angelou's early years growing up in the South?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer summarizes by saying the book “quietly and gracefully” showed how people lived, and it paid tribute to the “courage, dignity, and endurance” of the small Black community in Stamps.

Question 2

How do the students in the video say the book review writer applies a critical lens to understand the author’s perspective?

Reveal Answer

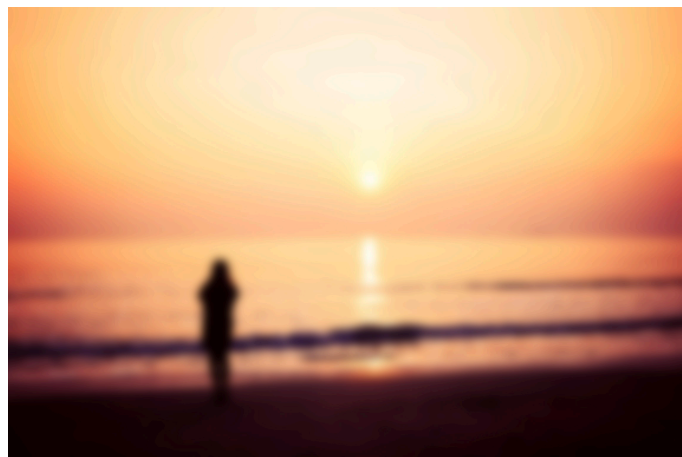
Hide Answer

Sample answer: They notice that the reviewer used a socioeconomic lens to discuss details about the community in which Angelou spent her childhood. They also notice that the reviewer used a psychological lens to discuss the connection between a childhood trauma and how it affected Angelou’s development as a writer.

Think about what the students did to examine and summarize the critical response showcased in the video. Consider how you can use a similar process to examine and summarize the argument in a critical response.

Check-In

Read the introduction and first section from a sample book review below. Then use what you have learned about providing a summary of the argument presented in a critical response to answer these questions.



Source: 1853741. Shutterstock

Bringing the viewpoint of Mr. Rochester’s “mad” wife to the foreground, the 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys serves as both a commentary on and a prequel to the events of Charlotte Brontë’s classic 19th century novel *Jane Eyre*. In

Jane Eyre, “Bertha Antoinetta” has inexplicably descended into madness and been locked away in an attic, serving as a spoiler for Jane and Mr. Rochester’s love affair. But in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, “Antoinette” emerges as a fully fledged character whose life experiences bring light to issues related to colonialism, race, class, and gender. Through poetic language and vivid imagery, Rhys narrates the challenges faced by the heiress Antoinette, who is caught between two worlds. Although of English descent, she is labeled a Creole because she has been born and raised in a Caribbean culture. Her ancestral home, a sugar plantation, has fallen into poverty and ruin. The Emancipation Act of 1833 freed the slave labor force, making it harder for slave owners to farm their colonial plantations and turn huge profits. Understandably, the Black inhabitants of her island hate Antoinette and do not see her as one of them, yet members of English society reject her as well, holding her and her origins in contempt. Antoinette is an “other,” no matter where she is.

An arranged marriage to an English man would seem to offer a chance for salvation and happiness. Unnamed in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this man is, in fact, Edward Rochester, the hero of *Jane Eyre*, seeking a fortune through marriage to a Jamaican heiress. Just as patriarchal colonialists tried to dominate and exploit the resources of the West Indies, Rochester tries to dominate and exploit the resources of his new wife. Because he suspects (incorrectly) that she is of mixed-race origins, he feels separated from Antoinette by both race and gender. Happy to accept her large dowry, he never sees or accepts her as a real person with feelings that should be respected. Among other abusive behavior, he tries to erase her identity by renaming her “Bertha” and treats her as if she were mad to try to drive her to insane behavior, eventually moving her back to England with him and locking her in the attic of his house.

Question 1

What type of book is being reviewed?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The book, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a novel that is based partly on another novel, *Jane Eyre*. It comments on aspects of *Jane Eyre* and serves as a prequel to its events.

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Question 2

What critical lenses does the reviewer use to interpret this book? What issues does the reviewer perceive in the book and want to respond to?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer uses a gender lens to discuss issues of gender as well as historical and socioeconomic lenses to discuss issues of race and class related to colonialism.

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Question 3

How could you summarize the book review writer's argument?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The book review writer argues that the character of Antoinette emerges in the novel, and her life experiences "bring light to issues related to

colonialism, race, class, and gender.”

The reviewer notes how the novel illuminates the challenges faced by someone who does not fit neatly into racial and class categories. The reviewer also argues that English colonists dominated and exploited the resources of the West Indies and that Rochester takes advantage of the Creole heiress Antoinette, accepting her dowry, but abusing her to the point that he erases her identity, declares her mad, and imprisons her in an attic.

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Practice

Read the passage from a sample book review below. Consider what you have learned about providing a summary of the argument presented in a critical response to a work of literature. Then complete the activity.



Source: Esteban De Armas. 123RF

Generations of science fiction writers have used this genre to explore the ramifications of new ideas and to comment on our society and the issues we face

today. *First Wavers*, the new sci-fi novel by Belinda Guzman, is no exception.

Guzman delves into complex technological issues faced by modern people through a story set in the future of our galaxy.

Teenager Vivi Lopez is apprenticed to her technician parents as part of a corps of “first wavers” who land on inhospitable planets and use advanced equipment to prepare the planets’ atmospheres and surfaces for eventual colonization. Having spent her whole life in space, Vivi relies on an AI robot programmed to meet her emotional needs for companionship and has never seen plants growing anywhere outside of a glass tube in a hydroponic chamber. Domenica Rossi, on the other hand, has grown up on Earth and is shattered when her family volunteers to settle a faraway planet. Secretly taking with her handfuls of seeds from her grandfather’s garden of heirloom vegetables, Domenica bravely tries to make the best of this new challenge. The two girls meet in passing while sharing a ride on an immense transport ship ferrying colonists between planets, then deepen their friendship when a technological disaster befalls Domenica’s new home planet and Vivi and her parents are sent to try to fix the failing life support systems.

By contrasting the viewpoints of the two girls, Guzman inspires the reader to rethink their preconceptions about both the benefits and the drawbacks of technological innovations. Many people today assume that science will continually evolve and invent new mechanisms able to solve all future problems. Other people insist that humanity must not outsource too many functions to machines because technologies will inevitably break down and fail just when people are most dependent on them. Guzman offers the nuanced notion that both positions are correct: without the technology Vivi is so attached to, humans could not spread so well to other worlds, but without the “real” seeds that Domenica has brought with her from Earth, the colonists would have had no way to replant their food supply.

Activity

Write a summary of the argument presented in this critical response.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer claims that, like many science fiction novels, *First Wavers* uses a futuristic storyline to comment on important issues of today, particularly the impact of technology. Using a historical critical lens, the reviewer notes that the author contrasts the viewpoints of the two main characters to depict two opinions about how humanity today (and in the future) should interact with technology. The reviewer argues that by showing how both Vivi's trust in technology and Domenica's love for nature turn out to be essential for humanity's survival, the author presents a nuanced proposal for how modern people should consider integrating technology into their lives.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I determined the reviewer's argument presented in this critical response.
 2. _____ I wrote a concise summary of the reviewer's argument.
 3. _____ I included evidence or details the reviewer included to support their opinion.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will evaluate the strength of the evidence supporting a critical response to a work or body of literature (e.g., author documentary, book review).

Key Words

- **argument** – a reasoned point of view about a topic or text
 - **critical lens** – the perspective from which a reader understands a work of literature
 - **critical response** – a reaction to a book or other piece of writing; also known as a critique
 - **evidence** – the facts and information that support an idea or analysis
 - **thesis statement** – a writer's main idea or argument in a critique of a literary work
-

Critical Response

Access and Evaluate Information



Source: milkos. 123RF

A person reads a book review to find out if a book is worth reading or how reading it might be of value to them. A reviewer's critical response provides that information by evaluating the contents and presentation of the book. The reader learns the reviewer's assessment of the book's worth and more detailed information about its contents and how well the author presented the book.

A strong critical response presents a compelling main argument, or thesis statement, in its introduction. Then, it develops this argument in the body paragraphs of the review with claims about the book's contents or presentation. A reader can decide if they agree with the reviewer and if they are persuaded by the evidence that the reviewer provides to support their views. There are various kinds of supporting evidence, such as facts, details, examples, anecdotes, statistics, and direct quotations from the book.

A book review writer discerns which evidence is most relevant to supporting the claims in their critical response. They should include only the most persuasive and significant evidence. They will explain their reasoning, which will make their claims more convincing to their audience.

Select the button. Then, select each pin to learn more about how a book review writer supports a critical response to a literary text. There are four pins.

The care with which Kenman has crafted her descriptions and dialogue will transport her audience to the medieval setting. ¹ The Author's Note reveals that she spent months researching the time period, ² and the descriptions of the castle rooms and courtyards are full of specific and historically accurate details such as mentions of herbs being strewn on the rushes on the floors. ³ Kenman also sprinkles her dialogue with words and terms plucked from Middle English, for example, having Lord Loxley proclaim about the castle's main hall, "In there, thou mayest behold a most fair and delightful sight!" ⁴

When evaluating the strength of the evidence that the writer of a book review uses, ask yourself: What does this detail tell me about the claims the writer is making in this critical response? Does this detail support their claim?

Question 1

What would happen if all that a book review writer did was to state their opinion about a book?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: If the book review writer stopped at only stating their opinion, their reader would not be persuaded to accept the reviewer's evaluation. Only strong evidence that supports the reviewer's judgment will help a reader tell if the reviewer's assessment is convincing or not.

Question 2

Why must a reader access and evaluate textual evidence when evaluating the strength of the evidence supporting a critical response to a work?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Unless a reader finds and evaluates the textual evidence that a reviewer is using to support their claims, the reader has no way to determine whether the reviewer's analysis or ideas about the book are solid and persuasive.

Question 3

Why should a reader take the time to check to see if the reviewer is using a certain critical lens to evaluate a text?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The type of critical lens a reviewer is using to examine the text can affect the type of text evidence that the reviewer then uses to support their claims.

Recognizing a Critical Lens

Sometimes a reviewer might use a critical lens to interpret the text. By recognizing a perspective that a reviewer is using to examine the text, a reader can better determine the strength of a reviewer's claim and supporting evidence. Critical lenses might include:

- a gender lens, for investigating issues such as gender stereotypes and the role gender plays in a plot
- a historical lens, for investigating the historical context and time period in which the work was produced and looking at the author's worldview
- a psychological lens, for investigating what the text helps the reader understand about characters and to learn about the workings of the human mind in general
- a socioeconomic lens, for investigating social and economic issues in the text and the problems that arise from them, including matters related to the class,

employment levels, and community environments of the characters

The type of critical lenses a reviewer is using will influence the type of text evidence on which they rely. Therefore, a reader should be sure to check to see if a reviewer is using a critical lens in their analysis and then keep that lens in mind when evaluating the evidence supplied by the reviewer.

To write an effective book review yourself, be sure to include supporting evidence that will help your readers determine how strong your argument is in your own critique of a literary work. This will make it more likely that your readers will be persuaded to accept your assessment of the book.

Check-In

Use this passage from a sample book review of a spy novel to answer the questions.

