

The Explication: an essay that analyzes EVERY line of a short text

How Does a Text Mean?:

Throughout the course of this year, I have asked you to consider the following question: "How does a text mean?" This question is intentionally awkward to capture your attention. Essentially, I want you to realize that the way in which a story is presented matters just as much as the story itself.

Authors like to use literary devices such as symbols, motifs, metaphors, simile, double-meanings, imagery, and other ways of enhancing the meaning of a text. For this essay, you will analyze literally EACH AND EVERY LINE of a SHORT text. I recommend picking a song or poem that you like and has some depth to it.

Please read the sample I have provided for you. It also includes notes that you should read and see how the essay is structured.

The Assignment:

Write an essay that analyzes each and every line of a short text that answers the following question: **How did the author of your poem use literary devices to enhance the message of the poem?**

Your essay should include all of the following:

- a thesis statement that clearly and directly answers the essay question
- a paragraph that briefly summarizes the story behind the text
- body paragraphs that analyze each and every line and the literary devices used
- proper quotations including line number citations
- a conclusion that has an enhanced version of your thesis

Explication Essay (Summer School)

	INSUFFICIENT MASTERY	APPROACHING MASTERY	MASTERY	BEYOND MASTERY
THESIS	Your essay contains a thesis, but it may not be clear or relevant.	Your thesis states an argument about the text.	Your thesis states a clear argument about how the literary devices contribute to the meaning of the text.	Your thesis states a clear, original argument about how the literary devices contribute to the meaning of the text and guides your entire essay.
EVIDENCE	You address only small pieces of the text	You address most of the text, but do not account for each line	You address the whole text at some point, line by line	You address the whole text line by line and revisit upon key pieces of evidence
ANALYSIS	You do not explain or interpret the evidence. The essay mostly contains summary.	You explain only some of your evidence.	You analyze the evidence by explaining the literary devices used in a 4:1 ratio.	You clearly, persuasively and sophisticatedly analyze how your evidence supports your thesis in a 4:1 ratio.
QUOTATIONS	You either do not quote the text or improperly drop in entire quotations without having them be a part of a larger sentence.	You sometimes properly quote evidence by introducing the quotation, OR you quote properly but do not provide line citations.	You consistently quote evidence properly by introducing the quotation and providing line citations.	You consistently quote evidence properly by introducing the quotation and providing line citations.
COHESIVENESS & ORGANIZATION	You do not provide clearly identifiable topic sentences.	Your topic sentences do not clearly support your thesis statement.	Your topic sentences clearly support your thesis statement.	Your topic sentences clearly support your thesis and provide a smooth transition from one idea to the next.
GRAMMAR	Grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling have many noticeable errors.	Grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling have some noticeable errors.	Grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling have no major errors.	Grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling have no noticeable errors.

IF ANY PART OF YOUR ESSAY FALLS BELOW MASTERY, REVISE & RESUBMIT.

Thesis:	/50	Comments:
Evidence:	/100	
Analysis:	/200	
Quotations:	/100	
Cohesiveness/Org.	/100	
Grammar	/50	
Total:	/500	

SAMPLE

Explication of the Poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" by Robert Frost

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:30 PM

Comment: Title of Essay

Devin K. Ozdogu
Summer School
6-22-09

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:31 PM

Comment: Name, Date, "Period"

Nothing Gold Can Stay
by Robert Frost

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:31 PM

Comment: A full copy of the text being explicated

Nature's first green is gold, 1
Her hardest hue to hold,
Her early leaf's a flower,
But only so an hour, 4
Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day,
Nothing gold can stay. 8

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:42 PM

Comment: Text has each line numbered. If your text does not come with a line number, then you will have to add them in.

In the poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay", Robert Frost uses alliteration, metaphor, allusion, and meter to establish a message that natural perfection is short-lived.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:32 PM

Comment: First paragraph is thesis. Explains how and why the author uses literary devices to communicate meaning.

