

## Literary Analysis Guideposts:

Adapted from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C. Foster

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A guidepost can be a starting point for writing an interpretive essay – a sort of blueprint for enabling you to find a concept imbedded in the text. When you feel you have located a guidepost in a story, analyze the surrounding details for proof of your idea. Just as a good thesis needs a good three part proof (statement of organization) a strong example of a literary guidepost will be shown by the number of pieces of evidence (and their relative weight/merit) for that guidepost you can locate.

**1. The Quest:** Anytime a character leaves one location and travels to another, it may be a quest. The components are as follows:

- a. A destination.
- b. A stated reason to go there (why does the character believe s/he needs to go to this place?)
- c. Obstacles or trials to overcome.
- d. The real reason for the trip, which is always self-knowledge. What does the character learn about himself/herself?

**Pop Culture Example:** The film *Money Ball* embodies the concept of a quest. *Money Ball* follows the life of Billie Beane, the general manager of the Oakland A's. When Beane took the general manager role in 1997, the A's were in a very difficult situation; they had very little money and were not developing talented players in their "farm system." Beane wiped the slate clean when he arrived, practicing new strategies and forgetting old ones. Beane decided to analyze players using their "on-base percentage," which was unheard of in baseball and contracted players that were seen as unqualified by other teams. As the general manager of the Oakland A's, Beane faced severe criticism from people internally (other high executives) and externally (the media and fans). It was a long road until Beane saw success, but it eventually came in the form of wins in the regular season and playoff appearances. Although Beane didn't attain the ultimate goal (winning the World Series), he was able to learn things throughout this quest. Beane learned that "sticking to his guns" isn't necessarily a bad thing, even when everyone surrounding him thinks so. He also found that his love for the A's exceeded his desire for money. In 2002, he declined the Boston Red Sox's general manager offer, which would have made him the highest paid general manager in the history of baseball.

**Literary Example:** A great example of a quest is the journey down the Mississippi River in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck Finn decides to head down the river after continual beatings from his father. Along this journey, Huck meets many people and is put in many situations that challenge his beliefs. Probably the most visible example is Huck's relationship with Jim. Jim is a runaway slave that ends up traveling with Huck for most of the novel. Huck is initially very offensive towards Jim due to his aristocratic childhood, and often considers turning him in. However, Huck does not as he realizes that friendship can come in any fashion. Huck ends up making his journey focused more on bringing Jim to a slave-free state than anything else. The growth in Huck's maturity is tremendous by the end of the novel. Because of his "quest" to travel to a new location, Huck becomes a more mature and less biased character throughout the novel.

**Question:** Can you locate a quest, identifying all components in the story?

**2. Nice to Eat With You—Acts of Communion:** anytime an author brings characters together for a meal (an inherently dull event... who cares if people are eating?) the purpose is to give the reader a close-up look at the relationships between characters, and about the characters as individuals... it is like putting a microscope up to the participants.

**Pop Culture Example:** In *Thor*, Thor is a demi-god from another planet that finds himself stranded on Earth. He befriends some earthlings (Natalie Portman) and since he hasn't eaten in a few days they take him out to a small café so that he may replenish his strength and quench his thirst and hunger. During this meal, Thor exclaims that the coffee is delicious, smashes the cup on the floor, and then demands that he be given another. This exemplifies his somewhat rough and savage nature as well as the fact that since he from a royal family he is used to being pampered and catered to. This scene in the movie shows that Thor

will have to learn to not be so arrogant and full of himself if he wishes to successfully regain his kingdom and be a true and good leader. It is these discrete scenes that allow the audiences to see traits and characteristics in the characters that otherwise would have taken longer to be discovered.

**Literary Example:** In many stories, plot and character development occurs while the key players sit down for a meal together. In Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, some of the most important advancements in the story occurred when Raskolnikov sat down for dinner with Dunya and her fiancée. This is where we really begin to see the strange obsession that is driving him to try to force her to cut off her engagement with Luzhin. Over the course of the meal, we see some of the extreme psychological flaws that drives Raskolnikov to commit murder. While we could discover these things regardless of the setting or situation, learning them over the course of a meal is somehow more impact full. Because most everyone can relate to the closeness that we often feel while sitting down at the table with our family, we are able to connect to the characters more effectively. We understand what the characters are feeling even if we have not experienced the exact same situation. If the same information about the plot and the characters were revealed some other way, it may not be as easy for the reader to understand what is happening quite as well.

