

SHORT STORIES

1. Who is the main character? Does this person's character change during the course of the story? Do you feel sympathetic toward the main character? What sort of person do you think he or she is? Does this character have a foil?
2. What pattern or structure is there to the development of the plot? Can you describe the way the events are organized? Is the structure significant to the meaning?
3. Does surprise play an important role in the plot? Is there foreshadowing? Does the author use flashbacks?
4. Is anything about the story ironic?
5. Is there any symbolism in the story? How does the author make you aware of symbolic actions, people, or objects?
6. What is the setting - the time and location? How important are these elements in the story? Could it be set in another time and place just as well? Is the setting significant to the meaning?
7. Describe the atmosphere of the story, if it is important. How does the author create this atmosphere?
8. Who narrates the story? Is the narrator reliable? What effect does the point of view have on your understanding of the story? What would be gained or lost if the story were told from a different point of view (for example, by another character)?
9. How does the title relate to the other elements in the story and to the overall meaning?
10. What is the theme of the story? Can you state it in a single sentence? How is this theme carried out?
11. Does the author's style of writing affect your interpretation of the story? If so, how would you describe the style? For example, is it conversational or formal? Familiar or unfamiliar? Simple or ornate? Ironic or satiric?

POETRY

1. Can you paraphrase the poem if necessary?
2. Who is the speaker in the poem? How would you describe this persona?
3. What is the speaker's tone? Which words reveal this tone? Is the poem perhaps ironic?
4. What heavily connotative words are used? What words have unusual or special meanings? Are any words or phrases repeated? If so, why?
5. What images does the poet use? How do the images relate to one another? Do these images form a unified pattern (a motif) throughout the poem? Is there a central, controlling image?
6. What figures of speech are used? How do they contribute to the tone and the meaning of the poem?
7. Are there any symbols? What do they mean? Are they universal symbols, or do they arise from the particular context of this poem?
8. Is the occasion for or the setting of the poem important in understanding its meaning? If so, why?
9. What is the theme (central idea) of this poem? Can you state it in a single sentence?
10. How important is the role or metrics (sound effects), such as rhyme and rhythm? How do they affect tone and meaning?
11. How important is the contribution of form, such as rhyme scheme and line arrangement? How does the form influence the overall effect of the poem?

PLAYS

1. What is the central conflict in the play? How is it resolved?
2. Does the play contain any secondary conflicts (subplots)? How do they relate to the main conflict?
3. Does the play follow a traditional dramatic structure? What is the climax? Is there a denouement?
4. Who is the main character or protagonist? What sort of person is he/she? Does this protagonist have a fatal flaw? Is the protagonist a hero?
5. Is the antagonist a person, an environment, or a social force? If a person, does the antagonist cause conflict intentionally?
6. Do the other characters provide exposition? Are they used as foils to oppose? Contrast, criticize, and thus help develop the main characters?
7. What are the time and setting of the play? How important are the elements? Could the play be set just as effectively in another time or place?
8. Does the title provide any clues to an understanding of the play? If you had to give the play another title, what would it be?
9. What is the theme of the play? Can you state it in a single sentence?
10. Is the play a tragedy, a comedy, or a mixture? Is this classification important?
11. Is the presentation realistic? Does the playwright use any special theatrical devices? If so, what effect do they have on your impression on the play?