Nigella Edford's *Time for Intrigue* is a deftly-plotted spy novel with suspenseful, twisty situations that seem plausible thanks to its sharply observant descriptions and nods to real historical characters and events. By switching often and abruptly between narrative viewpoints and ending each chapter with a cliffhanger, Edford keeps the reader flipping pages, desperate to find out what happens to the characters next. Having worked for MI5 herself for twenty years, retired spymaster Edford has drawn on her comprehensive familiarity with cyphers, spy-tech, and foreign locations to construct a thoroughly convincing world for her fast-talking and quick-thinking agents of espionage to inhabit.

Having worked as a woman in the male-dominated spy field, Edford brings a keen understanding to the challenges faced by her main character, Kym. Details from Kym's career as a woman in this same field such as being passed over for leadership roles or having her competence at cracking a code doubted ring true with the depth of real-life experience. And having been drawn to empathize so strongly with Kym's struggles, the reader will feel just as satisfied as Kym does when Kym is finally given a chance to use her skills freely to save her team at a moment when all hope seems lost.

Question 1

How does the reviewer support their main argument?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer claims that the “deftly-plotted” novel is “suspenseful” and that its “sharply observant descriptions” and the inclusion of details referring to

“real historical characters and events” make its otherwise implausible situations easier for the reader to accept. To support the idea that the plot is suspenseful and well-crafted, the reviewer cites the evidence that the viewpoint of the narrator changes often and that chapters end on cliffhangers, which would create an interesting and suspenseful read. To support the idea that the situations seem plausible thanks to observant descriptions and the inclusion of real events and characters from history, the reviewer provides the evidence that the author is a retired MI5 agent herself and is drawing from her own knowledge and experience to write the book.

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Question 2

What critical lens does this reviewer use to examine this novel? What evidence supports the reviewer’s claim?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reviewer uses a gender lens to discuss the “challenges” faced by the main character, Kym, as a woman in a male-dominated field. To support this claim of challenging circumstances, the reviewer cites the evidence that, because of the author’s own experiences as a woman working in the same male-dominated field, the details about Kym’s struggles in her career feel real.

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Question 3

How would you evaluate the overall strength of the evidence used to support the critical response?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The evidence the reviewer included is strong.

All the evidence that the reviewer included relates to one of the claims that the reviewer makes. For example, chapters ending on cliffhangers supports the claim that the book is “suspenseful,” and the author being a retired spymaster supports the claim that the book contains “observant descriptions.” The evidence is persuasive because it backs up what the reviewer is saying about the book, and it describes specific features of the book and the author’s background that relate to the reviewer’s key points.

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Practice

Read the passage below from a sample book review of a novel about the American West. Then, complete the activity.

Dull, predictable, offensive in some parts, and written with a distinct lack of inspiration and care, Harry Maywood's western *Outlaws Outside of Town* is an effort to read. The only entertainment a reader will receive will be the jolts of laughter when they recognize yet another historical inaccuracy. Although Maywood's previous novel had some charming moments and adequate descriptive passages, this one is a must miss.

A reader will need to rely on their memory of Western towns as depicted on television shows and movies to visualize the setting of this story, because Maywood provides only the most basic and perfunctory of descriptions. The reader is informed that the hay stored in a barn is "straw-colored" and that the noise of an incoming train's signal sounds "whistle-y." None of the characters are described in much depth, although Maywood does mention that Sheriff Wyatt "smiled a wide smile" two or three hundred times.

The plot of the story, such as it is, follows the characters' attempts to fight off Weston Wayne and his gang of criminals who live in the hills nearby and prey on the daily stagecoach. Because Sheriff Wyatt is established in the opening pages of the story as universally loved by everyone, there is no suspense involved in wondering whether the townspeople will rally behind him to face the criminals. And because Maywood describes both the outlaw Weston Wayne and Sheriff Wyatt with the words "smiled a wide smile" over and over, it is not the plot twist Maywood thinks it is twelve chapters later when he reveals that Weston Wayne and Sheriff Wyatt are twin brothers.

Throughout the novel, sloppy errors pop up to pull the reader out of the fictional world Maywood is laboring to create. One character arrives by train in the neighboring town ten years before the first railroads were built in the West. Another character is described as reading Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* years before this book was published.

Worst of all, Maywood relies on every possible racial stereotype to describe the one Indigenous American family in this story. In this day and age, there is no excuse for writing such inaccurate and frankly offensive caricatures. With headdresses, clothing items, and weapons drawn from about six different groups of Indigenous American people, none of whom actually lived in the area where this story is set, the Blackhawk family is a weak and insulting attempt to use real-life people as props to add interest to Maywood's boring Western narrative. Overall, readers who love the genre will be disappointed and even disgusted with Maywood's book.

Activity

In a paragraph or two, evaluate the strength of the evidence supporting the author's critical response to the book being reviewed, including any critical lens used by the reviewer.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: In this review, the reviewer expresses a negative assessment in the critical response. The book review writer argues that the book is "dull, predictable, offensive in some parts, and written with a distinct lack of inspiration and care." The reviewer provides strong evidence to support each of these points. To support the idea that the book is dull and predictable, the reviewer says that the book lacks suspense because the reader knows that everyone loves Sheriff Wyatt and will band together to fight off the criminal gang. The reviewer also notes that a repeated description of two characters having "smiled a wide smile" makes it

obvious these two characters are closely related, so there is no surprise for the reader.

To support the idea that the book is offensive in parts, the reviewer examines the story with a historical lens. The reviewer notes that since the book was written recently, the writer has no excuse for including offensive racial stereotypes. As evidence that the writer did a terrible job of writing respectful and historically accurate characters, the reviewer notes that the few Indigenous American characters included in the book are described as using clothing and weapons drawn from several very different groups, none of whom even lived in the area where this story is set.

To support the idea that the book is written with a lack of inspiration, the reviewer quotes specific examples of repetitive and unoriginal sensory descriptions, such as describing a train whistle as “whistle-y.” The reviewer also notes that, in general, the author did not describe the Western town or the characters in much depth.

To support the idea that the book is written with a lack of care, the reviewer cites examples where the author did not research the time period correctly and, as a result, included historical inaccuracies, such as the arrival of a character by railroad ten years before railroads to the West were built. The reviewer notes that this destroys the illusion of the fictional world the author is trying to create as real and believable.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I stated the reviewer’s overall response to the book.
2. _____ I located the reviewer’s evidence in support of the response.
3. _____ I evaluated the strength of the evidence the reviewer used to support a critical response.

4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Book Review Portfolio 1

Book Review Portfolio 1



A good book review helps readers choose the best books to read. Such a review presents a critique of a work of literature. Not just summarizing the book's contents, this critical analysis evaluates the contents of the book and the author's presentation. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the text and judges how well the author

fulfilled their purpose for writing it. If a book review is well written, it can persuade its audience to share the author's opinion and decide if they would benefit from reading this book or not.

In this portfolio, you will write a book review in response to this prompt:

Write a book review of the fiction text you have read over the course of the unit, evaluating its contents and presentation.

Portfolio Introduction

Over the next three lessons, you will write a Book Review Portfolio. You will have three days to address the learning goals and complete the portfolio.

Type of Writing Definition

A good book review helps readers choose the best books to read. Such a review presents a critique of a work of literature. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the text and judges how well the author fulfilled their purpose of writing it.

Portfolio Topic

Write a book review of a fiction text you have read over the course of the unit, evaluating its contents and presentation (or an alternate topic as assigned by your teacher).

Planning Document

Download the following document to your computer. Use this document to plan your portfolio.

Book Review Planner

Rubric

Use this rubric to ensure you are meeting all the goals of the portfolio.

Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Example Portfolio

Use this example of a completed portfolio as a guide for your writing. The portfolio topic this student chose was *Review of There There*.

Review of There There

Book Review Portfolio 1 Continued

Watch the video for some ideas on approaching this prompt.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

A Strong Review Transcript

Activity 1

Create a chart such as this one with one column for contents and another for presentation. Consider the fiction text you read and think about what struck you most while reading it, including the way the author presented elements such as the plot, theme, or characters. Jot notes in each column to help you start deciding how you will shape your evaluation of this literary text and your main argument about it.

Contents	Presentation

The lessons in this portfolio will support you as you plan, write, revise, and edit your work. They will guide you through the steps of evaluating the book you are reviewing and then shaping, communicating, and supporting your analysis of this fiction text.

As you develop your book review, you will also follow the progress of another student, Everly, as she creates her own book review. Read Everly’s book review now and think about how she introduces you to the book and its contents and evaluates the author’s presentation.

Note that the author of *There There* does not use the preferred term *Indigenous Americans*.

Pro Tip

Throughout this portfolio, you'll be learning more about specific ways in which Everly approached the process of writing a book review text. You may want to download her book review to your desktop, tablet, or phone or print it out so that you can take notes or highlight portions that help you understand a specific element or technique.

Review of *There There*

Review of *There There*

by Everly Garza

Most Americans have an origin story, the story of how they or their ancestors first arrived in the United States and the struggles they faced to get and stay here. But what about the people who were here before the United States was a nation, before it was colonized, before it was even an outline on a European explorer's map? Those people, the Indigenous Americans, are still here, and they have their own stories, which are quite different from the stories people descended from immigrants tell. They are also very different from the stereotypes and false narratives that have been created by history and calcified in popular culture. In his powerful and challenging novel *There There*, Tommy Orange explodes the idea of what it means to be an Indigenous American.

The novel weaves together the voices and stories of fourteen different characters, all of whom live in or have connections to Oakland, California. Oakland, as the narrator explains, is a city where thousands of Indigenous Americans have sought refuge from life on reservations. The city is a haven of sorts, but it is also dangerous, and it is not a tight-knit community for the characters. Most don't know each other, although connections and relationships are eventually revealed; for example, two characters might be half-siblings; one character is the child another gave up for adoption years before. The thread that loosely ties the disparate characters and their stories together is an upcoming powwow, the first such event in the city. Some characters attend in hopes of discovering what it means to be an Indigenous American, some simply show up for work, and others have nefarious intentions. For all of the characters, however, the powwow is a major turning point in their lives. It becomes a literally explosive event, and the lives of many characters are forever altered.

The novel's unique structure provides a sturdy but flexible framework for more than a dozen characters' voices and stories. Structured like a dramatic play, the novel consists of a prelude and four acts or thematic sections. There is even an intermission in the form of an interlude in the middle of the second section. The prelude is a dark retelling of American history from the Indigenous American point of view. It leads up to the present day and a specific place—the Indigenous

American community in urban Oakland, California. The four main sections of the novel introduce the characters and guide them and the reader like a slow-moving river on a journey to the powwow at the end. Each chapter within a section focuses on one character's experiences, and the author devotes multiple chapters to each character over the course of the novel. The order of the chapters and the characters' narratives may seem random and deliberately confusing at first, but the novel has an internal logic. The author subtly weaves together the stories of his characters, and careful readers will notice how details in one character's story begin to connect or overlap with the details in another's. Finally, by the novel's third act, the relationships among the characters begin to emerge more clearly, and each character's reasons for attending the powwow come into focus.