**Questions:** Can you locate a shared meal between characters in the story - may be a literal meal where food is consumed, or it may be a more figurative meal (characters drinking or doing drugs together at a party)? Look carefully at the details, the descriptions, what the characters say to each other, and what they don't say to each other...what do you learn about them and their relationships?

**3. Nice to Eat You—Acts of Vampires:** We're not necessarily speaking here of literal vampires (Dracula, the Vampire Lestat), although we may be...but we are also speaking of figurative vampires- those characters who engage in vampire like behavior. Figurative vampirism has to do with the following:

A. The darker side of sexuality—the act of sinking teeth into another person's neck is a form of penetration—the kind of sex that is about body shame rather than intimate freedom, that is about unwholesome lust rather than natural desire, that is about seduction and temptation rather than a meeting of equals.

B. Selfishness/exploitation— a vampire, literal or figurative, wants what he wants when he wants it...his/her needs come first, over anyone else's (a literal vampire drinks someone else's blood to live, killing the victim; a figurative vampire may take advantage of a person in some other way for selfish pleasure).

C. Refusal to respect the autonomy of other people—a vampire doesn't take "No" for an answer, whether it is a literal vampire telling a victim he has no choice but to bare his throat, or a figurative vampire holding a gun to someone's head and issuing orders.

D. Experience taking advantage of inexperience—acts of Vampires often involve an older, more mature and sophisticated vampire preying upon a younger and more naïve victim.

E. Consumption/need to eat—the vampire consumes his her victims. A literal vampire drains the blood of a victim, leaving the victim weak or dead, because the vampire needs to eat; a figurative vampire in some sense consumes the life force of another to sustain himself, such as a slave holder who uses a slave to do the work the slave holder needs done to survive.

**Popular Culture Example:** In *The Black Swan*, the more experienced, street-smart dancer, Lily seduced the young and naïve Nina (experience over inexperience sexually). Lily uses her sexuality and worldly experience to distract Nina from what her true goal was, which was to land the role of the White Swan (selfishness/exploitation). She takes over Nina's thoughts and makes her unable to make decisions for herself, forcing her into certain situations she normally wouldn't be put in (refusal to respect autonomy). Lily takes Nina's innocent thoughts towards sexuality and transforms them into darker, more passionate thoughts (darker side of sexuality). Lily uses drugs to control Nina and keep her from doing the things that are necessary to keep her role. She forces Nina to skip rehearsals and weaken her skills so that she is unable to perform at her full potential (consumption/need to eat).

**Literary Example:** Every character in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* is put into a situation in which they are forced to exterminate every person in order to keep their own lives (consumption/need to eat). The tributes from the top districts were given more food and wealth in their upbringing, which made

them more powerful and better trained than the tributes from the poor districts (experience taking advantage of inexperience). The tributes chosen have no escape from the dangerous competition and are left in the hands of the gamemakers in the capital, who are controlling the game (refusal to respect autonomy). The tributes are forced to think only about themselves because only one person can survive in the end (selfishness/exploitation). Katniss Everdeen, the main character uses her sexuality to convince people watching the games that she loves the other tribute from her district, Peeta Mellark. She does this in order to receive gifts and support from sponsors, which will help her gain strength and further her personal gain (darker side of sexuality).

**4. Where Have I Seen This Before?** There is no such thing as a wholly original work of literature—all great works of art are influenced by what has come before them, and in literature this is more particularly the case, perhaps, because of what literature treats—the human condition. As human beings, we share certain emotions and experiences in common—the details may differ, but the fundamental experiences do not. We may lose a sister to suicide, or a best friend to cancer, but we all experience the loss of a loved one in a similar way. This is why well-written literature resonates with us—we feel what the characters feel because we share common experiences of some sort. The Bible and other great religious works provide framework for many contemporary stories; fairy and folktales provide another rich base for more modern stories; Shakespeare’s works have been often replicated in modernized versions of the Bard’s tales; and Greek mythology provides an ample supply of framework stories. This dialog between old texts and new texts—*intertextuality*—enables us to see new meanings where we may have missed them before.

