

Growing Up Latino Essay Guidelines

The purpose of this essay is to write an analysis of the main character in one of the following stories: “The Moths,” “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas,” or “The Day the Cisco Kid Shot John Wayne.” As you write think of your audience, in that you are writing to those who have read the story and are interested in your interpretation of the main character. What you want to do is present your interpretation of the narrator’s characterization, and show that your analysis is accurate and plausible. You should set forth an idea about the main character, and then highlight scenes from the story that support your thesis.

Purpose: To write an analysis that develops an interpretation of the story’s main character and explains how that interpretation is supported through the context of the story.

Audience: Those interested in the story.

Tone: Reasonable and free of distortions. Medium level of formality. Keep the use of “I” to a minimum.

How To Get Started

You first need to choose one of the three stories: “The Moths,” “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas,” or “The Day the Cisco Kid Shot John Wayne.” Which story captures your interest? The narrator or main character will be the focus of your essay, and you will need to develop a thesis statement or controlling idea about this character and the story told.

Pre-Writing Activities

As with this semester’s previous essays, the body of the essay will be comprised of several sections that are woven together by transition sentences reflecting the thesis. Those sections are the following: **summary, problem, resolution, symbolism**. The length of each section ranges from $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page to two pages, as necessary to express your ideas and thoughts.

Summary: A summary relates an outline of what happens in the story, to whom, and why in a precise and compressed fashion.

Problem: All short stories focus on a problem, conflict, or major issue that the central character encounters. For the story that you’ve chosen, you will need to explain and describe this problem, conflict or major issue. Ask yourself, “What problem does this character face?” A one sentence answer to this question can serve as a topic sentence for a paragraph. After the topic sentence, use examples from the text and from your own knowledge, observations, and experience to support your ideas. You may need to write multiple paragraphs in order to fully express your ideas.

Resolution: In order for a story to finish, the problem presented must come to a resolution, or the problem must be solved in one way or another. Ask yourself, “How is the problem solved?” A one sentence answer to this question can serve as a topic sentence for a paragraph. After the topic sentence, use examples from the text and from your own knowledge, observations, and experience to support your ideas. You may need to write multiple paragraphs in order to fully express your ideas.

Symbolism: In quality short stories there are multiple levels of meaning. There is the literal level of what happens, where and why, but the story also pushes further through the use of carefully placed symbols. According to The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature, Michael Meyer writes, “A symbol is a person, object, or event that suggests more than its literal meaning” (193). Using Meyer’s definition pick a symbol within the story and fully describe how it expands the story’s meaning. (Yikes! How do you do that? Don’t worry we’ll identify symbols in-class as part of our discussions and group work.)

To start, pick a person, object, or event in the story. What is the literal function of this item? Now, keep going. Besides the literal function, what does this item represent, remind you of, make you think about?

For example, a car may not be just a car. It can function as a symbol in a story. If the car is a brand-new Mercedes Benz, then this car may function in the story as a symbol of wealth, while if the car is a beat-up Chevy in need of a new transmission, then this car may function in the story as a symbol of poverty.

Once you have picked the symbol, outline its literal meaning, or what it just plain is, and then think: What does the symbol represent and how does it expand the story’s meaning?

Putting It All Together

Your essay must include the following parts: an introduction with a thesis statement, a body section, and a conclusion. The following outline may be useful as you combine the mini-essays into one cohesive piece of writing:

Section 1: Introduction

- a. Begin with a general overview of the story.
- b. The final sentence must be the thesis statement.

Section 2: The body section includes the following mini-essays: “Summary,” “Problem,” “Resolution,” “Symbolism,” and if you’re in the Puente Project one paragraph about your mentor interview.

- a. These mini-essays make up the body of your paper.
- b. You may add sections, paragraphs, sentences as needed.
- c. Before and after each mini-essay, you will need to add transitions linking the mini-essays together.
- d. Transitions must also mention and reflect the thesis.

Section 3: Conclusion

- a. These are your final words on the topic. What do you want the reader to remember?

Direct Quotations

- Your essay must also include at least **three** direct quotations from the story.
- When you include a quotation in a paragraph you need to summarize the part of the story under discussion, introduce the quote, and after the quote explain what the quote means and how it applies to your essay.
- Think: Summary, quote, explanation.
- Always explain the significance of the quote. Do not assume the quote says it all. Do not end a paragraph on a quotation.

- **Summary Quote Explanation Paragraph Format**

- Begin a paragraph with a topic sentence that echoes the thesis.
- Continue the paragraph by summarizing the event your topic sentence mentions.
- Find a quote that is relevant to the paragraph topic.
- Introduce the quote.
- Write an explanation about the quote. What does the quote mean? What does it show or imply about the story's problem, resolution, or symbolism?

Paper Requirements

1. Three to eight pages in length.
2. The paper includes an introduction with a thesis statement, body sections, and a conclusion.
3. Includes at least **three** direct quotations from the story.
4. Works Cited page.
5. Follows MLA guidelines for citation of sources, parenthetical documentation, and format.

Puente Project Mentor Interview (*Skip this section, if you're not in Puente.*)

- Call your mentor and tell them which story you've chosen for your essay.
- Also make an appointment to discuss the story.
- Prior to the appointment, re-read the story and write up at least **three** questions to ask.
- Take notes. Perhaps even bring a tape recorder to tape the conversation.
- Have fun, smile, think, and don't forget to thank your mentor for their time.

English 100
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Works Cited

Meyer, Michael. The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.