The novel's focus is on a collection of characters who are "Urban Indians" (10). The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories. The majority of the characters are young men: Dene, Tony, Edwin, Calvin, Octavio, and Daniel. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield and Jacquie Red Feather are half-sisters in their sixties. They are the great aunt and grandmother of the youngest characters, Orvil, Loother, and Lony, who are not yet teens. The experiences of many of the characters overlap. Few know their fathers, and most were raised by grandparents or in foster care. All of the characters' lives are touched by addiction and abuse. Despite the similarities in experiences, each of the character's voices is unique. Some sound like street kids; Edwin is college educated; Tony is a self-aware young man living with "drome" or the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome (15). The author uses a fascinating mixture of first, second, and third-person points of view to tell their stories. When Opal is first introduced, she is a child living in a commune, and the author describes the experience using the first-person point of view. Later, when Opal is a middle-aged postal worker raising her sister's grandsons, the author uses third-person limited narration to reveal her worries. Thomas's chapter is told through the second-person narration, a technique that allows the character to universalize his life and experiences by describing what "you" see and think.

All of the characters wrestle questions about their identity and how to express it. Names are vitally important to the characters. When Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield asks her mother about her long name, she explains that it comes “from old Indian names. We had our own way of naming before white people came over” (46). Her daughter is “supposed to carry that big old name around with honor” (46). Elsewhere, the narrator devotes an entire paragraph to the variety of names Indigenous Americans use to identify themselves as a group: “We are Indians and Native Americans and Native American Indians, North American Indians, Natives, NDNs and Ind’ins” (135). Some characters ignore their heritage, while others don’t even realize that they are Indigenous Americans. Some acknowledge their heritage but have no idea what it means to be Indigenous American in a modern setting. Everything they know or have been taught about it seems from another time and place. Edwin puts it this way: “The catch, or double bind, about the whole thing is: If it isn’t pulling from tradition, how is it Indigenous? And if it is stuck in tradition, in the past, how can it be relevant to other Indigenous people living now, how can it be modern?” (77). Yet all of the characters find themselves compelled to attend the powwow, where the power of traditional rhythmic drumming and dancing provides answers for some of them. In the locker room before the powwow, an elder tells Orvil, “There’s only one way for an Indian man to express himself. It’s that dance that comes all the way from back there” (231). Orvil immediately understands: “He knows what the guy said is true. To cry is to waste the feeling. He needs to dance with it” (232).

In another author’s hands, the powwow might have become a symbol of unity, a place where the characters come together to find meaningful bonds and rediscover their heritage. It might have been a chance for the author to invoke a happy ending or provide a sense of closure that leaves readers satisfied. Instead, the powwow erupts in violence, and the fates of some characters are left unresolved as the book ends. Such an ending may leave some readers feeling dissatisfied because they never learn what happens to the characters whose lives they’ve become so immersed in. Through his choice of ending, the author sends a clear message: No one knows

what is going to happen next; that's how real life is, no matter who you are or what your heritage.

Tommy Orange's *There There* is a powerful and often disorienting swirl of voices and stories unlike anything else you might read. Reading the novel is like having dozens of voices in your head. The impact of the novel is to tear down everything you thought you knew about the Native American experience and show you instead that the story of the modern Indigenous American is as varied, confusing, and full of joy and uncertainty as anybody else's.

Activity 2

Rate Everly's book review by giving it one, two, or three stars (1 star = Meh; 2 stars = Pretty good; 3 stars = Awesome!) Then, write one or two sentences that explain your rating.

Using the Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Once you complete your book review, you will evaluate how well you did against a portfolio rubric, or checklist. Looking at the same rubric now can help you keep in mind the key elements of an effective book review. That will help you as you plan, write, revise, and edit a book review.

Activity 3

Choose an item on the rubric. Tell how the item will help you as you develop your book review.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will summarize a literary text.

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **summary** – a brief description that includes the main points or elements of a text
 - **unbiased** – showing no favoritism toward something
-

Book Review Portfolio 1



Source: marekuliasz. Shutterstock

Before you can begin your analysis of a literary text for a book review, you must provide an objective summary of the text. This will help your reader understand the book's contents. Your reader will not have read the book before, so they must become familiar with some basic facts about the story if they are going to be able to follow the points you make during your evaluation of it.

Summarizing a Literary Text

When you write a summary to include as part of a book review, you should identify the characters, setting, most significant plot events, and perhaps the theme in an unbiased

way. You should avoid using any words or phrases that express your opinions or judgments about the book's contents. Right now, your reader only needs to know the basic details about the story. Later, you will provide a critical response about the author's presentation of the contents you have just summarized.

To summarize the literary text:

- Read the book and look for the literary elements of character, setting, and plot, noting particularly the story's main conflict and its resolution.
- Choose the most essential elements in the text by asking yourself if you could compose an adequate summary without each detail.
- Paraphrase the details in the correct sequence.
- Leave out any words or phrases that express your opinion or judgment about the story.

Remember that your purpose for writing a summary is to provide your reader with background about the book. Do not include any critical analysis yet. Your reader only needs to know the basic facts. That way, they can understand the claims you make later when you evaluate how effectively the author has constructed the text.

Question 1

What is an objective summary of a literary text?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: It briefly states the most important points and details from the text, focusing on elements such as plot, characters, setting, and perhaps theme. It is unbiased and does not include any opinions or judgments.

Question 2

What does it mean to be objective?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: A summary is objective when it avoids including any statements of opinion or judgment about the book.

Question 3

Why should the writer of a book review include an objective summary toward the beginning of their writing?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: A summary can familiarize the reader with the contents of the book so they can better follow the points the reviewer makes when evaluating various aspects of it.

Check-In

Read this part of Everly's book review "Review of *There There*" and use what you have learned about summarizing a literary text to answer the questions.

Review of *There There*

The novel weaves together the voices and stories of fourteen different characters, all of whom live in or have connections to Oakland, California. Oakland, as the narrator explains, is a city where thousands of Indigenous Americans have sought refuge from life on reservations. The city is a haven of sorts, but it is also dangerous, and it is not a tight-knit community for the characters. Most don't know each other, although connections and relationships are eventually revealed; for example, two characters might be half-siblings; one character is the child another gave up for adoption years before. The thread that loosely ties the disparate characters and their stories together is an upcoming powwow, the first such event in the city. Some characters attend in hopes of discovering what it means to be an Indigenous American, some simply show up for work, and others have nefarious

intentions. For all of the characters, however, the powwow is a major turning point in their lives. It becomes a literally explosive event, and the lives of many characters are forever altered.

Question 1

What does the reader learn about the characters, plot, and setting from this part of Everly's book review?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The reader learns that this novel is not focused on one or two main characters but rather tells the stories of "fourteen different characters." The reader learns that the novel is set in Oakland, California, a place to which the various characters have moved from Indigenous American reservations. The reader also learns that the plot is not a series of events that depict the beginning, middle, and ending of a single narrative; instead, it presents fourteen different experiences of characters that cross and interrelate and lead toward a final climax at a powwow, the "first such event in the city."

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Question 2

How can you evaluate if this is a good example of an objective summary of a literary text?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Everly identifies the characters, setting, and plot without including any judgment or personal opinions about these elements. She also does not use any first-person pronouns. She includes only enough detail to make her points clear, such as noting only a few examples of ways the characters are related without listing each and every connection between the characters.

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Question 3

Why did Everly include this summary at the beginning of her book review?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Everly wants to familiarize her reader with the key details about the story, including characters, where the events take place, and what happens. Now that her reader knows this information, they will be prepared to understand and evaluate the points she will make about the story when she begins analyzing the book's contents and presentation.

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Practice

Activity

As an early step to writing your book review, it's time to draft an objective summary of the literary text you will review. Remember the steps of the process to follow to summarize this work:

- Search through the text to locate the most important things a reader should know about the characters, setting, plot, and theme.
- Check that you are not revealing your thoughts or opinions about the story. Make sure you are simply retelling main details and events.
- Take out any nonessential information or details from your summary.
- Retell the details in the order in which they occurred in the text.

Do not make the summary of the book you are reviewing too long. Usually, one or two paragraphs of your book review can relay important details in an objective summary. Review your summary to make sure you have included only the main facts that tell *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* in this story.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I used information from the literary text I read to write an objective summary.
2. _____ I avoided including my own opinions or judgments.
3. _____ I determined which details and information about the characters, setting, plot, and theme were most essential to the summary.
4. _____ I presented the details from the text in a logical sequence.

5. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling to write this summary.

Then, review the full Book Review Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will organize a critique of a literary work.

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **critique** – a critical analysis or evaluation of another piece of writing; also known as a critical response or review
 - **literary analysis** – a form of writing in which an author evaluates a work of literature, providing both an opinion and support for that opinion and examining the literary elements of the work including its plot, setting, characters, and point of view
 - **synopsis** – a complete summary of a story
 - **thesis statement** – a writer's main idea or argument in a critique of a literary work
-

Book Review Portfolio 1



Source: wavebreakmedia. Shutterstock

When you write a [critique](#) of a literary text, you present an argument about the book's contents and worth. You are presenting your views about the book in a persuasive manner, offering your reader an evaluation of the book that may or may not persuade them to read it. To support your claims about the book's value, you will focus primarily on your own literary analysis. However, critiquing a book is not just about sharing your personal opinion; it's about providing a balanced and well-supported evaluation of the book's content. While your own [literary analysis](#) is essential, incorporating the views and interpretations of others can significantly strengthen your critique. You can do this by using the following techniques:

- 1. Research Other Reviews and Critiques:** Look for reputable sources such as literary journals, newspapers, or academic articles that have reviewed the same book. Read these critiques carefully and note common points or recurring themes. This will give you a broader perspective on the book and help you understand different interpretations.
- 2. Use Quotes:** Use direct quotes from these sources to support your points. If a well-known critic or several reviewers have expressed a similar viewpoint to yours, citing their words can add credibility to your critique. Remember to always attribute these quotes properly to their sources.
- 3. Compare and Contrast:** Comparing your opinion with those of other critics can make your critique more engaging. If your interpretation differs from others, explain why. This will show that you've considered different viewpoints and have a well-rounded understanding of the book.

Organizing Your Critique

You must carefully plan how to organize the parts of your critique, or your reader may not understand or agree with your analysis and assessment of the book. When you write a [book review](#), you must present information in a logical order so that your reader can follow the points you are making, see how you support them with evidence, and then decide if they find your evaluation about the book persuasive or not.

Writers can organize a book review in different ways, but most book reviews will likely contain:

- an introduction that features the reviewer's main argument, or thesis statement
- a summary or synopsis of the book that provides the reader with the background they will need to understand the rest of the review
- body paragraphs that support the main argument and analyze the book's contents and author's presentation, including literary elements
- evidence to support each point the reviewer makes while evaluating the book
- a conclusion

One way to organize your book review is drafting ideas in an outline. A simple outline can help you organize ideas and may look like this:

- I.** Introduction / Argument of critique / Thesis statement
- II.** Summary of book being reviewed
- III.** Body paragraph 1 / Evaluation of Literary Element
 - A.** Evidence
 - B.** Evidence
- IV.** Body paragraph 2/Evaluation of Literary Element
 - A.** Evidence
 - B.** Evidence
- V.** Body paragraph 3/Evaluation of Literary Element
 - A.** Evidence
 - B.** Evidence
- VI.** Conclusion

Your thesis statement in a book review should appear toward the beginning of the book review, usually as part of the introduction. It will present your main point about the literary text you are reviewing so that your reader knows what argument you intend to make throughout the rest of your essay. This thesis statement might be expressed in one or several sentences.