**Example from Shakespeare:** In Stephenie Meyer’s saga of the Twilight books, the love interest between the two main characters is very similar to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Although the two are in love, they are many forces pushing them apart. They wish to be together, however they cannot because of the circumstances. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the families had a pre-existing feud that kept the two apart. In Twilight, the characters faced many obstacles that kept them from being together. Although the circumstances were different, the situation is very much alike.

**Example from the Bible:** In Revelations, the world comes to a violent and torrid end. In the modern movie *Day After Tomorrow*, world is destroyed by a horrific natural disaster. These two works of literature reflect the common of destruction of the world.

**Example from Greek Mythology:** In Greek mythology, Odysseus returns home after his long journey by a favorable and mystical current of wind. In the *Sponge Bob* movie, Mindy gives Sponge Bob and Patrick a magical bag of wind so they can get home.

**Example from Fairy Tales:** In “Cinderella,” she is forced to live with her evil stepmother and wicked stepsisters. At the end of the movie, she finds her prince and is taken away to a better life. In the movie *Cinderella Story*, Hillary Duff’s character Sam has to work in a diner and is taken advantage of by her stepmother and mean stepsisters. While she doesn’t meet a real prince, she meets a boy from high school who is her prince charming.

**Questions:** Is there any aspect of your story/novel that seems familiar to you? A plot, a character, a setting? Once you have identified some aspect that seems familiar, think about other related examples you remember from the classics...do more details strike you as similar to the work you were initially reminded of? If so, does this help you see some aspect of the story in a new light?

**5. Stormy Weather:** Weather, like acts of communion, always represents or shows the reader something...it’s not just a random detail.

A. **Rain:** rain can represent sadness (tears from the sky) or depression. Since rain water is needed for plants to grow, it can also represent a healing sadness, or just the positive healing part...rain can come with spring, and be about new life.

B. **Heat:** represents anger (our faces flush with anger), passion (another reason our faces flush); and hot weather can be considered a catalyst for either of these (in *Romeo and Juliet*, tempers flare in the heat); the film *Gladiator* takes place in the Roman summer; rage and the lust for vengeance are fueled by the heat, as is the gladiator’s passion for the sister of his persecutor.

C. **Snow:** represent frigidity (because of the cold), emotional coldness (for the same reason), purity (because of the white color), and death (because of the inability of life with withstand the cold). In “The Dead,” when Gabriel looks out upon the snow, he realizes that he is like Michael Furey, like the monks sleeping in their coffins, like all humanity.

D. **Fog:** represents fear of the unknown (you can’t see clearly in it), hidden danger (for the same reason), and camouflage (it enables people to hide). In *Dracula*, the fog that surrounds the ship bringing Dracula to England represents the hidden danger coming to the people of London, and the Harker’s and Westenra’s confusion about what is happening to them.

E. **Electrical Storm:** represents danger (you can be electrocuted), shock (lightning bolts shoot from the sky suddenly, accompanied by loud thunder), or God’s judgment (Zeus sent his lightning bolts to punish wrongdoers). In “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe, both an electrical storm that destroys the house and a lightning-shaped fissure in the castle indicate God’s judgment on the Usher family.

### **Pop Culture and Literary Examples of Stormy Weather:**

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, the scene starts off as a beautiful day, yet it changes so rapidly that it changed the moods of all the characters. The stormy weather had a reaction to both the characters and the mood of the book. This caused the trip to become sour.

In *Harry Potter*, the scene and the storm causes an eerie and unknown feeling of what events were going to happen. This gave Hagrid, a lovable giant, the view of anger and a feeling of intrusion. This is what is perceived by the family.

In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, when Hagrid comes to pick up Harry and scares the family with a storm behind him showing uncertainty and protecting the unknown.

In *Crime and Punishment*, following the murder scene Raskolnikov begins the walk back to his house; he is in a numb and emotionless state of mind and while he is starting to break down a huge storm rolls in. This dramatic scene is exemplified by the loud thunder and pouring rain. This change in scenery shows his emotions.

The stormy weather in *Night* produced an extremely somber and negative view on the death march by Wiesel and his father. As the reader, this scene in the book was directly affected by the stormy weather. If this scene had been displayed with bright sunshine and no clouds, it would have had a completely different affect on the book.

