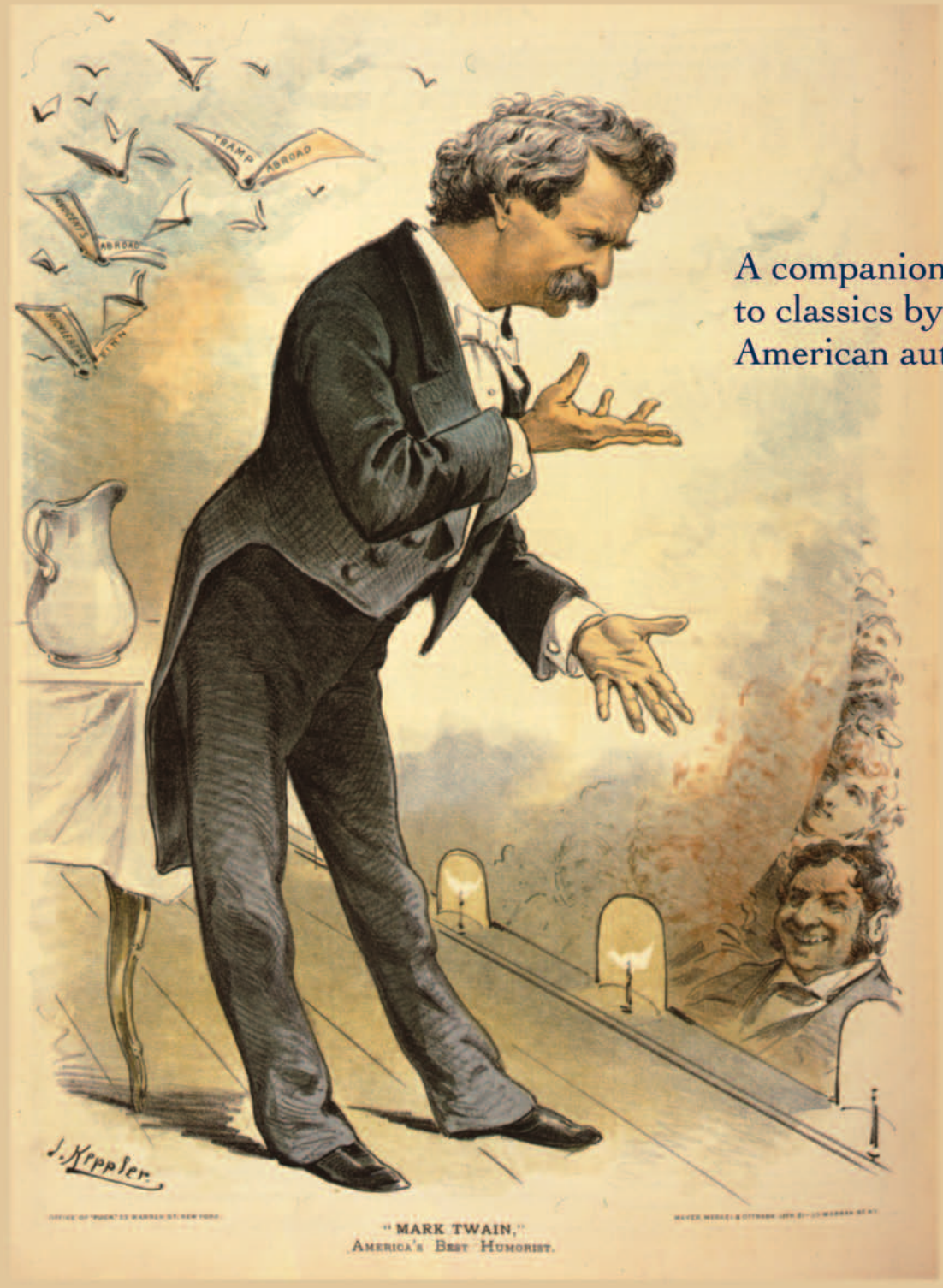
Words Aptly Spoken

AMERICAN LITERATURE



A companion guide to classics by great American authors

Foreword

This collection introduces you to twenty-nine works of American literature from early Christian sermons to twentieth-century plays. As a bonus, the book includes the text of three sermons by Christian ministers from early America, two stories by the great storyteller O. Henry, and two poems by the classic American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

While reading these classic works, take time to engage with the author. What hard questions does the book ask you to consider? Remember, you don't have to agree with the author in order to benefit from a book. Sometimes you learn just as much by disagreeing, because the experience forces you a) to think through the reasons you disagree, and b) to strengthen your own beliefs in the process.