Then, because the reader has most likely not read the book you will be reviewing, your summary will give them the main facts about it. Once they know key information about the characters, setting, and plot of a book, the reader will better understand your claims about the text. This summary should be focused, objective, and concise. Extraneous details might confuse the reader or distract them from your points.

Your body paragraphs will explain, analyze, and critique various aspects of the book's contents and how the author presents them. Your main argument, or thesis, may have already briefly mentioned the two or three main points you plan to make, or the literary elements you will be evaluating in depth. For example, you might decide to analyze an author's use of narrative techniques to develop characters or figurative language to evoke a particular mood. You should include evidence that supports your evaluation of these points, including supporting evidence you may have gathered from other critiques. Group all discussion of each point in its own section of paragraphs.

Finally, end with a strong conclusion. In this part of your book review, you restate your main argument. You want your reader to leave the review knowing exactly what you thought about the text and its overall value and why you think this. That way, the reader can decide if they are persuaded to share your views and if they want to read this book themselves or not.

Preparing Your Book Review

Watch the video as a student talks about preparing to write a book review for the novel *There There*.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question 1

What is the first thing the student does to figure out how to organize the book review?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The student decides what information to include in the review.

Question 2

What parts does the student decide to include in their book review and how does the student determine the order in which to present the sections in the middle portion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Because the examination and analysis of the contents of the book could be ordered in different ways, the student explains their logic to organize the review. The student notes that because they will mention in their summary how structure is a key part of the book, they will explain the book's text structure first. Then, because different chapters are narrated from different points of view, they note that it makes sense in the next section to examine in more depth the author's use of narrative voice. Finally, because their discussion of narrative voice touches on how all of the voices come together at the book's conclusion at the powwow, they decide that it makes sense to finish with their analysis of the book's ending.

As you plan how to organize your book review, think about the most effective way to present your examination, evaluation, and analysis of the literary work. Decide how best to introduce your thesis statement or main claims. Consider which elements of the author's presentation you will focus on in your evaluation. Determine what is the most logical way to order these different sections of analysis. Figure out how to present relevant and persuasive supporting text evidence. Remember to tie all your thoughts up together in a strong conclusion that restates your main argument.

Check-In

Reread Everly's book review, "Review of *There There*." Then, complete the activity.

Note that in the direct quotations from the book, the author of *There There* does not use the preferred term *Indigenous Americans*.

Review of *There There*

Review of *There There*

by Everly Garza

Most Americans have an origin story, the story of how they or their ancestors first arrived in the United States and the struggles they faced to get and stay here. But what about the people who were here before the United States was a nation, before it was colonized, before it was even an outline on a European explorer's map? Those people, the Indigenous Americans, are still here, and they have their own

stories, which are quite different from the stories people descended from immigrants tell. They are also very different from the stereotypes and false narratives that have been created by history and calcified in popular culture. In his powerful and challenging novel *There There*, Tommy Orange explodes the idea of what it means to be an Indigenous American.

The novel weaves together the voices and stories of fourteen different characters, all of whom live in or have connections to Oakland, California. Oakland, as the narrator explains, is a city where thousands of Indigenous Americans have sought refuge from life on reservations. The city is a haven of sorts, but it is also dangerous, and it is not a tight-knit community for the characters. Most don't know each other, although connections and relationships are eventually revealed; for example, two characters might be half-siblings; one character is the child another gave up for adoption years before. The thread that loosely ties the disparate characters and their stories together is an upcoming powwow, the first such event in the city. Some characters attend in hopes of discovering what it means to be an Indigenous American, some simply show up for work, and others have nefarious intentions. For all of the characters, however, the powwow is a major turning point in their lives. It becomes a literally explosive event, and the lives of many characters are forever altered.

The novel's unique structure provides a sturdy but flexible framework for more than a dozen characters' voices and stories. Structured like a dramatic play, the novel consists of a prelude and four acts or thematic sections. There is even an intermission in the form of an interlude in the middle of the second section. The prelude is a dark retelling of American history from the Indigenous American point of view. It leads up to the present day and a specific place—the Indigenous American community in urban Oakland, California. The four main sections of the novel introduce the characters and guide them and the reader like a slow-moving river on a journey to the powwow at the end. Each chapter within a section focuses on one character's experiences, and the author devotes multiple chapters to each character over the course of the novel. The order of the chapters and the characters' narratives may seem random and deliberately confusing at first, but the novel has an

internal logic. The author subtly weaves together the stories of his characters, and careful readers will notice how details in one character's story begin to connect or overlap with the details in another's. Finally, by the novel's third act, the relationships among the characters begin to emerge more clearly, and each character's reasons for attending the powwow come into focus.

The novel's focus is on a collection of characters who are "Urban Indians" (10). The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories. The majority of the characters are young men: Dene, Tony, Edwin, Calvin, Octavio, and Daniel. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield and Jacquie Red Feather are half-sisters in their sixties. They are the great aunt and grandmother of the youngest characters, Orvil, Loother, and Lony, who are not yet teens. The experiences of many of the characters overlap. Few know their fathers, and most were raised by grandparents or in foster care. All of the characters' lives are touched by addiction and abuse. Despite the similarities in experiences, each of the character's voices is unique. Some sound like street kids; Edwin is college educated; Tony is a self-aware young man living with "drome" or the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome (15). The author uses a fascinating mixture of first, second, and third-person points of view to tell their stories. When Opal is first introduced, she is a child living in a commune, and the author describes the experience using the first-person point of view. Later, when Opal is a middle-aged postal worker raising her sister's grandsons, the author uses third-person limited narration to reveal her worries. Thomas's chapter is told through the second-person narration, a technique that allows the character to universalize his life and experiences by describing what "you" see and think.

All of the characters wrestle questions about their identity and how to express it. Names are vitally important to the characters. When Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield asks her mother about her long name, she explains that it comes "from old Indian names. We had our own way of naming before white people came over" (46). Her daughter is "supposed to carry that big old name around with honor" (46). Elsewhere, the narrator devotes an entire paragraph to the variety of names Indigenous Americans use to identify themselves as a group: "We are Indians and

Native Americans and Native American Indians, North American Indians, Natives, NDNs and Ind'ins" (135). Some characters ignore their heritage, while others don't even realize that they are Indigenous Americans. Some acknowledge their heritage but have no idea what it means to be an Indigenous American in a modern setting. Everything they know or have been taught about it seems from another time and place. Edwin puts it this way: "The catch, or double bind, about the whole thing is: If it isn't pulling from tradition, how is it Indigenous? And if it is stuck in tradition, in the past, how can it be relevant to other Indigenous people living now, how can it be modern?" (77). Yet all of the characters find themselves compelled to attend the powwow, where the power of traditional rhythmic drumming and dancing provides answers for some of them. In the locker room before the powwow, an elder tells Orvil, "There's only one way for an Indian man to express himself. It's that dance that comes all the way from back there" (231). Orvil immediately understands: "He knows what the guy said is true. To cry is to waste the feeling. He needs to dance with it" (232).

In another author's hands, the powwow might have become a symbol of unity, a place where the characters come together to find meaningful bonds and rediscover their heritage. It might have been a chance for the author to invoke a happy ending or provide a sense of closure that leaves readers satisfied. Instead, the powwow erupts in violence, and the fates of some characters are left unresolved as the book ends. Such an ending may leave some readers feeling dissatisfied because they never learn what happens to the characters whose lives they've become so immersed in. Through his choice of ending, the author sends a clear message: No one knows what is going to happen next; that's how real life is, no matter who you are or what your heritage.

Tommy Orange's *There There* is a powerful and often disorienting swirl of voices and stories unlike anything else you might read. Reading the novel is like having dozens of voices in your head. The impact of the novel is to tear down everything you thought you knew about the Indigenous American experience and show you instead that the story of the modern Indigenous American is as varied, confusing, and full of joy and uncertainty as anybody else's.

Activity

Think about what you learned about organizing the parts of a book review and complete the Matching activity.

Practice

Activity

Now that you have drafted a summary you could use in your book review for the fiction text you have read over the course of the unit, it's time to think about how you will organize the major parts of your book review. Use a graphic organizer to organize your critique.

Book Review Planner

Follow these steps.

- 1.** First, consider what to include in your introduction and sharpen the focus of your thesis statement, or the main argument. This is your reasoned judgment about the overall contents and presentation of this book and its value or worth to a reader.
- 2.** Next, record details you want to include in your summary or synopsis of the book you read. This part of the review will acquaint your reader with the key

details from the story pertaining to its plot, setting, characters, and theme.

- 3.** Then, based on your introduction and thesis, decide which aspects of the text you want to evaluate. Remember that the evaluation of the book's contents and author's presentation must support whatever you said in the thesis. Gather views and interpretations of others that will support your critique.
- 4.** Figure out the best order in which to present your evaluation of literary elements so that each part builds logically on the one that came before.
- 5.** Be sure to include text evidence that supports the claims you make about the author's presentation.
- 6.** Finally, end with a conclusion that restates the main points of your critique and ensures that your final evaluation of the text is clear to your reader.

Pro Tip

Remember that you do not have to include every single detail in your planner. At this stage, you should have determined in general which literary elements you will evaluate, and you have collected evidence. As you continue writing your book review, you may decide to change some details.

Need a little extra support? Look at Everly's completed planner and think about how it helped her plan her book review.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I evaluated my ideas and narrowed them down to a focused thesis statement about the book I will review.
2. _____ I took some notes as a placeholder for where the summary will go in my book review.
3. _____ I decided which aspects of the book I will critique in greater depth, and I set aside sections in my book review to cover each one.
4. _____ I reviewed my complete graphic organizer to make sure I had planned where to put all the parts of my critique in a logical order.

Then, review the full Book Review Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Book Review Portfolio 2

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will present an evaluation of a novel, including an analysis of how authors use key literary elements to contribute to meaning.

Key Words

- **book review** – a critical analysis of a text that summarizes the text's contents, analyzes its subject and themes, and evaluates the effectiveness of the author's work
 - **literary element** – the basic component of a literary work, such as character, plot, setting, theme, point of view, and mood
-

Book Review Portfolio 2



Source: ngupakarti. Shutterstock

As part of a [book review](#), the writer evaluates the literary text, assessing the book's contents and the author's presentation. When expressing their opinion about the author's use of a [literary element](#), a writer should explain how these elements—such as character, plot, point of view, and writing style—contribute to the meaning of the story and the experience a reader has while reading it.

Analyzing Literary Elements

Literary elements are the basic components of a book. The author constructs meaning and communicates the story using literary elements. Some examples of literary elements include the following:

- character
- plot (including conflict and resolution)
- theme
- setting
- point of view
- mood
- tone
- diction
- motif

These elements can be used in a limitless variety of combinations and ways. When analyzing a book, you determine how the author communicates meaning or evokes a certain effect. For example, perhaps the author uses the point of view or perspective from which the story is told to develop the characters, or perhaps they convey the story's theme through repeated imagery. A different author might craft the meaning of their book by relying more heavily on an unusual plot structure or by selecting and arranging words carefully to create a unique narrative tone.

