

Writing Notes: Character Analysis

The purpose of my suggestions on your papers is to:

1. correct errors
2. give you ideas about what to add to your essay
3. help you organize your thoughts
4. model for you what “mature academic voice” looks like, what a deeper reflection looks like, etc.
 - a. When I write a model sentence on your essay, feel free to use it. When I write these sentences, I try to take your ideas and your writing style, and mold them into a clearer, more sophisticated sentence. This is the best way I know to teach you how to improve your own writing.
5. I spend a lot of time writing on your essays and on preparing writing note because I know how much they will help you to improve. Please read them carefully, ask all the questions that you have, and spend a lot of time revising. It will pay off ☺
6. When you read my comments, look for patterns. Why did I reverse the order of your sentence? How does it flow better and sound clearer now? Why did I change is shown to Bambara shows? Why did I change stuff to actions?

Suggestions to the whole class:

1. Reflect on a deeper level. Stay focused and develop your argument carefully. Avoid tangents or jumping ahead to a second level of meaning before you lay out your point. See model below.
2. When you build an argument, don’t just repeat your topic sentence with different words. Develop an interpretation—it should be deeper, more complicated, and more nuanced than your topic sentence. Your quotation is more than evidence: it is the basis of your analysis, your inference. As you build ideas, be sure to finish one idea before you move on to the next point. Often people get a good idea out and immediately move on before reflecting deeply enough.
3. Choose a meaty enough quotation to fuel this argument, not just a line that proves your point.
 - a. Choose “So I keep Raymond on the inside of me, and he plays like he’s driving a stage coach which is OK by me so long as he doesn’t run me over”
 - b. Rather than “Sometimes I slip and say my little brother Raymond.”
4. Quote a big enough chunk of the quotation so that you have enough to reflect on in depth (but don’t quote too much)
5. Carefully introduce the quotation with the context or chunk the quotation into your own sentence (see examples below)
6. Aim for a mature academic voice. Mature academic voice = sophisticated, analytical writing that uses precise vocabulary, sentence variety, and complex ideas without being unnecessarily complicated. See models below
7. The “why she changes” paragraph should analyze the event that makes her change, not discuss how she changes.
8. Tighten up your writing: delete unnecessary phrases, words, sentences. Write as clearly and simply as you can without oversimplifying or missing the depth of the story. Avoid repetition
9. Work on transitions: along similar lines, by the end of the story, however, . . . Make a clear transition when you move from Squeaky at the beginning to Squeaky at the end
10. Avoid repeating words and phrases. Vary your word choice and vary your sentence structure so that every sentence doesn’t begin with, “She realizes . . .”
 - a. Start with, “In order to understand the importance of pride, Squeaky . . .” or “Walking with confidence, she blurts out . . .” to break up the pattern
11. stay in the present tense
12. avoid the informal you
13. watch out for run on sentences: use the semi colon ;

14. after you make all your changes, do a final, final proofread. I recommend reading your essay out loud so that you can hear awkward sections and typos.

Content Suggestions to the whole class:

1. Be sure not to oversimplify, get to the nuance. Why does Squeaky brag so much? What can you infer from this behavior (not just that she's stuck up, but that she's hiding her true insecurities)
2. Why is it such a big deal that Raymond shows his running talent? He is developmentally disabled . . . what has he ever had "to call his own"? This really matters in Raymond's situation because he won't have many opportunities to shine.
3. Be sure to have something about Raymond in this essay, can't really analyze the story effectively without it

Introductions: use mature academic voice and stay focused

In his short story, "The Necklace," Guy de Maupassant shows us that money isn't everything through the transformation of his main character, Mathilde. Mathilde grows from a selfish girl obsessed by money into a mature woman who knows the value of hard work. Losing a seemingly valuable necklace and struggling for ten years to pay off the debt teaches her this valuable lesson.

Paragraph structure

1. topic sentence
2. introduce the quotation by giving the context
3. quotation or specific example
4. reflection on the quotation (3-5 sentences)

At the beginning of the story, Mathilde is lazy and selfish. Even "The sight of the little Breton maid doing her simple housework aroused in her passionate regrets and hopeless dreams" (8). Not only does Mathilde not lift a finger to help with the housework, but seeing a plain maid, rather than a fancy butler, work for her provokes her into a frenzy of depression. Mathilde does not find activities to occupy herself or to enjoy her leisure at home; she merely sits around and sulks, whines, and complains. Paralyzed by envy of the wealthier classes, she doesn't realize the value of what she has: a decent home and a loving husband (that she nevertheless despises because he can appreciate a good stew).

Build your argument carefully

Instead of:

At the beginning of the story, Squeaky thinks all girls are fake. She says "I'm thinking that all girls never smile at each other because they don't know how and don't want to know how and there's probably no one to teach us how, cause grown up girls don't know either." This shows how confused she is. She doesn't realize that she's fake too.

Aim for:

In the beginning of the story, Squeaky naively believes that all girls are fake; all girls, that is, except for herself. While running down Broadway Avenue, Squeaky has a confrontation with two of her rivals and one flashes her a fake smile. As she describes the scene, Squeaky explains:

and I'm thinking that all girls never smile at each other because they don't know how and don't want to know how and there's probably no one to teach us how, cause grown up girls don't know either.

Of course this smile is fake; who would give a genuine smile when she's trying to insult her enemy?

Squeaky's central problem is that she has no friends. Because she has never had a friend, she has never experienced a real smile and this sadly leads her to assume that girls are incapable of smiling because they are *all* fake. Squeaky is so busy protecting her brother and keeping up her reputation of "being the baddest thing around," that she has never given anyone a chance to be her friend. The ultimate irony here is that Squeaky is also fake; her tough girl act is not only a front to protect her brother, but also to cover her insecurity about having no friends. Who's actually being "real" here?

Strong Lines

- "This is Squeaky's defensive response to Gretchen, Mary Louise, and Rosie when they clash on Broadway Street." Alek
- "For her it's like seeing something really amazing because her brother has a mental disorder, and watching him do something really hard is incredibly rewarding." Alexis
- "She comes off as tough so that no one will see how insecure she is about her self and the easiest way for her to do this is to put on the tough girl act, and make people think that she hasn't a care in the world." Victoria