As with the other collections in the *Words Aptly Spoken* series, *American Literature* contains a series of questions about each work. Review Questions ensure that you understand the basic plot, characters, setting, and message of the book. Thought Questions take the themes and ideas raised by each author and help you apply them to other, more familiar situations.

In the field of literature, reading and writing are closely tied. *American Literature* helps you make this connection by walking you step-by-step through the process of writing an essay about literature. Each work you will study is accompanied by a writing practice section that targets the important skills you need to have in order to write a good essay about literature.

As you read and write your way through these classics of American literature, make it your goal to be critical in the best sense of the word. Remember, every author in this collection was a person who was flawed, biased, and opinionated.

By reading and writing about these individuals and remaining, as you do so, aware that they were human, you should not lose appreciation for what they accomplished. Instead, you should recognize that their imperfect contributions have helped to shape American thought in the past just as your contributions can help shape future thought.

Best wishes, and happy reading!

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A Note For Parents: Tools for the Journey

If you have ever heard Shakespeare performed before a live audience and marveled at the ease with which the words flowed from the actors' lips; if you have ever envied people who can call on Milton, Dickens, Joyce, and Lewis to lend eloquence to their argument; if you have skimmed a list of the hundred greatest novels of all time and winced as you remembered struggling to finish *The Grapes of Wrath* in high school—you may think that the great conversations of literature are forever closed to you.

The good news is, they're not! Whether you are a student, an adult, a parent, a child, or all of the above, you have the capability to train yourself not only to read great literature, but also to share its beauty, truth, and joy with others.

Although most people learn to read as children, the art of deliberately engaging with the content and ideas of a novel or short story requires ongoing practice.

The *Words Aptly Spoken* series is based on the classical model of education,[1] which breaks learning into three natural stages: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. In the grammar stage, you learn the vocabulary of a subject. In the dialectic stage, you learn to develop logical arguments and analyze others' ideas. In the rhetoric stage, you explore the consequences of ideas as you form and express your own. This guide will help you as you begin to apply the classical model to the study of literature.

Why American Literature?

American literature is a varied and exciting field. Every century, America has undergone many social, cultural, economic, and political changes. These changes have had a significant influence on the way authors have written and what they have written about. In addition, these changes have made American literature an excellent source for competing ideas.

As you become more comfortable with the grammar of reading—plot, characters, setting, conflict, etc.—you should begin to read for ideas, so you can engage with those ideas and wrestle through their implications. In many ways, reading is an exchange of ideas between the author and the reader, like two friends sitting down in front of a fire to discuss the secrets of life.

After the fire has died, it is up to you to decide what happens next. Do you put aside the questions and the new thoughts? Or do you daily go back to those lessons and apply them to your life? The decision is yours. Learning to write about these books and the ideas they contain (**rhetoric**) is the next step toward sharing your ideas and conclusions with the people around you.

How to Use This Book

Despite popular belief, reading is not wholly instinctive. Because comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking require practice, each work of literature you will study is broken down by chapter into a series of questions designed to give structure and guidance to your reading.

[1] See Dorothy Sayers' essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning."

Although the questions are arranged chapter-by-chapter, most readers will not pause to answer questions after finishing a chapter. If the book has captured your imagination the way classic literature ought to, you won't want to stop reading! For this reason, treat these questions as tools not only for reading, but also for writing, leading discussion, and sharing your ideas with others.

Review Questions pull out the **grammar** for each chapter: Who is the book about? (Characters) What happens? (Plot) Where does it take place? (Setting) What is the message? (Theme) What is the scope or time frame? (Focus) For readers of all ages, repeatedly asking these questions will generate good reading habits; eventually, as you read, your brain will automatically take note of this information and store it for future use.

Thought Questions are an exercise in **dialectic**, taking the basic elements from the Review Questions and encouraging you to analyze that information in light of other knowledge. As you become more familiar with the building blocks of a story, you should begin to ask questions of your own. What does this mean for me? How should I respond to this argument? You can use the Thought Questions to jump-start your own thinking process, as training tools for leading discussion, or as topics for essays.

If you cannot answer some of the questions by the time you have finished the book, consider going back and re-reading sections you may only have skimmed the first time. A word of caution: don't merely "look up" the answers to the questions and skim the rest of the book. Once established, this habit will make it harder for you to read and understand more difficult books. After all, self-respecting Olympic runners know that they would be at a severe disadvantage in the actual games if they secretly completed only half of their daily training regimen. In the same way, the results you achieve as a reader will reflect the quality and consistency of your training.