To make the strongest argument you can about the book you are reviewing, focus on evaluating only the most impactful literary elements that this author uses, those that are most essential to fulfilling the author's purpose for writing the book. Then support your analysis with text evidence from the story. This evidence might be details, including descriptive language or direct quotations, that show how the author presents characters, settings, or plot events.

As you watch the video, notice how the student explains how the author uses literary elements to contribute to the meaning of the story.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 1

Which literary elements does the student think most heavily contributed to the meaning of this book and how does she explain their effect?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: She identifies structure and voice as key literary elements in this book. Then she explains how each element was used in the text, for example, comparing the structure of this novel to the structure of a play and explaining how the author uses different points of view in the narration to vary the narrative voices to better match the different experiences of the various characters. She explains how the use of these elements helps the author to achieve certain ends; for example, the play-like structure with an interlude allowed the author to include a dark retelling of American history in the middle of this otherwise narrative novel.

Question 2

What can you tell about why the student chose to focus on these particular literary elements and their relationship to each other?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The student notes that these two literary elements combine to support each other. She concludes that the way the text structure divides the book into sections and chapters allows the author both to explore different themes and to explore many different perspectives on and experiences in the same world.

When writing your own book review, remember to include an analysis of the author's use of literary elements. Begin by determining which literary elements you feel the author uses most effectively to create meaning. Determine the use of literary elements that have the greatest impact on the reader's experience. Then check that your ideas about the use of literary elements support your thesis, or the main argument you are making about the book.

Narrow your focus to around three literary elements and analyze specifically how the author uses each one to contribute to the meaning of the book. Make a clear claim about the author's use of each one. Explain concisely how and why you think the author uses each element, and if the author's presentation is effective or not. Additionally, provide text evidence to support and develop your evaluation of the author's work.

Check-In

Read the passage below from Everly's book review, "Review of *There There*" to answer Question 1.

The novel's unique structure provides a sturdy but flexible framework for more than a dozen characters' voices and stories. Structured like a dramatic play, the novel consists of a prelude and four acts or thematic sections. There is even an intermission in the form of an interlude in the middle of the second section. The prelude is a dark retelling of American history from the Indigenous American point of view. It leads up to the present day and a specific place—the Indigenous American community in urban Oakland, California. The four main sections of the novel introduce the characters and guide them and the reader like a slow-moving river on a journey to the powwow at the end. Each chapter within a section focuses on one character's experiences, and the author devotes multiple chapters to each character over the course of the novel. The order of the chapters and the characters' narratives may seem random and deliberately confusing at first, but the novel has an internal logic. The author subtly weaves together the stories of his characters, and careful readers will notice how details in one character's story begin to connect or overlap with the details in another's. Finally, by the novel's third act, the relationships among the characters begin to emerge more clearly, and each character's reasons for attending the powwow come into focus.

Question 1

How does Everly analyze the author's use of a literary element? How does Everly support the claim she makes in the book review?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly claims that the author uses a unique structure for the novel that provides a “sturdy but flexible framework” that the author can use to present more than a dozen characters’ voices and stories. To support this claim, Everly describes in detail the structure of the novel. She compares it to a dramatic play and explains how it consists of a “prelude and four acts or thematic sections,” each section made up of chapters, and each chapter focusing on the experiences of one character. She finishes by explaining how this use of structure allows the author to develop the characters, citing as evidence how the characters’ relationships and motivations become clear to the reader by the third section through the way the author reveals new details, some of which overlap and connect with each other, in each character’s story.

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Now read this passage from the book review to answer Question 2.

Note that in the direct quotations from the book, the author of *There There* does not use the preferred term *Indigenous Americans*.

The novel’s focus is on a collection of characters who are “Urban Indians” (10). The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories. The majority of the characters are young men: Dene, Tony, Edwin, Calvin, Octavio, and Daniel. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield and Jacquie Red Feather are half-sisters in their sixties. They are the great aunt and grandmother of the youngest characters, Orvil, Loother, and Lony, who are not yet teens. The experiences of many of the characters overlap. Few know their fathers, and most were raised by grandparents or in foster care. All of the characters’ lives

are touched by addiction and abuse. Despite the similarities in experiences, each of the character's voices is unique. Some sound like street kids; Edwin is college educated; Tony is a self-aware young man living with "drome" or the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome (15). The author uses a fascinating mixture of first, second, and third-person points of view to tell their stories. When Opal is first introduced, she is a child living in a commune, and the author describes the experience using the first-person point of view. Later, when Opal is a middle-aged postal worker raising her sister's grandsons, the author uses third-person limited narration to reveal her worries. Thomas's chapter is told through the second-person narration, a technique that allows the character to universalize his life and experiences by describing what "you" see and think.

All of the characters wrestle with questions about their identity and how to express it. Names are vitally important to the characters. When Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield asks her mother about her long name, she explains that it comes "from old Indian names. We had our own way of naming before white people came over" (46). Her daughter is "supposed to carry that big old name around with honor" (46).

Elsewhere, the narrator devotes an entire paragraph to the variety of names Indigenous Americans use to identify themselves as a group: "We are Indians and Native Americans and Native American Indians, North American Indians, Natives, NDNs and Ind'ins" (135). Some characters ignore their heritage, while others don't even realize that they are Indigenous Americans. Some acknowledge their heritage but have no idea what it means to be an Indigenous American in a modern setting. Everything they know or have been taught about it seems from another time and place. Edwin puts it this way: "The catch, or double bind, about the whole thing is: If it isn't pulling from tradition, how is it Indigenous? And if it is stuck in tradition, in the past, how can it be relevant to other Indigenous people living now, how can it be modern?" (77).

Question 2

What is Everly's claim about the author's use of narrative devices, and how does she support the claim?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly claims that the author uses a variety of narrating devices and voices to present the experiences and perspectives of a wide range of different characters. To support this claim, Everly describes a sampling of the characters from the story to illustrate the diversity of ages and backgrounds they represent. She also provides specific examples of times when different points of view were used for different characters and evaluates the effect of these uses. Additionally, she incorporates direct quotations from the story of times when the characters muse about the names they claim for themselves or use to identify themselves as a group.

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Read this passage from the book review to answer Question 3.

In another author's hands, the powwow might have become a symbol of unity, a place where the characters come together to find meaningful bonds and rediscover their heritage. It might have been a chance for the author to invoke a happy ending or provide a sense of closure that leaves readers satisfied. Instead, the powwow erupts in violence, and the fates of some characters are left unresolved as the book ends. Such an ending may leave some readers feeling dissatisfied because they never learn what happens to the characters whose lives they've become so immersed in. Through his choice of ending, the author sends a clear message: No one knows what is going to happen next; that's how real life is, no matter who you are or what your heritage.

Question 3

What is Everly's analysis of the author's ending of the book, and how does she support that analysis?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly claims that the author uses the ending to communicate a message that no one knows what will happen next and that this is what real life is like, no matter who you are or what your heritage is. To support this claim, Everly notes that usually the author supplies a "happy ending" or provides a satisfying sense of closure; however, in this case, the author chooses not to resolve the fates of many of the characters. As a result of this unexpected ending, Everly infers this ending will leave some readers unsettled, emphasizing the author's message about the unpredictability of life.

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Practice

Activity

You are ready to begin the next step of drafting your book review. So far, you have completed the summary of the literary text you are reviewing. You have created a plan for organizing your book review. Now it is time to start writing your analysis of the author's use of literary elements in the book you will review.

Use the three-column chart to organize your thoughts. Head each column with the literary element from the book that you will analyze in your review. List potential text evidence that supports the claims you will make about the author's use of each element in the column below.

Book Review Three-Column Chart

Once you have identified the three literary elements you plan to focus on and gathered the evidence to support your analysis of the author's use of these elements, you can add this information to your Book Review Planner.

Book Review Planner

Pro Tip

An author may use a variety of literary elements when writing a text. Most likely, they will not contribute equally to the meaning of the text. Some will be more prominent than others. Limit your evaluation to the literary elements that have the greatest effect on the meaning or the reader's experience. Then locate evidence from the book that best supports your evaluation of how well the author uses these elements.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified which three literary elements I will analyze in my book review.
2. _____ I decided what claim I will make that assesses the way the author uses each of these literary elements.
3. _____ I identified textual evidence from the book to support my analysis of the author's use of these literary elements to contribute to the story's meaning.

Then, review the full Book Review Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.

Key Words

- **audience** – the group of people for whom a text is intended
 - **coherent** – unified, consistent, and logical
 - **purpose** – the reason a text is written
 - **task** – the type of writing being produced
-

Book Review Portfolio 2

As you continue drafting your book review, keep your task, audience, and purpose in mind. Additionally, make sure you present your ideas in a clear and coherent way so that your audience will understand your overall argument and be persuaded to agree with the claims you make as you evaluate the book.

Determine Task, Audience, and Purpose



Source: nuiiko. 123RF

The task is the type of writing you will produce. The writing prompt for this portfolio states the task explicitly:

Write a book review of the fiction text you have read over the course of the unit, evaluating its contents and presentation.

You know what your task will be: writing a book review. You can use that knowledge to help you structure your review. For example, a book review should include an introduction (containing your main argument, presented as a thesis statement), a summary of the book you are reviewing, body paragraphs that analyze the author's presentation, and a conclusion.

The audience is the group of people for whom your text is intended. For this assignment, your audience is probably your peers, your Learning Coach, and anyone else interested in reading a review of this book. Keeping this group in mind will help you focus your writing. For example, considering who your audience is will help you decide how best to develop your ideas and present evidence in a way that this group will find convincing and persuasive. It will also affect the type of language you use. Although informal language would be suitable for a casual message between friends, when writing a book review, formal language should be used. As you write, ask yourself questions such as:

- What might this audience already know about this book?
- Why might my audience be reading this review in the first place?
- What facts, details, and examples would help this audience understand my evaluation of the book's contents and presentation and convince them to agree with my claims?
- What questions will this audience have about this book, and how can I provide those answers in my writing?

Recall that the purpose is your reason for writing. People usually write for one of three purposes: to inform, to entertain, or to persuade. For your book review, your purpose is to inform the reader about the book you are reviewing. You want to tell them about its overall strengths or weaknesses. You also want to persuade your audience to agree with your evaluation. To fulfill this purpose, you must make an argument about the book and persuade the reader to accept it by providing them with textual evidence that supports your analysis and evaluation.

Question

Why is it essential to keep your task, audience, and purpose in mind while writing a draft of your book review?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Thinking about the task, audience, and purpose provides a focus for drafting a book review. If you consider the audience for whom you are writing and the reason why you are writing, you will be better able to develop ideas and select persuasive supporting evidence.

Book Review Portfolio 2



Source: Kateryna Upit. Shutterstock

Producing Clear and Coherent Writing

As you consider the task, audience, and purpose of your book review, focus on producing clear and coherent writing, which is writing that makes logical sense.

Coherent writing *coheres*, or “sticks together.” That means ideas are arranged in a way to flow logically, beginning with the sentences and paragraphs.