The stormy weather in *Hamlet* during the “to be or not to be” speech creates an atmosphere appropriate with Hamlet’s suicide speech.

The stormy weather in *Friday Night Lights*, during Boobie Miles last game of his career expresses the deep depression that will follow for Boobie. He gets his cleat stuck in the muddy grass from the storm after his team had already sealed the victory and tears his ACL, ending his dreams of becoming a college star and NFL player.

**Questions:** Is there any place in the novel/story in which weather is described in detail? Do any of the previously mentioned representations make sense given the story line? Are their details about the way the weather is described that give the reader further clues as to what the weather represents here? Look for specific words, phrases, connotations.

**6. Violence:** Violence in a well-written work does more than merely further the story line and complicate things for the characters...it should provide clues to the character’s personalities, and clues about the world they inhabit.

**Pop Culture Example:** In the film *Gladiator*, the final scene and climax point occurs when Commodus the ruler of the Roman Empire battles the best known Gladiator around Maximus. This final battle shows us a lot about the two characters, their similarities and differences. Maximus and Commodus are both killers, but Commodus does it for pleasure where as Maximus is enslaved and forced to do so. Before they begin to fight to the death, Commodus stabs Maximus without anyone seeing to give himself an advantage. This shows a lot about his dishonest character. Maximus sucks it up and fights Commodus to the death, proving his strong character. The violence in the film *Gladiator* ultimately provides insight to the main characters, like Maximus and Commodus.

**Literary Example:** *The Hunger Games* trilogy uses violence as a guidepost to help readers get a better perspective on the characters. When Katniss Everdeen is chosen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death against 23 other teenagers, she does her best to avoid killing and being killed. She makes allies with a little girl named Rue and protects her amongst all the violence. This gives away enough to readers to hint that Katniss Everdeen is a good person, just in a bad situation.

**Questions:**

1. What does the episode of violence tell you about the hidden motive of the perpetrator? Of the victim? What do you learn about their hidden personalities—what makes them tick—their strengths and weaknesses?
2. What does the episode of violence tell you about the world at large? Does the whole world weep (figuratively) over the episode (as in the poem “Lycidas” in which the whole world cries for the death of one young man) or does the world go on, unchanged, uncaring, as in Robert Frost’s poem “Out, Out”? Is there concern, grief, indifference?
3. What is the root cause of the violence – is it internally conditioned or historically conditioned? If it is internally conditioned, the perpetrator is just plain “bad to the bone” because he/she is just bad—a sociopath with no conscience, perhaps. If the violence is historically conditioned, our perpetrator may be good at heart (Sethe in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* does kill one of her children in an uncommonly violent manner, however, her violence is historically conditioned—her experience of slavery was so violent, so brutal, that in her mind, death is better for her children, and so the violence, though tragic, is in some sense understandable.

7. **Symbolism:** a one-to-one correspondence is an allegory (the object can represent one thing/idea)—a true symbol may represent many things, adding richness to the text, and multiple possibilities - however it is NOT true that a symbol can mean whatever you want it to mean. Your identification of a symbol must be disciplined by the text, in other words, you must have real evidence from the text related to that symbol to prove your point.

**Popular Culture Example:** In *No Country For Old Men*, the antagonist and villain, Anton Chigurh may represent many different things. He may symbolize, as he sees himself, destiny personified, the embodiment of fate and chance. By flipping a coin to decide someone’s fate he is not responsible for the decision; he simply enforces the rules that only he understands. He may also symbolize the Reaper, as his on-screen killings often show him mirroring his victims, or shadowing them. They often are forced to face him after he stalks them and his killings are always in a single motion. Many focused shots appear of him passing through thresholds or still in hallways to juxtapose his motions. Chigurh may also represent the Devil or the ultimate evil, as his ruthless murders may be completely unjustifiable. Any of these can have an argument made in their favor but they may be mutually exclusive – though there is no definitive answer or incorrect interpretation.

**Literary Example:** In Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, Milo’s chocolate covered cotton could symbolize a number of things. Milo’s monopoly on the Egyptian cotton market left his syndicate with a boundless surplus, and he is trying to find other uses to sell it for. It could be showing how profit motive far surpasses customer satisfaction and even product safety. It also erodes at the idea that a syndicate is equally beneficial to all of its members, as Milo tries to peddle inedible and disgusting food to them. The chocolate covered cotton may also symbolize the redundancy of commercialism and the creation of completely unusable products.