Because measuring progress is a part of learning, each section in this book begins or ends with suggested reading or writing exercises that allow you to gauge how well you have mastered the skills you've been practicing. Although a particular exercise for writing is suggested with each book studied, you can rearrange and revise to suit your needs.

It is best if you have your own copy of each book so you can highlight or make notes in the margins. If, however, you need to use a copy belonging to the library or to a friend, consider reading with a small notebook or a pad of sticky notes nearby so you can jot down ideas and connections while they are fresh in your head.

The Journey in Perspective

One of the most important things to remember as you start—or resume—this journey is that it doesn't happen overnight. The art of leading and sharing in conversations about classical literature takes a lifetime to refine. You must begin with the fundamentals: learning to read closely, taking notes, and developing the vocabulary to structure your ideas and explain them to others (**grammar**). You must practice: adding new techniques, revising old ones, and comparing the results (**dialectic**). And then you will be ready to start all over again as you share the joy of the journey with others around you (**rhetoric**). Let's get started!

Reading Skills

Being a good reader takes practice, and it is vital to a range of other skills. If you miss the big ideas when you read, you cannot analyze or critique those ideas, identify the underlying messages, or respond to them thoughtfully in writing or conversation. These tips will help you read more effectively.

Vocabulary

If you see an unfamiliar word, take a minute to look up the definition and write it down. Not only will this improve your vocabulary, but it will help you avoid missing important details. Pay particular attention to words that have a different connotation now than they had when the book was written.

Characters

Keep a list of the main characters. Write down their names, a few defining characteristics, and their relationships with other characters. If you find a section that shows their character traits especially well, write down the page number.

Plot

Write down a skeletal outline of the book's plot. What happened, to whom, when, where, and how? Focus on turning points and revelations that were important to the plot's development.

Timeline

Keep a timeline of the major events in the book. This is especially useful if multiple subplots take place at the same time. You can also use a timeline to keep track of flashbacks or dream sequences.

Themes

Do you see a pattern in the problems that plague the characters? Is there some flaw that all the main characters share? Write it down. Also, if something in the book reminds you of another book or story you have read, jot down the page number(s) and the element(s) that seem similar.

Quotes

Does a character say something memorable? Underline or highlight it, or write down the page number and a few key words. When you write about or discuss the book, you will need evidence, and it is much easier to mark quotes as you go than to relocate specific passages when you need them.

Don't forget to read with a notebook or pad of sticky notes handy. If you own the book, margins are a great place to write, but make sure you use a bookmark so you can find your notes. Keep practicing these reading skills, and you will find your jobs as thinker, critic, and writer much easier as a result.

About the Essay

Reading and writing go hand in hand. A good book is meant to be shared, and essays are one way of sharing your thoughts about a book with others. Essays come in many different forms and have many different purposes. As you study the books in this guide, try your hand at the essay styles listed below. Being able to write more than one kind of essay will improve your writing technique, keep you interested and engaged, and help you look at literature with new perspective.

Book report

The first type of essay many students encounter is the book report. Although the implied reader of a book report is someone who wants to find out more about the book, the main purpose of writing a book report is to demonstrate that the writer has read the book, understands the basic elements of the story, and has formed an opinion about the book's merits.

Book reports are all about learning and repeating the **grammar** of literature. Writing a book report is a little bit like writing a newspaper article. A book report should answer the journalistic questions who – what – why – when – where – how. Your focus is on facts and important characters and plot points, not on details or in-depth analysis.

The first paragraph should introduce the author and the book, including the main characters and the setting. The next few paragraphs should lay out the plot, focusing on the big events and how they are related. The final paragraph should briefly analyze and judge the merits of the book. Each section of the essay should include support in the form of quotations from the book.

Think about this type of writing as the foundation for more complex essays. As with reading, when you practice summarizing the plot, characters, conflict, and resolution of a book, your brain is developing the habit of identifying these core elements. Later, you will be able to write with ease about not just the names of the characters but also their relationship to each other as they develop and change.

Character sketch

Character sketches are a good example of the next stage in your development as a writer. A character sketch asks you to pick out the important information relating to a particular character. In this way, like book reports, character sketches are more about description than argument. Unlike book reports, however, character sketches require you to draw on your own interpretations of the character's actions in order to write the essay. You will need to analyze the grammar of the book and begin to draw logical conclusions about it (**dialectic**).