Determine the best way to organize the information you want to present to the reader. All parts of your book review should relate to one another in a way that makes sense. For a book review, you should begin with an introduction that presents a clear thesis statement and main argument about the book. Next, you should provide a brief objective summary that tells key facts about the book and its contents, fulfilling the purpose of informing your audience. Then add body paragraphs that evaluate the author's presentation, such as the author's use of literary elements, and include evidence that supports your evaluation. This fulfills the purpose of persuading your audience to agree with your evaluation. At the end, wrap up your ideas with a strong conclusion that restates your thesis in a different way.

As you write the different sections of your book review, be sure to show the relationships between your ideas by using transition words and phrases. Check that you are ordering your ideas in a way that emphasizes the relationship between them. Be sure to offer context, as appropriate, for your audience so they can follow your ideas.

To write a coherent paragraph, include a topic sentence and several detail sentences that expand it. Do not switch the focus of your topic in the middle of the paragraph. That will confuse your readers. Mixing topics and ideas across different parts of your review will make it difficult for your reader to keep track of what you are arguing. This in turn will make your audience less likely to agree with your ultimate assessment of the book's strengths or weaknesses.

Question

How will determining the task, purpose, and audience help you produce clear and coherent writing for your book review?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Knowing the task helps me to organize my book review to include necessary information and evaluation. Knowing the purpose and audience helps me understand what sort of text evidence to include to support my main argument

and convince my audience to agree with my evaluation and help them to decide whether or not they want to read this book.

Check-In

Reread “Review of *There There*.” Then answer the questions.

Note that in the direct quotations from the book, the author of *There There* does not use the preferred term *Indigenous Americans*.

Review of *There There*

by Everly Garza

Most Americans have an origin story, the story of how they or their ancestors first arrived in the United States and the struggles they faced to get and stay here. But what about the people who were here before the United States was a nation, before it was colonized, before it was even an outline on a European explorer’s map? Those people, the Indigenous Americans, are still here, and they have their own stories, which are quite different from the stories people descended from immigrants tell. They are also very different from the stereotypes and false narratives that have been created by history and calcified in popular culture. In his powerful and challenging novel *There There*, Tommy Orange explodes the idea of what it means to be an Indigenous American.

The novel weaves together the voices and stories of fourteen different characters, all of whom live in or have connections to Oakland, California. Oakland, as the narrator explains, is a city where thousands of Indigenous Americans have sought refuge from life on reservations. The city is a haven of sorts, but it is also dangerous, and it is not a tight-knit community for the characters. Most don’t know each other, although connections and relationships are eventually revealed; for example, two characters might be half-siblings; one character is the child another gave up for adoption years before. The thread that loosely ties the disparate characters and their stories together is an upcoming powwow, the first such event in the city. Some characters attend in hopes of discovering what it means to be an

Indigenous American, some simply show up for work, and others have nefarious intentions. For all of the characters, however, the powwow is a major turning point in their lives. It becomes a literally explosive event, and the lives of many characters are forever altered.

The novel's unique structure provides a sturdy but flexible framework for more than a dozen characters' voices and stories. Structured like a dramatic play, the novel consists of a prelude and four acts or thematic sections. There is even an intermission in the form of an interlude in the middle of the second section. The prelude is a dark retelling of American history from the Indigenous American point of view. It leads up to the present day and a specific place—the Indigenous American community in urban Oakland, California. The four main sections of the novel introduce the characters and guide them and the reader like a slow-moving river on a journey to the powwow at the end. Each chapter within a section focuses on one character's experiences, and the author devotes multiple chapters to each character over the course of the novel. The order of the chapters and the characters' narratives may seem random and deliberately confusing at first, but the novel has an internal logic. The author subtly weaves together the stories of his characters, and careful readers will notice how details in one character's story begin to connect or overlap with the details in another's. Finally, by the novel's third act, the relationships among the characters begin to emerge more clearly, and each character's reasons for attending the powwow come into focus.

The novel's focus is on a collection of characters who are "Urban Indians" (10). The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories. The majority of the characters are young men: Dene, Tony, Edwin, Calvin, Octavio, and Daniel. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield and Jacquie Red Feather are half-sisters in their sixties. They are the great aunt and grandmother of the youngest characters, Orvil, Loother, and Lony, who are not yet teens. The experiences of many of the characters overlap. Few know their fathers, and most were raised by grandparents or in foster care. All of the characters' lives are touched by addiction and abuse. Despite the similarities in experiences, each of the character's voices is unique. Some sound like street kids; Edwin is college

educated; Tony is a self-aware young man living with “drome” or the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome (15). The author uses a fascinating mixture of first, second, and third-person points of view to tell their stories. When Opal is first introduced, she is a child living in a commune, and the author describes the experience using the first-person point of view. Later, when Opal is a middle-aged postal worker raising her sister’s grandsons, the author uses third-person limited narration to reveal her worries. Thomas’s chapter is told through the second-person narration, a technique that allows the character to universalize his life and experiences by describing what “you” see and think.

All of the characters wrestle questions about their identity and how to express it. Names are vitally important to the characters. When Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield asks her mother about her long name, she explains that it comes “from old Indian names. We had our own way of naming before white people came over” (46). Her daughter is “supposed to carry that big old name around with honor” (46).

Elsewhere, the narrator devotes an entire paragraph to the variety of names Indigenous Americans use to identify themselves as a group: “We are Indians and Native Americans and Native American Indians, North American Indians, Natives, NDNs and Ind’ins” (135). Some characters ignore their heritage, while others don’t even realize that they are Indigenous Americans. Some acknowledge their heritage but have no idea what it means to be an Indigenous American in a modern setting. Everything they know or have been taught about it seems from another time and place. Edwin puts it this way: “The catch, or double bind, about the whole thing is: If it isn’t pulling from tradition, how is it Indigenous? And if it is stuck in tradition, in the past, how can it be relevant to other Indigenous people living now, how can it be modern?” (77). Yet all of the characters find themselves compelled to attend the powwow, where the power of traditional rhythmic drumming and dancing provides answers for some of them. In the locker room before the powwow, an elder tells Orvil, “There’s only one way for an Indian man to express himself. It’s that dance that comes all the way from back there” (231). Orvil immediately understands: “He knows what the guy said is true. To cry is to waste the feeling. He needs to dance with it” (232).

In another author's hands, the powwow might have become a symbol of unity, a place where the characters come together to find meaningful bonds and rediscover their heritage. It might have been a chance for the author to invoke a happy ending or provide a sense of closure that leaves readers satisfied. Instead, the powwow erupts in violence, and the fates of some characters are left unresolved as the book ends. Such an ending may leave some readers feeling dissatisfied because they never learn what happens to the characters whose lives they've become so immersed in. Through his choice of ending, the author sends a clear message: No one knows what is going to happen next; that's how real life is, no matter who you are or what your heritage.

Tommy Orange's *There There* is a powerful and often disorienting swirl of voices and stories unlike anything else you might read. Reading the novel is like having dozens of voices in your head. The impact of the novel is to tear down everything you thought you knew about the Indigenous American experience and show you instead that the story of the modern Indigenous American is as varied, confusing, and full of joy and uncertainty as anybody else's.

Pro Tip

Consider printing out Everly's book review or pasting it into a text document. That way, you can more easily annotate specific portions of the book review as you read it.

Review of *There There*

Question 1

What is the task, purpose, and audience for Everly's book review?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The task is to write a book review of *There There*, the purpose is to inform about the book and persuade an audience to accept Everly's analysis of its contents and the evaluation of its overall worth. The intended audience is likely Everly's peers or anyone who might like reading literary texts.

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Question 2

How did the task, purpose, and audience help Everly produce clear and coherent writing?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The task helped Everly produce clear and coherent writing by helping her determine how to organize this book review. She presents a clear

thesis or main argument in her introduction, telling readers that the author “explodes the idea of what it means to be an Indigenous American.” She includes a summary that concisely acquaints her audience with key details about the book’s characters, setting, and plot (which consists of the voices and stories of fourteen different characters interacting and connecting in various ways). She devotes several paragraphs to critical analysis of the author’s use of literary elements, providing text evidence to support her points and making sure her analysis supports her claims and overall thesis. She ends with a conclusion that restates and emphasizes her original thesis statement. The purpose helped Everly produce clear and coherent writing because she knew she had to write to inform her readers about the book and its qualities and persuade them to agree with her evaluation and assessment. The audience helped Everly produce clear and coherent writing because thinking about their reasons for wanting to read her review and what they might already know or not know about the book helped her figure out how best to develop her ideas and select text evidence to support her points.

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Practice

Activity

As you continue your draft, look for opportunities to develop your ideas more clearly and coherently. Keep in mind how you can use task, purpose, and audience to help you support your thesis statement and produce writing that is clear and coherent. As you write, look for opportunities to develop your ideas more clearly and coherently. Ensure that your ideas flow logically from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph and relate clearly to one another. Check that you have provided transition words or phrases to get from idea to idea. Make sure that each paragraph starts with a topic sentence. Check that the following sentences in the paragraph relate to this topic sentence, providing explanation, detail, or other types of elaboration.

Ask yourself:

- Have I organized my book review in consideration of task, purpose, and audience?
- How has my focus on task, purpose, and audience helped me to express my ideas?
- Have I included all necessary parts for a book review?
- Have I arranged my book review effectively to deliver my ideas in a clear and coherent way?

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I expressed my ideas clearly.
2. _____ I organized and presented my ideas coherently.

3. _____ I developed ideas appropriate to my task.
4. _____ I developed ideas appropriate to my purpose.
5. _____ I developed ideas appropriate to my audience.
6. _____ I supported my thesis statement by organizing and developing my ideas while keeping my task, purpose, and audience in mind.

Then, review the full Book Review Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Book Review Portfolio 3

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline when writing a book review.

Key Words

- **convention** – a rule for writing text, such as a rule of capitalization, punctuation, grammar and usage, sentence structure, and spelling
 - **discipline** – a subject or content area
 - **formal style** – a style of writing in which the text structure and syntax are more complex, the vocabulary level is more advanced, and rules of grammar and usage are closely followed
 - **norm** – the way that a writer usually creates a text within a discipline
 - **objective tone** – a tone of writing in which no indication of a writer's personality or other personal details is presented
 - **style** – the mechanics of writing, including word choice, sentence structure, and grammar
 - **tone** – the attitude of a writer toward a subject
-

Book Review Portfolio 3

Communicate Clearly

As you draft your book review, keep your audience, purpose, and task in mind. You will also want to use an appropriate style and tone. Style includes the choices you make when writing, such as choosing certain vocabulary and using syntax, or the arrangement of words and phrases, to convey ideas. Tone is the attitude the writer takes toward the subject, or topic, of a text. Using a suitable style and tone will ensure that you communicate your ideas clearly.

Select a style and tone that suits the discipline, or subject area, of the kind of text you are writing. Each discipline has its own set of norms and conventions. Norms are the ways that writers usually create texts within the discipline. Conventions are rules that most writers have agreed to follow, such as rules of grammar and usage.

A book review should be written with a formal style and an objective tone. By following the norms and conventions of a book review, you will show your audience that you understand your subject matter. That will convince your readers that they can trust what you are writing because they will view you as an authority on the subject. Then your readers will be more likely to be persuaded to agree with your evaluation of the book.