**Questions:**

1. Does the lens of the viewer focus on an object – whether it be film or prose – with great detail? If it is repeatedly and intensely illustrated, it could be a symbol.
2. Does the object reappear? A recurring image may be symbolic.
3. Does the object come into contact with the characters? Effects on character development or arc could be symbolic.

**8. It’s All Political:** People and/or events in the story may represent political ideas either positively or negatively...usually reflecting the political concerns that were contemporary to the writer. Political commentary can be difficult to discern when it is presented symbolically, unless one is familiar with the

political concerns of the time...this is an area in which reading widely will assist you, but if haven't yet read widely, try the following:

- A. Find the year the book was written, and do a little research on the political concerns of those times (type the year into a search engine and see what comes up).
- B. Consult literary criticism for clues (check the Gale literary data base for articles, or a main library catalogue for book-length works designed to help explicate the political and social concerns of the day, e.g. "The Annotated Alice" explores Carroll's specific political concerns regarding ideology, specific politicians and historical figures, views on social issues, etc.)

**Pop Culture Example:** In *Boardwalk Empire* the character Nucky Thompson and his mistress Margaret Schroeder are involved in a debate through which they use religious stories to justify their point of view. Nucky's story is that a man was stuck on the roof of his house during a flood. A small boat came by and offered to save him to which the man replied, "God will save me," and to the next larger boat that came by offering assistance, "God will save me," and to an even bigger boat "God will save me." The man goes to heaven and asks God "why didn't you save me?" God replied, "What do you expect? I sent three boats." Margaret offers her story as well. In hell there is a table with the most delicious foods man could ever hop to have. However all the sinners are given long spoons that are too long so they cannot feed themselves. Their punishment is the temptation of the food. In heaven there is the same table except everyone is content and full. For the people who made it to heaven use the long spoons to feed each other. However Nucky disagrees with Margaret's story saying it is necessary for one to help himself so that he can help others.

This scene is actually a social commentary on social programs in the United States. The show is set in the 1920's where Americans were doing quite well yet right before the Great Depression. The economic conditions were similar to what we saw from the 1990's to current early 21st century. This debate is on how we should fix poverty as we in our current society still face the same unanswered question. The debate seems to be should everyone help themselves through hard work. If everyone would take care of himself/herself, couldn't we be free of the burden of relying on others? Yet we could also all help each other through social programs and benefits to those who are disadvantaged so that everyone can be helped and succeed as a whole. Margaret, the immigrant to America seeking opportunity, believes in helping others because she has the benefit of receiving aid from wealthy men. Nucky Thompson, a largely self made man, corrupt politician, and gangster thinks everyone should help himself or herself as he did. Whose side has the right of it? The increasingly less innocent immigrant whose destiny seems to coincide with the men she sleeps with? Or the corrupt politician who murders and lies his way to the top of the illegal alcohol trade? It could also come down to whose story you like better.

**Literary Example:** In Voltaire's *Candide* we follow the main character Candide through a series of adventures that are ridiculous. He continues on a dark journey where he debates philosophical ideas. The subject of his attack is mainly the "best of all worlds" idea. The best of all possible worlds essentially is the idea that all of the bad things that happen in this world will eventually lead to good. To counter this point, Voltaire shows us horrible things in his work, and brutalizes the characters to show how ridiculous this notion can be. However, in an overwhelmingly negative book, we do see a few positive pages discussing El Dorado. One of the villagers says to Candide that the Government owns everything.

The phrase the Government owns everything may be an endorsement of socialism, a criticism, or simply an observation of its workings. Voltaire may have been endorsing socialism because all of the residents are intelligent, friendly, happy, and satisfied people. They want nothing and need nothing. Yet, Voltaire may also be criticizing socialism with ludicrous details such as - the children play with rubies and jewels in the streets, and the locals describe gold as yellow mud. Voltaire may also use these details to criticize socialism, because it may only work if money lined the streets figuratively and literally. However this minor detail may be overlooked entirely and the text still serves its political purpose. The chief openly says he does not understand the Europeans' fascination with yellow mud. Voltaire may be criticizing European imperialism as a bunch of idiots committing atrocities over "yellow mud."