In a character sketch, you will introduce your reader to one of the book's characters by presenting details from the book that support your overall impression of the character. You can use the character's words, interactions with other characters, actions, and thoughts (if available) to help you "sketch" your character. When you write a character sketch, remember to *show* rather than *tell*. For example, instead of telling your reader that "Jane Doe was an insecure person," you could describe a scene in which Jane was given a compliment but was convinced that it was spoken sarcastically.

The first paragraph should introduce the character and his/her relationship to the plot. The next few paragraphs should use examples and quotes to highlight a particular aspect of the character's personality. In other words, you should begin to show your reader who this person is and how you have come to that conclusion. The final paragraph should either point back to the character's impact on the plot or remind readers how the character changes or grows over the course of the book.

Book critique

Another type of essay that builds your dialectic skills is the book critique. A book critique is similar to a book report in that it briefly describes the book. A critique, however, goes one step further to analyze how well the grammar of the book works together to produce a cohesive whole.

A critique is not an unsupported statement of your opinion about the book. Some book reports, albeit not especially good ones, tend to gush, "This was a great book; I loved reading it, and I will recommend it to all my friends." That type of writing may be appropriate to a book report, but a critique asks you to explain the reasons behind your opinion.

In a book critique, you should analyze the effectiveness of the book as a piece of writing. Were the characters believable? Why or why not? Did the plot conclude logically or did it ask readers to disregard logic? Was the dialogue slow? Were there too many descriptions? For this task, the grammar of reading is extremely important because you have to be able to identify the author's techniques for developing characters and structuring the plot in order to critique why they did not work as intended.

The first paragraph of a book critique should introduce the book and its author and briefly summarize the plot. The next few paragraphs should identify the book's strengths and weaknesses, using examples and quotes to support your claims. The final paragraph should pass judgment on the book as a whole. This is your chance to explain what the author could have done better.

The most difficult part about writing a book critique is to keep your tone professional even as you point out examples of poor writing, jumbled plot, and one-dimensional characters. If you were presenting your essay to the author of the book, you would not want to tell him/her that the book "had no plot whatsoever." You might, however, be able to tactfully mention that, "the book's focus on character rather than plot made the transition to a battle scene in chapter four seem abrupt." Your writing should reflect similar preciseness and avoid *ad hominem*[2] attacks on the author.

Critical essay

Critical essays are by far the most common type of academic writing in upper-level literature classes. In addition, because this type of essay asks you to consider the book in greater depth as you develop an argument about the ideas it contains, critical essays are an important step from the dialectic stage, in which you analyze others' writing and arguments,

[2]Latin for "to the man", an *ad hominem* attack is a logical fallacy committed when someone attacks the character of the person making an argument rather than responding to the argument itself.

toward the **rhetoric** stage, in which you will develop and present your own ideas. For these reasons, the writing practice sections in this book will focus mainly on planning and writing critical essays.

Before you can plunge into the writing process, however, you must go back to the grammar in order to avoid a common misperception about the nature of a critical essay. The word "critical" may be misleading. Although "critical" and "critique" are similar words, they are used in two different ways in this context. A critique, as mentioned earlier, is intended to find fault with a book. Its purpose is to pick out weaknesses in the author's writing style or development of plot and character.

A critical essay, by contrast, focuses on the reader's insight into the book. Think of "critical" as it is used in the phrase "critical thinking." To think about something critically is to question it rather than to absorb it without considering the implications. A critical essay should look below the surface of the book. Your essay could highlight a connection between several books, find and analyze a significant moment in a character's development, or trace a repeated theme of the book and discuss the consequences of that idea.

No matter which approach you choose, you will build critical essays on an argument or claim you make about the book. That claim is called a **thesis**. The next section will focus on how to select a thesis and write a critical essay. For now, just remember that a critical essay is first and foremost about *your* thoughts. It is impossible to write a critical essay without a) reading the book, and b) engaging your mind on the level of ideas as you do so. Before you think about writing the essay, you must always begin by thinking about the book.

Brain Work
PLANNING THE ESSAY

Before you even begin to write, it is important to think about what you want to say. Planning helps you organize and makes the job easier when you actually begin to write. The planning phase can be broken down into five or six steps: asking a question, developing a thesis, building an argument, preparing an outline, sometimes conducting research, and thinking about form and style. Of course, all of these steps are possible only after you have read the book at least once.

Asking a question

The first few steps of pre-writing involve narrowing down your interests from the broad scope, to a general topic, to a specific question. Start by asking a few basic questions about your interests.