Overall, Frost's poem tells the story of nature falling from a state of perfection. He talks about greenery, flowers, and leaves, but that is just the literal interpretation of his words. Nature is meant to not only mean a biological environment like a garden, it also represents human nature. Frost hints that just like a flower cannot always maintain natural beauty, we humans also eventually suffer from our sins.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:33 PM

Comment: Second paragraph briefly summarizes the story of the text.

In the first two lines, Frost uses alliteration to illustrate nature's original state and how difficult it is to maintain. By repeating the "g" sound in "green is gold" (1), Frost is joining these two ideas through metaphor. Nature's first burst of life isn't just green, it has a golden and perfect quality to it. Thus, Frost is setting the stage for the first half of his argument: natural beauty is close to perfection. Yet, he immediately proceeds to show the reader that this ideal state is impossible to maintain. We learn that the golden perfection is the "hardest hue to hold" (2). Just as it is difficult for Nature to remain golden, the repeated "h" sound is a bit of a tongue-twister and makes it difficult for the reader to pronounce this line. As a result, we get a feel for the trouble that Nature must go through.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:33 PM

Comment: Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that expands upon one part of the thesis.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:37 PM

Comment: Each line of the text is analyzed. For every quotation there are four sentences of analysis.

Frost then repeats his initial argument through the use of another metaphor in lines 3 and 4. Not only is green more than green (i.e. golden), but Nature's "early leaf's a flower" (3). Frost's metaphor takes something ordinary (a leaf) and transforms it into something strikingly beautiful (a flower). Then, much like the first two lines, the poet immediately reminds us that perfection and beauty are nice but fleeting things as a leaf is a flower "But only so an hour" (4). We are to understand that nature is flawless yet temporary.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:41 PM

Comment: Every time the text is quoted, the line number is provided afterwards.

In lines 5 and 6, Frost shows us how natural perfection falls from grace through a simple yet powerful allusion. First, he explains that after a brief moment of ideal beauty, "leaf subsides to leaf" (5). A leaf is no longer an idealized flower; it is a simple, ordinary leaf. Nature's beauty has lost its magical zeal. In the following line, we learn that Frost is not merely referring to the natural world, but the world of man as well. He alludes to man's "original sin" in the Garden of Eden when (as the Bible has it) we fell from perfect creations of God to flawed creatures doomed to a certain degree of suffering. As "Eden [sinks] to grief" we feel that Nature is mourning our struggle to be good and pure because she knows it's a losing battle.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:38 PM

Comment: Each body paragraph follows the same structure: topic sentence, quotation from line, analysis.

Finally, Frost concludes his poem by walking us through the stages of the fall. In his final use of alliteration, Frost emphasizes the every other syllable by repeating the letter "d" in "So dawn goes down to day" (7). He is again repeating his argument. Nature's leaf is a flower that turns back into a leaf. Eden's Adam and Eve start off perfect but are exiled because of their sins. Dawn is meant to be a golden hour when Nature casts a golden light over everything it touches. Yet, in three emphasized syllables, we go from golden dawn to a mundane day.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:39 PM

Comment: Each and every line of the text is analyzed/interpreted.

Frost creatively ends his poem by using meter to demonstrate just how imperfect we are. Frost writes the whole poem in perfect iambic trimeter that gives an accent to every second syllable in each line. Yet, the last line is flawed with only 5 syllables when it should have 6. In the last line "Nothing gold can stay", the meter is broken on the word "gold" (6). Here, Frost exhibits that even he and his poetry are flawed. Instead of merely telling us that humans cannot remain ideal for long, he shows us by having his poem mirror our flaws.

Overall, Frost's clever use of literary devices allows the reader to experience his argument instead of merely listening to it.

Devin Ozdogu 6/22/09 4:39 PM

Comment: Concluding paragraph is an enhanced version of the thesis. The central idea is the same, but it should be more sophisticated or more complex.