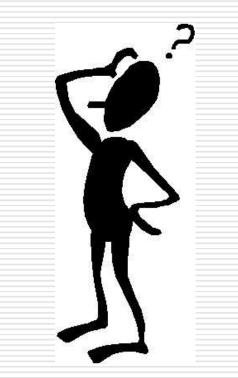# Writing a *Literary Analysis* Essay

How to Determine a Thesis

The Goal of Analysis

- ☐ To demonstrate some new understanding of the literary work
- ☐ State this new understanding in the form of an **assertion**
- ☐ Support your analysis with evidence and commentary.

What's an Assertion

- An assertion is an opinion about a <u>general subject</u>, like life, relationships, gender or class that you think the author is making through some element (character, theme, symbol) of the novel

Think aloud: Finding an assertion

- ☐ I noticed that in Stargirl the main character Stargirl changes

- ☐ Stargirl changes twice during the novel: first she is an eccentric, free-spirit, later she tries to conform to the behaviors of her peers, but finally she returns to her true individualistic self

What's Next?

Now make an assertion based on this analysis of Stargirl:

- ☐ Ask: What new understanding about life, relationships, gender or class does this present?

- ☐ Answer: Stargirl doesn't like this society…she finds it shallow and phony…so she quits it.

Formula to make an assertion:

- (author's name) is making a point about (general subject); the specific point s/he is making is that _____.

- *Example*: In *Stargirl*, author Jerry Spinelli makes a point about the superficial nature of modern society; the specific point he is making is that society is shallow and does not value individuality and it therefore should be rejected.

From Formula to Thesis

- Revise your assertion statement adding that the author is using the character(s) to make that specific point

- *Example*: Jerry Spinelli, author of *Stargirl*, uses the protagonist Stargirl to argue that modern society is superficial and incapable of valuing individuality and should be rejected.

- Now, this becomes the preliminary thesis.

Let's try another one:

- I noticed that in <u>The Pearl</u>, the main character, Kino, changes.

- Kino changes during the course of the novel. First, he is a young father and husband who is poor but content. However, after he finds a great pearl, he changes into a ruthless murderer.

What's next?

- [ ] Now make an assertion based on this analysis of Kino.

- [ ] What new understanding about life, relationships, gender or class does this present? (In other words, why does he change? – this is your analysis.)

- [ ] Answer: Kino changes because of his greed. He finds out that greed is a destructive force that can ruin one's life.

Formula to make an assertion:

- (author's name) is making a point about (general subject); the specific point s/he is making is that _____.

- *Example*:   Author John Steinbeck makes a point about the destructive nature of greed in man; the specific point he is making is that placing one's greedy needs over the more important intangible needs of family can destroy a man's life.

From Formula to Thesis

- ☐ Revise your assertion statement adding that the author is using the character(s) to make that specific point.

- ☐ *Example*: Through Kino's struggles with the pearl, Steinbeck demonstrates that placing one's greedy needs over the more important intangible needs of family can destroy a man's life.

Think Aloud:

- Character compare/contrast
- I noticed that Arthur, in *Button, Button* and Chris in *Hundred Bucks of Happy* are similar in that both decide to do the right thing. Both characters are tempted by wealth, but choose to make good, selfless decisions

A Formula To Use To Make an Assertion

- ☐ Use the formula

- ☐ Richard Matheson, author of *Button, Button* and Susan Beth Pfeffer, author of *A Hundred Bucks of Happy* are making a point about self-sacrifice; their specific point is that good people think of others before themselves.

Now turn this into a thesis.

- Revise your assertion statement <u>adding that the author is using the character to make that specific point.</u>

- The authors Matheson and Pfeffer are using their characters of Arthur and Chris to illustrate that to be a good person, one must put the welfare of others above one's own desires.

Got Questions?

Email your question to me at sproctor@prcc.edu