- Do you want to talk about the story within the book, or do you want to relate the book to outside information?
- If you chose to stay within the text, are you interested in the plot and characters, or do you want to look at the author's themes or the characters' philosophies?
- If you chose to look outside the text, do you want to talk about historical events, cultural attitudes, or events in the author's life as they relate to the book?[3]

Now that you've narrowed down the scope of your paper, look back at your notes. What topics interested you while you were reading? Did a particular character fascinate you? Did you see a lot of comparisons between the author's and the protagonist's lives? Decide on a general topic based on this information.

A strong argument about literature responds to a problem, puzzle, or question raised by the book. Once you have a topic, choose a question you would like to answer. For example, if you were writing an essay about *The Secret Garden*, you might be interested in the themes of the book, particularly the theme of love. Within that topic, you might be curious about the characters' understanding of what love means. You might ask the following question: What is Archibald Craven's concept of love, and how does it change by the end of the book?

Developing a thesis

A thesis is your answer to the question you have asked. It is the claim you will make about the book. Developing a thesis is one of the most important parts of writing a critical essay, so at this point, you may want to go back and re-read sections of the book that deal with your

[3]Use caution with this last option: remember that what an author writes is separate from—though influenced by—who he or she is. It's risky to assume that everything in an author's books lines up with an experience in his or her life.

topic. You should build your claim from the book rather than trying to manipulate the book to fit your claim.

Your goal should be to make an argument that is somewhere between the obvious and the unsupportable. On one hand, it is very difficult to argue something that is self-evident. You wouldn't have a very good argument if you walked up to someone and said, "I think there are twelve months in a year, and I'm going to prove it." The other person would be likely to walk away. However, if you said, "I think I can prove there should be only ten months in a year," you could have a very interesting conversation. For this reason, steering clear of claims that are too obvious is one objective.

On the other hand, you will need to have reasonable support for your thesis. Your argument should interpret and tie together the quotes and actions of characters in the book. You should be able to logically argue in favor of your thesis using quotations from the book. It's worth repeating that your thesis should come out of the book; the book shouldn't be forced into it.

In the example from *Secret Garden*, you might develop the following thesis: Archibald Craven initially thinks love and material gifts are the same thing, but by the end of the book he realizes that love is different and more important.

Building an argument

Once you have a thesis, the next step is to lay out your argument. What steps are necessary to convince your reader to accept your thesis? In order to visualize those steps, it is helpful to lay out your argument point-by-point. As an illustration, consider this word game:

To play, take one word, and then, by changing one letter at a time, turn it into another word with the same number of letters. For example: FISH ⇨HOOK. Here is one possible solution:

> FISH ⇨ FIST ⇨ FAST ⇨ CAST ⇨ COST ⇨ COLT ⇨ BOLT ⇨ BOOT ⇨ HOOT ⇨ HOOK

If you merely skipped from FISH to HOOK, you would have proven nothing. In order for the game to work, each link must lead logically from the last, but there may be multiple ways to reach the same conclusion. The same "rules" apply to your essay. At each step, your reader should be able to follow your line of reasoning without having to make leaps in logic.

For the sample thesis from *The Secret Garden*, you would need to prove that Archibald Craven originally thought love and material comforts were the same thing, and that he later realized love was different. To do that, you would need to provide examples in which Mr. Craven tries to show love by buying gifts for his son, Colin, or his niece, Mary. Next, you would need to show a cause for his change of thinking: for example, a conversation with another character. Finally, you would need to give examples from the end of the book, in which he tries to show a different kind of love that is separate from gift giving.

Preparing an outline

Building an argument leads naturally into preparing an outline. Once you have the step-by-step process for proving your thesis, you can turn that mental path into an outline. Your outline can be as broad or as detailed as you want; however, a more detailed outline will make your job easier when you start writing. This is a good time to start thinking about the

scenes or events in the book that you will use to back up your argument.

Here is one possible outline for the sample topic:

I. Introduction

II. Mr. Craven's initial relationships (emphasizing the connection between love and gifts)
   A. With Mary
      1. Love
      2. Gifts
   B. With Colin
      1. Love
      2. Gifts

III. Mr. Craven's change of mind
   A. Conversations with Mary
   B. Conversation with Mrs. Sowerby

IV. Mr. Craven's new relationships (emphasizing that the two types of affection are separate)
   A. With Mary
      1. Love
      2. Gifts
   B. With Colin
      1. Love
      2. Gifts

V. Conclusion

Conducting research

If you take a logic or debate class, you will learn that the difference between a shouting match and a logical argument can be as simple as the use of evidence. Any argument will be stronger if you can back it up with proof. In literary studies, support comes in two forms. First, you can use **primary support**, which comes from the book you are writing about. If you are writing an essay about *The Secret Garden*, your primary support will be quotes from *The Secret Garden*. Most of your primary research will take place as you read and think about your argument, before you even begin to write.