**9. Christ Figures:** When reading Western literature, no matter what one's personal religious convictions, an understanding of the religious heritage that has informed/influenced society and thus that society's literature will aid understanding (e.g. a serious student of eastern literature should have some background in eastern religious texts in order to better understand eastern literature.) Christ figures appear in English literature stemming from Jewish/Catholic/Anglican teaching in Great Britain, and from Jewish/Puritan influence in

the United States. If a character has three or more of these qualities- he/she is a possible Christ figure (\*note similar lists might be constructed to aid in the search for other savior figures from other faiths...how is a character like Moses, like Buddha, like Mohammed, like Coyote, etc.)

- A. Crucified: (may have wounds in hands, feet, side, or brow)
- B. Agony: (pain greater than most mortals are asked to endure)
- C. Self-sacrificing: (not necessarily to the point of death). Jesus gave his life to pay for the sins of humanity, your character may give something of himself/herself up to benefit another person or people group.
- D. Good with children: when the disciples told children Jesus was too busy and important to see them, Jesus scolded his disciples and told them he was there for their children. Is your character good with children, or one child in particular? Does the character treat a child as important?
- E. Loaves, Fish, Water, Wine: Jesus performed miracles with these objects—feeding groups of people with almost nothing, changing one substance into another, etc. Does your character interact with these objects?
- F. 33 years of age: (Jesus was roughly early-middle age when he performed his ministry—is your character middle aged?)
- G. Carpenter: your character may be a carpenter, or someone with a career generally considered less important... a plumber, a mild-mannered reporter, etc.
- H. Walked on water: may be figurative for your character—does he/she spend time on a boat, time floating, etc.
- I. Time alone in the wilderness.
- J. Tempted by the devil: Jesus withstood the devil’s temptations—is your character tempted by something and able to morally withstand?
- K. Spends time with criminals without being one of them: Jesus spent times with thieves, hookers, etc. and treated them like human beings without being one of them... does your character do the same?
- L. Buried and rose on the third day: (may not be literal—is there some sense in which your character is hidden from view for three days, then reappears?)
- M. 12 disciples: Jesus had people who followed him, emulated him, and sought to be like him... does your character have someone or some group of people who follow him or her?
- N. Unusually forgiving: Jesus publicly forgave those who put him to a painful death... does your character forgive someone above and beyond the call of duty?
- O. Redeems an unworthy world: Jesus came to save a world that didn’t really deserve it... does your character save someone or a group of people who doesn’t deserve to be saved?
- P. Predecessor/prophet: Jesus had John the Baptist—a prophet who announced Jesus’ coming beforehand, prepared people for Jesus’ arrival, and helped start Jesus’ ministry. Does your character have a predecessor?
- Q. Baptism: Jesus started his ministry with a baptism—he went under that water and came up from it to symbolize a death to an old way of life and a beginning of a new way of life that is more enlightened . . . does your character go in the water and come up wiser?
- R. The One: Jesus was the only one of his kind- a man, but more than a man (God in man’s form). Is your character human, but more than human?
- S. Halo: In Catholic tradition, Jesus’ head was surrounded by an unearthly light.

### **Pop Culture Examples:**

John Connor from the *Terminator* is a Christ figure: as a boy he is looked upon as a rowdy, teenage boy into all the wrong things. He is looked down upon as less important until we find out that he is destined to save the human race in the future. He endures emotional and physical pain as he fights to survive to be able to lead the human race to victory as they overcome the machines that have taken over. He is saving a world that created the machines in the first place and he is roughly middle-aged when he does so. Also his initials can also stand for Jesus Christ.

One of these stories is an ultimate classic to our generation, *The Lion King*. In this story, Simba, the son of the king, is chased brutally by his uncle whom is desperate for the throne. Simba’s father is killed and Simba escapes off into the Pride Lands to hide. These lands are the barest, most simple lands across the whole kingdom, and they are also where Simba chooses to live until adulthood amongst his new

acquaintances. After plenty of time passes Simba returns to his homeland to find it destroyed, without a trace of food or water. His people are defeated without hope for any future until the prince returns and defeat his evil uncle who had taken over and obliterated the land. Almost instantaneously after Simba's victory the land replenishes itself and all is well again. Simba is re-crowned king and rivers begin to flow, vegetation bursts with rapid expansion, and everyone is happy. The symbolic, Christ-like appearance within this Pop-culture film lies in the closing scene of the movie when Simba defeats Scar. Once Simba has defeated the evil the land surrounding his kingdom instantly rejuvenates itself and becomes filled with life once again. Simba plays the role of the guardian angel; the Christ figure to risk his whole life at the stake of his people. He does not die for his kind; he saves his people through battle. And once battle has ended, all is well and his people are saved. This gorgeous scene of running rivers and flowery fields exploding with light nearing the movie's end is allegorical of the dramatic heart change experienced when Christ takes root in a person's life.