Maintaining a Formal Style



Source: dolgachov / 123RF

Book reviews will use a formal style. A formal style helps a writer to communicate their ideas about the book they are reviewing in a way that fits the purpose and audience.

When using a formal style:

- Use a more advanced vocabulary level and consider the connotations of the words you use.
- Use clear, precise statements and avoid generalizations and vague phrases.
- Avoid using colloquialisms such as casual, everyday language or slang.
- Avoid using abbreviations and contractions.
- Use more compound and complex sentences instead of simple sentences.
- Include transitional words and phrases to signal the relationship between ideas.
- Follow conventions for organizing the type of writing, such as including a formal title and citing the source for your text evidence using page numbers.

Consider how Everly revised the following part of her book review of *There There* to reflect a more formal style.

Note that the author of *There There* does not use the preferred term *Indigenous Americans*.

Before: This book tells about a ton of different folks. I mean, there are all sorts of them. So many kinds of people in this book. Tommy uses many ways to tell their stories.

After: The novel's focus is on a collection of characters who are "Urban Indians" (10). The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories.

Question 1

How did Everly revise this passage to write in a formal style?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Instead of the informal phrase, "book tells about a ton of different folks," Everly substitutes a more precise phrase that uses more advanced vocabulary: "novel's focus is on a collection of characters." Everly also includes a specific quotation from the book, properly cited, to explain to the audience what this collection of characters has in common: they are all "Urban Indians." She deletes the repetitious fragment "So many kinds of people in this book." She replaces the vague statement "Tommy uses many ways to tell their stories" with a more specific statement that uses higher-level vocabulary: "The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories."

Question 2

What effect did Everly's revisions have on her book review and its ability to communicate clearly to the reader?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Her revisions not only made her style more formal; they also made her writing more precise and complex and clarified the argument she is presenting and supporting.

Book Review Portfolio 3

Objective Tone



Source: Tyler Olson. Shutterstock

The tone of your writing should be objective. An objective tone gives no indication of your personality. You avoid stating opinions or private beliefs, either directly or

indirectly. When using an objective tone, you keep the focus on facts and evidence rather than your own feelings and reactions. Using an objective tone allows the reader of your book review to focus on the merits of the book and its value.

Of course, part of reviewing a book is evaluating it, so you will need to make claims about the strengths and weaknesses of the book's contents and the author's presentation. Be sure to present your views as reasoned critical assessments that can be supported by strong evidence rather than random emotional reactions. Relate your claims to your main argument.

When using an objective tone:

- Use third-person pronouns rather than first- or second-person pronouns.
- Use words with neutral connotations rather than words that reveal how you feel about a topic.
- When including judgments, back up all claims with text evidence.
- Cite facts and evidence rather than your personal opinions and experiences.

Consider how Everly revised the following passage from her book review to use a more objective tone:

Before: I've read other books where authors use events like this powwow to unite the different characters. When reading this book, I expected the author to conclude with a happy ending. I think books are very satisfying when they provide a sense of closure like that. Instead, this powwow reminded me of news stories I've seen about violence. This book just ends. Not knowing what was going to happen to some of the characters left me feeling dissatisfied after spending so much time becoming immersed in their lives.

After: In another author's hands, the powwow might have become a symbol of unity, a place where the characters come together to find meaningful bonds and

rediscover their heritage. It might have been a chance for the author to invoke a happy ending or provide a sense of closure that leaves readers satisfied. Instead, the powwow erupts in violence, and the fates of some characters are left unresolved as the book ends. Such an ending may leave some readers feeling dissatisfied because they never learn what happens to the characters whose lives they've become so immersed in.

Question 1

How did Everly revise her book review to use a more objective tone and communicate more clearly to the reader?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly removed first-person pronouns like *I* and referred instead to “readers” and “some readers.” She also deleted her personal reactions and reference to the personal experience of watching news stories about violence. These changes make her writing clearer and the evaluation of the book more effective.

Question 2

What is an example of how Everly used vocabulary and syntax effectively to create a formal style?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly uses a variety of interesting sentence structures to arrange contrasting ideas of how the book might have ended. She points out that other authors might have used the powwow to “provide a sense of closure;” instead, the powwow “erupts in violence.” Everly sets up this clear contrast to conclude that the ending may leave some readers “dissatisfied.” Everly uses vocabulary to create positive feelings with words and phrases such as *unity*, *meaningful bonds*, and *rediscover their heritage* to strengthen her point about what a satisfying ending

could be and to provide the contrast of the dissatisfaction some readers might feel because they don't know what happens to the characters at the end.

Check-In

Think about what you learned about using a formal style and objective tone when writing a book review. Then reread Everly’s book review, “Review of *There There*” and answer the questions.

Note that in the direct quotations from the book, the author of *There There* does not use the preferred term *Indigenous Americans*.

Review of *There There*

Review of *There There*

by Everly Garza

Most Americans have an origin story, the story of how they or their ancestors first arrived in the United States and the struggles they faced to get and stay here. But what about the people who were here before the United States was a nation, before

it was colonized, before it was even an outline on a European explorer's map? Those people, the Indigenous Americans, are still here, and they have their own stories, which are quite different from the stories people descended from immigrants tell. They are also very different from the stereotypes and false narratives that have been created by history and calcified in popular culture. In his powerful and challenging novel *There There*, Tommy Orange explodes the idea of what it means to be an Indigenous American.

The novel weaves together the voices and stories of fourteen different characters, all of whom live in or have connections to Oakland, California. Oakland, as the narrator explains, is a city where thousands of Indigenous Americans have sought refuge from life on reservations. The city is a haven of sorts, but it is also dangerous, and it is not a tight-knit community for the characters. Most don't know each other, although connections and relationships are eventually revealed; for example, two characters might be half-siblings; one character is the child another gave up for adoption years before. The thread that loosely ties the disparate characters and their stories together is an upcoming powwow, the first such event in the city. Some characters attend in hopes of discovering what it means to be an Indigenous American, some simply show up for work, and others have nefarious intentions. For all of the characters, however, the powwow is a major turning point in their lives. It becomes a literally explosive event, and the lives of many characters are forever altered.

The novel's unique structure provides a sturdy but flexible framework for more than a dozen characters' voices and stories. Structured like a dramatic play, the novel consists of a prelude and four acts or thematic sections. There is even an intermission in the form of an interlude in the middle of the second section. The prelude is a dark retelling of American history from the Indigenous American point of view. It leads up to the present day and a specific place—the Indigenous American community in urban Oakland, California. The four main sections of the novel introduce the characters and guide them and the reader like a slow-moving river on a journey to the powwow at the end. Each chapter within a section focuses on one character's experiences, and the author devotes multiple chapters to each

character over the course of the novel. The order of the chapters and the characters' narratives may seem random and deliberately confusing at first, but the novel has an internal logic. The author subtly weaves together the stories of his characters, and careful readers will notice how details in one character's story begin to connect or overlap with the details in another's. Finally, by the novel's third act, the relationships among the characters begin to emerge more clearly, and each character's reasons for attending the powwow come into focus.

The novel's focus is on a collection of characters who are "Urban Indians" (10). The author presents an impressive range of characters, and he implements a variety of narrating devices to tell their stories. The majority of the characters are young men: Dene, Tony, Edwin, Calvin, Octavio, and Daniel. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield and Jacquie Red Feather are half-sisters in their sixties. They are the great aunt and grandmother of the youngest characters, Orvil, Loother, and Lony, who are not yet teens. The experiences of many of the characters overlap. Few know their fathers, and most were raised by grandparents or in foster care. All of the characters' lives are touched by addiction and abuse. Despite the similarities in experiences, each of the character's voices is unique. Some sound like street kids; Edwin is college educated; Tony is a self-aware young man living with "drome" or the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome (15). The author uses a fascinating mixture of first, second, and third-person points of view to tell their stories. When Opal is first introduced, she is a child living in a commune, and the author describes the experience using the first-person point of view. Later, when Opal is a middle-aged postal worker raising her sister's grandsons, the author uses third-person limited narration to reveal her worries. Thomas's chapter is told through the second-person narration, a technique that allows the character to universalize his life and experiences by describing what "you" see and think.

All of the characters wrestle questions about their identity and how to express it. Names are vitally important to the characters. When Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield asks her mother about her long name, she explains that it comes "from old Indian names. We had our own way of naming before white people came over" (46). Her daughter is "supposed to carry that big old name around with honor" (46).

Elsewhere, the narrator devotes an entire paragraph to the variety of names Indigenous Americans use to identify themselves as a group: “We are Indians and Native Americans and Native American Indians, North American Indians, Natives, NDNs and Ind’ins” (135). Some characters ignore their heritage, while others don’t even realize that they are Indigenous Americans. Some acknowledge their heritage but have no idea what it means to be an Indigenous American in a modern setting. Everything they know or have been taught about it seems from another time and place. Edwin puts it this way: “The catch, or double bind, about the whole thing is: If it isn’t pulling from tradition, how is it Indigenous? And if it is stuck in tradition, in the past, how can it be relevant to other Indigenous people living now, how can it be modern?” (77). Yet all of the characters find themselves compelled to attend the powwow, where the power of traditional rhythmic drumming and dancing provides answers for some of them. In the locker room before the powwow, an elder tells Orvil, “There’s only one way for an Indian man to express himself. It’s that dance that comes all the way from back there” (231). Orvil immediately understands: “He knows what the guy said is true. To cry is to waste the feeling. He needs to dance with it” (232).

In another author’s hands, the powwow might have become a symbol of unity, a place where the characters come together to find meaningful bonds and rediscover their heritage. It might have been a chance for the author to invoke a happy ending or provide a sense of closure that leaves readers satisfied. Instead, the powwow erupts in violence, and the fates of some characters are left unresolved as the book ends. Such an ending may leave some readers feeling dissatisfied because they never learn what happens to the characters whose lives they’ve become so immersed in. Through his choice of ending, the author sends a clear message: No one knows what is going to happen next; that’s how real life is, no matter who you are or what your heritage.

Tommy Orange’s *There There* is a powerful and often disorienting swirl of voices and stories unlike anything else you might read. Reading the novel is like having dozens of voices in your head. The impact of the novel is to tear down everything you thought you knew about the Indigenous American experience and show you

instead that the story of the modern Indigenous American is as varied, confusing, and full of joy and uncertainty as anybody else's.

Pro Tip

Consider printing out Everly's book review or pasting it into a text document. That way, you can more easily annotate specific portions of the book review as you read it.

Question 1

How does Everly maintain a formal style throughout this book review?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly maintains a formal style by using compound and complex sentence structures, higher-level vocabulary, and correct grammar. She avoids the inclusion of slang, casual phrases, or figures of speech such as idioms. On the rare occasions when she does include a figure of speech, she uses it for a formal and specific purpose that relates to her assessment. For example, she uses a simile to describe how the four main sections of the novel "guide [the characters] and the reader like a slow-moving river on a journey to the powwow at the end." She also follows the norms and conventions of a book review by including a title for her text and by formatting her quotations correctly and citing their source by page number.