At this point in your writing, you will probably rely mostly on primary support, using quotes from the book to back up your opinions. In some cases, however, you may begin to write about a topic and discover after you create your outline that you will need **secondary support**.

Secondary support comes from books or journal articles that other scholars have written about your book or topic. If you are writing about historical events or social conditions at the time a book was written, you may need to consult an outside source to find information about, for example, nineteenth-century slavery laws or the principles of the transcendental

movement in philosophy.

If you are asked to find research to support your ideas, it is important to know where to look. Through the Internet, an abundance of information is available. Be cautious, however. Writing a good essay is not possible unless you use credible information. The Internet contains a lot of good information, but it also contains a lot of information that is biased or just plain untrue. Always check the credentials of your sources, especially online sources. Books or articles written by professors or researchers are much more credible than blogs or websites that can be edited by anyone.

If you are in doubt, remember that the library is always a good place to search. Published books and journal articles (with some exceptions) go through a rigorous editing process by experts in the field, which means they are less likely to contain errors or unsupported claims. In addition, your librarian may be able to give you advice about finding credible information.

Thinking about form and style

Although an essay is largely about your thoughts and interpretation, it should still be professionally written. That means writing in third person when possible (not using I, me, you, or we) and using formal language and style (no contractions, slang terms, or colloquialisms).

In a critical essay, it may be difficult to avoid inserting judgments about the characters and plot of the book. It is acceptable to use firm words and make decisive statements about a book. In fact, an essay that is too hesitant and qualifies every statement with "maybe" or "one might think" is as bad as an essay that is too forceful. Just remember to back up your claims with examples and evidence from the book.

When you first sit down to write, it is not important to get everything just right. You will make mistakes and need to make changes—that's why you revise your paper after you finish—but if you keep these principles in mind as you write and practice them consistently, the professional voice you develop will become more natural and personal.

Hand Work
WRITING THE ESSAY

After you have put in all the hard work of pre-writing, actually beginning to write may come as something of a relief. Rather than writing a sentence, stopping, and trying to figure out where to go next, you already have a plan to which you can refer if you get stuck. Now all you have to do is to transfer the ideas in your head onto the page.

Writing a rough draft

When you begin to write, focus on getting your ideas down on paper. There will be plenty of time later to go back and proofread. Keep your outline and notes beside you as you write. Depending on the length of the paper, you should aim to write one or more paragraphs for each section of your outline. Because you're making a claim about a book, each section of your paper should include at least one supporting quote or reference from that book.

Some people prefer to write sections as the inspiration comes to them, and then they organize the paper after they finish. Others start at the beginning and write straight through to the end. Either method is okay, but each one has a few pitfalls to avoid.

The risk of writing section-by-section is that your paper will lack continuity because it has been written out of order and stitched together. If you write this way, when you finish, go back and read the transitions between sections. Do they flow without a noticeable break? Your goal is for someone who has never seen your outline to be able to follow your logic.

The danger of writing straight through is that you will lose sight of your thesis as you follow your train of thought. If you write this way, when you finish, read your introduction and conclusion back-to-back. Do they "match up"? Readers should not expect that you will talk about one thing based on your introduction only to find that you've actually led them to another, unrelated conclusion.

Regardless of which method you choose, always pay special attention to your introduction and conclusion. These are some of the most important sections of your paper, and sometimes it is easier to write—or at least revise—them after you finish the body of the paper.

Refining the introduction

From the very beginning, the introduction should catch your reader's attention and give him or her a reason to keep reading. In your first sentence, you might use a provocative question, a poignant quote, or a strong statement—all examples of a good "hook"—to do so. Next, your introduction should present the general topic of the paper. Finally, it should contain two important pieces: your thesis and a brief "road map." (See "Brain Work" for a discussion of the thesis.)

Your road map should be 1-2 sentences long. Think of a road map as a miniature outline that gives your reader a sense of direction and leads up to your thesis. For example, "This

paper examines Mr. Craven's relationships with Mary and Colin early in the book and contrasts them with his interactions at the end of the book. In each situation, the essay compares Mr. Craven's demonstrations of love to his gift giving." Then, when you transition into the body of your paper, your readers will know what the major steps in your argument will be.

Revising the conclusion

If the introduction of the paper presents a miniature version of your argument and prepares the reader for the rest of the paper, the conclusion presents a recap of your argument and then offers the reader a chance to respond.

The first goal of your conclusion is to review the major points you have made and remind the reader how you have proven your thesis. Try not to repeat yourself; instead, pull out the most important details and show your reader how your thesis makes sense of them. Then, your conclusion should end with a memorable thought or quotation that goes one step further to suggest what the broader implications of your argument might be.

Perhaps your claim has consequences for the way people read this particular book or categorize this author. Maybe your argument will affect the way readers interpret a character or scene. Or perhaps, thinking critically about a book's theme could influence the way people relate to others around them. This is your chance to practice **rhetoric**, to persuade your readers that ideas have consequences.

Choosing a title

The title of your essay is the first thing readers will see. As such, it should tell the reader what your essay is about, but it should do so in a memorable way. A title like "*The Secret Garden*: An Essay" will not make your potential readers excited about what you have to say. On the other hand, "Growing Love in *The Secret Garden*" might encourage someone to read further.

A title can be uninformative because it is too vague, but a title that is flashy with no substance is equally unhelpful. Your title needs to give the reader a sense of what the essay is about. As with your writing style, it should be professional in tone. Remember, you should draw the reader in with your ideas, not just your ability to create puns or play with words.

Proofreading

Once the initial writing is complete, it is time to edit your essay. It is easiest to start with the biggest changes and move to the smaller ones. If you proofread for grammar, then decide you need to rewrite the entire middle section, you will have to check for grammar errors again when you are finished.

The first thing to evaluate is content. Does your paper fulfill your assignment? If not, you may have to rewrite or at least alter your essay so it fits the assigned task. Does the body of your paper prove your thesis? If not, go back and make those important links, showing the reader exactly why your thesis is correct. Does the paper use the book for support? If not, go back and cut out generalizations, replacing them with evidence.

Moving from the paper as a whole to the level of paragraphs, the next thing you should look for is organization. Your paper should make sense and smoothly develop your argument.

One way to check organization is to create an outline **from** your paper. Write down the main point of each paragraph in one sentence or less. Look at these topic sentences in the order that they appear in your paper. Do they make sense? Do they follow a logical order? If not, rearrange the sentences, then rearrange the corresponding paragraphs in your paper.

Now you need to make sure you have smooth transitions between your paragraphs. You want to make it easy for your reader to follow your train of thought. If you have just finished talking about one character's development, you should not jump straight into a paragraph about the turning point in the plot. Instead, you should use a transition sentence to link these two ideas. For example, "[Character's] changes start a chain of events that alters the entire plot of the book."

The next two steps, which move to the sentence level, may overlap to some extent. First, check for clarity. The most efficient way to find out if your paper is clear is to have someone else read it aloud. If you cannot find someone, read the paper aloud to yourself. Are your sentences smooth or choppy? Are your quotes smoothly integrated? Most importantly, this is the time to make sure your paper says what you want it to say.

When you are satisfied that the paper is clear, look for grammatical errors and errors in spelling or word choice. Try to avoid contractions (isn't, don't, can't) and first-person (I, me, we) or second-person pronouns (you). Go back and review information about punctuation and capitalization. Check for run-on sentences and fragments. Make sure your subjects and verbs and your nouns and pronouns agree in number. Check for consistency in your verb tenses. Watch for commonly-confused words (their, there, and they're; its and it's).

Finally, double-check your citations and use of research, making sure you have given proper credit and formatted your citations according to MLA or other guidelines. This last step may involve familiarizing yourself with some new **grammar** specific to academic writing.

Formatting citations

Writers and researchers put a lot of time into their work, and they deserve recognition for that effort. When you use someone else's ideas or information, failure to give proper credit is called plagiarism.[4] Plagiarism includes copying and pasting information from the Internet, paraphrasing or directly quoting someone else's words without giving them credit, and claiming someone else's ideas as your own. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and may result in failure of an assignment or a class. Even more importantly, plagiarism is unethical. It means that instead of doing your own work, you took someone else's and pretended it was yours.

There are several ways to use research correctly. You can use an author's words exactly, but you must use quotation marks. You can also paraphrase the author's words. Paraphrasing does not mean simply changing a word or two; it means completely rewriting the information in your own words and sentence structure. Whether you paraphrase or quote, you must include citations. Since this book is about literary writing, you should use the format of the

[4]The word "plagiarism" comes from the Latin verb *plagiare*, to kidnap.

Modern Language Association (MLA). MLA style has two parts: in-text (parenthetical) citations and a bibliography.