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Question 2

How does Everly maintain an objective tone throughout this book review to communicate clearly to her readers?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Everly avoids the use of first-person pronouns, referring instead to “the reader” or “you.” She also does not include personal details or anecdotes in her review. When she presents judgments about the novel as part of her evaluation, such as that “the order of the chapters and the characters’ narratives may seem random and deliberately confusing at first, but the novel has an internal logic,” she supports her viewpoint with specific evidence from the text; for example, she notes how “careful readers will notice how details in one character’s story begin to connect or overlap with the details in another’s . . . [so that] by the novel’s third act, the relationships among the characters begin to emerge more clearly, and each character’s reasons for attending the powwow come into focus.”

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Practice

Activity

Continue working on your draft of your book review. Evaluate your writing to make sure that you are maintaining a formal style and objective tone throughout the review while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline. During your evaluation, when you make a judgment about the book, always support your claims and views with strong and persuasive text evidence.

Remember to use:

- varied and complex syntax
- more advanced vocabulary
- clear, precise statements
- a formal title
- correctly formatted quotations
- citations for the source of textual evidence

Remember to delete elements that detract from the formality and objectivity you seek, including the following:

- contractions
- first-person pronouns
- slang terms
- casual phrases
- personal details or experiences
- opinions that are not part of your critical assessment or backed up by textual evidence

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I maintained a formal style by using complex syntax.
2. _____ I maintained a formal style by using advanced vocabulary words.
3. _____ I maintained a formal style by avoiding contractions, slang, and casual phrases.
4. _____ I attended to the norms and conventions, including grammar and usage, appropriate for my discipline.
5. _____ I maintained an objective tone by avoiding first-person pronouns.
6. _____ I maintained an objective tone free of references to personal details or experiences.
7. _____ I maintained an objective tone by supporting any judgments about the book's presentation with textual evidence.

Then, review the full Book Review Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will strengthen writing by revising and editing.

Key Words

- **edit** – to change writing to correct mistakes in language, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
 - **revise** – to review writing and make changes that improve its organization, clarity, and interest level
-

Book Review Portfolio 3



Source: noname3132 / 123RF

Once you have finished a draft of your book review, you are ready for the last steps of the writing process. First, you will revise your writing to improve its organization and clarity. You will review the overall structure and wording of your draft and make changes to content. To fix any issues, you will add, remove, change, or move text around. You might need to revise words, sentences, or even whole paragraphs. In the end, you must ensure that your ideas are relevant, clear, and connected. After you revise, you will edit your draft to look for issues with your language, grammar,

punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Revising and editing will improve your book review, making your text easier for your audience to understand and more appealing to read.

Revising

During the revision stage, you want to take a fresh look at your writing. Consider how a reader would perceive your work when reading it for the first time. Reading your text from a new perspective will help you notice places where you can improve its content, structure, and style. As you read your draft, make sure that it addresses the prompt and matches the task, purpose, and audience you identified earlier in this portfolio.

Remember that you are summarizing a book for your reader and evaluating the contents and presentation of a fiction text.

As you revise, you might do the following:

- Remove evidence and examples that are interesting but do not support your thesis statement and claims made during your evaluation.
- Add more facts and details to support your thesis statement and claims.
- Improve the organization and flow so ideas build on one another in a logical way, possibly reordering sentences or paragraphs.
- Add transition words and make clear connections between ideas.
- Vary word choice to eliminate repetition and include more precise words.
- Vary sentence structure to make your writing more engaging to read.
- Replace words with positive or negative connotations with neutral words to maintain an objective tone.
- Remove any slang, contractions, or personal pronouns to maintain a formal style.

You may decide to use a revising checklist to examine your writing objectively. A checklist provides guiding questions to help you locate places where you can improve the structure and flow of your writing.

Read the checklist Everly used to revise her book review:

Revising Checklist: Book Review

- Does the beginning of my book review introduce the main argument of my critique? Does it include a hook to draw the reader into the text in an engaging way? Does it tell the reader basic details like the title and author of the book I will be reviewing?
- Does the organizational structure of my text make sense for my task, purpose, and audience?
- Does my objective summary follow logically from the introduction? Are the events of this summary told in order? Did I include any extraneous details or personal opinions?
- In my analysis of the book, does each body section or paragraph support my main argument and focus on one aspect or literary element? Do I provide enough supporting evidence for each claim? Did I include any unnecessary details that should be deleted?
- Does each piece of evidence or information build on what came before in a logical sequence? Are transitions needed to smooth the connections between and among ideas?
- Have information and quotations from the book been integrated effectively into the text to maintain a flow of ideas?
- Do I use a formal style and objective tone throughout the text? If not, how can I maintain a formal style and objective tone?
- Did I vary my sentence structures and syntax throughout the text? If not, how can I vary these more? Are active and passive voices used effectively?
- Does my conclusion follow from and support the information in my review? Is it effective at restating my main argument with new words? Is

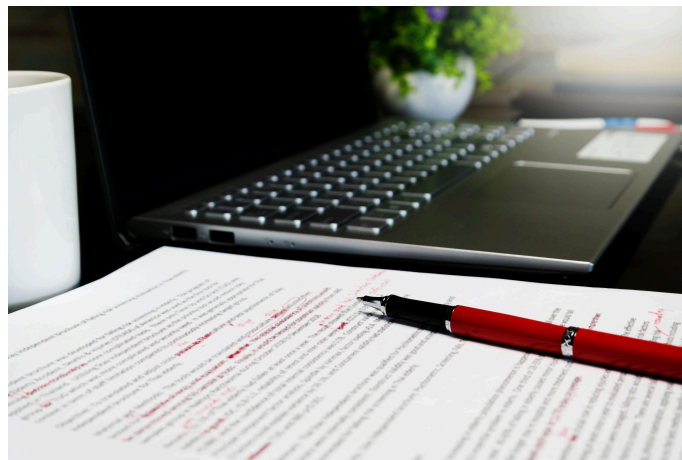
my reader clear about my final evaluation of the book's contents and presentation?

- Does this text achieve my purpose of analyzing and evaluating the fiction text I read?

Question

What did you find most helpful about this checklist? How might it help you as the writer of a book review?

Book Review Portfolio 3



Source: Lamai Prasitsuwan / 123RF

Editing

Once you have revised your book review, read through it one more time to edit it. The editing stage is the time to fine tune the text on a smaller scale.

This is your chance to check your word usage, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. By correcting mistakes and eliminating distracting errors, you make it easier for your audience to focus on your ideas. If your text is free from errors, it is

more likely that your readers will agree with your evaluation and decide whether they wish to read the book or not.

Check for common errors, including:

- Run-on sentences
- Incomplete sentences
- Make sure subjects and verbs agree, especially if they have prepositional phrases or clauses between them.
- Compare verb tenses throughout your text to make sure you have not accidentally switched tenses for no good reason.
- Check for misspelled words, including incorrect homophones.
- Check the correct spelling of all names and proper nouns.
- Check the punctuation and use of quotations, question marks, hyphens, and apostrophes.
- Check that periods have not been typed as commas or vice versa.
- Check that all sources have been properly cited.

Some suggested techniques for catching errors are to read your book review aloud or record yourself reading it and listen to the recording.

When editing, you can use reference materials such as an online dictionary, thesaurus, or grammar website to detect and correct common errors. Digital tools such as spelling and grammar checkers can help you identify errors, but they are not foolproof. For example, spelling checkers may not notice misspelled names of people and places. They may also miss incorrect verb tenses or sentences with words in the wrong order.

To help her locate editing errors in her writing, Everly uses the checklist below to edit her work. It includes errors that she has made in the past. Read through the checklist and consider how it might help you edit your book review.

Editing Checklist: Book Review

Language

- Are certain words used repeatedly? Can they be replaced with more precise words or phrases?
- Are sentences complete? Does the writing avoid sentence fragments or run-on sentences unless they are a direct quotation from the literary text?
- Are a variety of phrases and clauses used to convey specific meanings and make sentences more interesting?
- Are sources cited accurately and thoroughly?

Grammar

- Does the writing use correct verb tenses and verb forms?
- Do pronouns have clear antecedents? Do they agree in number?
- Do subjects and verbs agree in number and form?
- Are active and passive verbs used correctly?

Punctuation and Capitalization

- Are direct quotations from the literary text punctuated correctly?
- Are the names of characters and settings capitalized correctly?
- Are introductory subordinate clauses followed by a comma?
- Are semicolons used to link closely related independent clauses?

Spelling

- Are all words spelled correctly, including hyphenated words?
- Are homophones used and spelled correctly?

- Have you given your book review a final read-through in addition to using a spell check?

Question

What is an error you often make when writing a book review text? What can you do to keep from making that mistake in the future?

Check-In

Activity

You have read about revising and editing, and you have looked at examples of the kinds of revisions and edits a writer might make. Now it is time to start revising and editing your own book review. Reread the draft of your book review and make annotations about any revisions or edits you need to make as you finalize your text.

Use Everly's checklists to help you identify problem areas. You can personalize the checklists by adding errors you commonly make or problems you are noticing for the first time.

Revising Checklist

[Editing Checklist](#)

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Activity

Use the annotations you made in the draft of your book review text as a guide for revising and editing your writing. Refer to the checklists again as needed. Make all of your revisions before you begin editing. Then be sure to edit your most recent changes in addition to the items you flagged as you worked through your checklist.

Revising Checklist

Editing Checklist

After you revise and edit your book review text, carefully read it through one more time to make sure you have not introduced any new errors or accidentally deleted any important words or sentences.

Finally, check that your book review text is formatted properly. Use word processing tools to check that the margins of your pages are adequate and that you used a legible font. Double-check your book review title and put your name at the top.

Pro Tip

Once you finish revising and editing your book review, run a spelling and grammar check. Then print out a final copy of your book review and give it a “cold read.” Your eyes may see things on a physical print out that they missed when they were reading on screen.

How Did I Do?

Assess your narrative text by completing the full Book Review Portfolio rubric. Check each item you have accomplished. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I strengthened my writing by revising to improve weaknesses in structure, style, tone, clarity of content, and reader interest.

2. _____ I strengthened my writing by editing to correct errors in language, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

3. _____ I formatted my book review text, gave it an appropriate title, and put my name at the top.

Then, review the full Book Review Portfolio rubric one final time.

Book Review Portfolio Rubric

Book Review Portfolio 3

Reflect

Read over your finished book review portfolio with the book review rubric in hand. Think not only about how well your writing reflects the criteria on the rubric, but also on the process you undertook to complete the writing.

[Book Review Portfolio Rubric](#)



Source: Michael Simons. 123RF

Self-evaluate your book review. Ask yourself:

- How well does my book review meet the criteria on the rubric?
- What are the strengths of my book review?
- What are some areas I want to work on?

Use the questions below to reflect on the experience of writing a book review. Write your answers in your notebook.

- 1.** What did you find the most satisfying about the process of writing? What part of your final book review are you most proud of? Why?
- 2.** How much planning did you do before you began writing your book review text? Did the planning help you complete the writing task? Explain.
- 3.** What was the biggest challenge you faced in writing your book review? How could you overcome a similar challenge in the future?
- 4.** What did the experience of crafting a book review teach you about yourself as a writer?

Consider the self-selected fictional text you have been reading over the course of the unit. If you were going to interview the writer of that text for a podcast, what questions would you want to ask about the writing process or the craft of writing? List several questions. How might their observations strengthen your own ability to evaluate an author's content and presentation in a book review?