In-text citations appear in the body of the paper. After using information or a direct quotation, put the author's last name and the page number in parentheses, with no punctuation in between. For example, "This book is a classic" (Smith 101). Notice that the final quotation mark comes **before** the in-text citation and the punctuation mark comes **after** the citation. One exception is if the punctuation affects the mood of the quote. The most common examples are an exclamation point or a question mark. For example, Jane Doe exclaims, "Are we lost?" (Author 92).

The in-text citation points your reader to the bibliography, where complete information is given for each author referenced. The bibliography in MLA is called a "Works Cited" page. Entries are alphabetized by the author's last name (to match the in-text citation). See Figure 1 below for examples of different types of sources in MLA format. The basic format for a works cited entry is:

Book
Author's last name, first name. *Title*.[5] Publisher's location: Publisher's name, Year published.

Journal Article
Author's last name, first name. "Title." *Journal Title*. Volume.Issue (Date): Page range.

Website
Author's last name, first name. "Title of page." Sponsor (Date written). Accessed (Date) from [URL].

Figure 1

	Works Cited page	**In Text**
Book	Mills, John. *My Book*. New York: Random House, 1992.	(Mills 28)
Book, 2+ authors	Jeffers, Anne and David Miller. *Their Book*. London: Pearson, 2001.	(Jeffers and Miller 3)
Work in an anthology	Green, Terry. "His Article." *Collected Book*. Ed.[6] Tim Roe. New York: Scribes, 2005. 54-61.	(Green 58)
Newspaper	Harris, Tom. "Big News." *The Washington Post* 14 May 2004, A2.	(Harris A2)
Journal	Brown, Alice. "Her Article." *Literary Journal*. 35.4 (1998): 13-21.	(Brown 14)
Website	Dennis, George. "His Web Text." Research Foundation (2005). Accessed 4/14/2007 from [http://www.research.org/webtext].	(Dennis)

[5]If you are citing from a stand-alone work (a book or play), use italics for the title. If it is not published separately (a poem or short story), use quotation marks around the title.
[6]In an anthology, the abbreviation "Ed." is short for "editor," the person who compiled the anthology.

Work with no author	"About Literature." Literature Forum Online (2003). Accessed 5/29/2007 from [http://www.lfo.org/about].	("About")

For more detailed information about citation formats, look at the MLA Handbook, which is available at your local library or bookstore. You can also search online for MLA format.

"The Gift of the Magi"

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter (1862-1910) was in his mid-twenties, working in a bank in Texas, when he began to write satire for local newspapers. Soon after that, he was charged with embezzlement and fled to Honduras. When he returned, he spent three years in prison, during which he continued to write and publish short stories under various pen names. He became best known by the name O. Henry. After his release, he continued to write until his death. His short stories reflect his diverse experiences and are recognizable for their unusual twists and surprising endings. "The Gift of the Magi" was first published in 1906, and was later included in a collection called *The Four Million*.

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at $8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid $30 a week. Now, when the income was shrunk to $20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever

Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only $1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only $1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an $8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in a flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street. Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling iron and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task. Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry

Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled. "Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents

away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. O all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

Review Questions

1. Why was Della upset?
2. What were the James Dillingham Youngs' two prized possessions?
3. What did Della want to buy for Jim? How did she get enough money?
4. What gift did Jim give Della? How did he get enough money?
5. What was the irony of Della's and Jim's gifts to each other?

Thought Questions

6. Have you ever given up something you loved for someone you cared about? Why did you do it? How did you feel afterward?
7. What does Christmas mean to you? Are gifts an important part? Why or why not?
8. Is self-sacrifice always a good thing? Explain.
9. Did Della and Jim give each other wise gifts? Did O. Henry think so? Why?
10. Why do you think O. Henry called this story "The Gift of the Magi"?

Reading Skills VOCABULARY

These first seven reading assignments are a great opportunity to brush up on the reading skills mentioned in the introduction. For "The Gift of the Magi," practice dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary.

O. Henry is famous for using large or uncommon words in his stories. Here are a few words you may not have recognized. First, try to figure out what the words mean by looking at them in context in the story. Write down your tentative definition below. Now use a good dictionary to find a definition for each word and jot the definition in the margins of the story. Compare your guesses to the actual meaning of the word to see how close you were.

If you came across other words you didn't know, write them down below, and take a minute to look them up as well. The next time you read the story, mentally replace the difficult words with a synonym you do know, until the new words become a comfortable part of your vocabulary.

Vocabulary List

1. Imputation –
2. Parsimony –
3. Mendicancy –
4. Appertaining –
5. Depreciate –
6. Meretricious –