### **Literary Examples:**

Edward in *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* is a Christ figure. Halfway through his journey, Edward, the porcelain rabbit, ends up getting himself nailed to a pole. The way that Kate DiCamillo describes this scene a very obvious description of a Christ figure. Edward's arms are spread out on the pole and his feet and arms are nailed to the pole just like Christ to be used as a scarecrow on a farm. This moment in this children's book is like a reincarnation for Edward the rabbit. After being taken down, he feels more compassionate and begins to love people, whereas before he was selfish and arrogant.

Santiago from *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway is a classic literary Christ figure. A Cuban fisherman by trade, Santiago headed out to sea everyday for eighty-four days and returned empty handed everyday. On the eighty-fifth day, he decided he would head far in to the gulf and finally catch a fish. As he's fishing, his bait catches and he immediately knows it's a marlin. Santiago does not have the strength to reel it back in and he is dragged by it for 3 days. The marlin finally tires and the fisherman is able to kill it. On his way back however, his catch leaves a trail of blood and attracts a hoard of sharks. By the time he reaches shore, all that is left of his prize is bone. Santiago collapses in his home and dreams of his childhood in Africa.

There are several allusions to the crucifixion of Christ in the novel's use of imagery as well as plot. In order to deliver the true significance of the old man's plight, Hemingway draws up several parallels between Santiago and Jesus Christ. When the marlin first takes hold of the fisherman's line, the fisherman's palms are cut from the fishing line. It's a fairly blatant comparison to the stakes driven through the palms of Christ. In an even more obvious allusion to Christ, Santiago lets out a cry of anguish when the sharks arrive similar to a man having nails driven through his hands. When Santiago gets to shore, he carries his mast on his shoulders with his arms outstretched, a replication of Christ's position during his crucifixion. Finally, when Santiago reaches his home and collapses, he resembles Christ again as he lays with his arms outstretched and palms up.

On top of the imagery and symbolism alluding to Santiago as a Christ figure, the novel is rife with plot details that are similar to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Santiago is a martyr. His inability to catch fish is the beginning. The reader may wonder why the old man stays with the marlin for three days, eating only fish bait. Catching the marlin is a journey more than anything. He begins to respect the marlin and calls it "brother." Santiago goes through his figurative crucifixion and resurrection. The fact that he was at sea for three days is no coincidence either. From the bible, "On the third day he rose again." Three days for the figurative resurrection of Santiago, and three days for the rebirth of Jesus. Santiago eventually transcended to make gains from his losses.

**Questions:** Which Christ-like traits does your character have and which ones? Remember that even a character with only a few of the above traits can be considered a Christ Figure.

**10. Flight:** Your character may literally fly, think or dream of flying, or figuratively fly (jump, hang, or somehow be suspended above ground). This can be interpreted positively or negatively. Positively, it may represent freedom, happiness, escape, nonconformity, love, etc. Negatively, it may represent a rebelliousness aspect of a character; defiance of nature or religion, since we are not made to fly.



**Pop Culture Example:** In the television series *Sponge Bob*, the main character Sponge Bob wishes only to be a licensed driver but a variety of things prevent him from fulfilling this desire. He never becomes licensed, and therefore he never escapes his innocence.

**Literary Example:** In the series Harry Potter, the dark lord Voldemort teaches himself how to fly. Lord Voldemort goes against every human rule or emotion and begins flying to put himself above others and their material items such as brooms.

**Questions:** is there any time in the novel in which your character flies literally or figuratively? Are there any clues in the descriptive language that might indicate what this particular type of flight says about character? Does the end result of this “flight” tell the reader something about the meaning of flight?

**11. Sex:** Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* opened the avenue for sexual symbolism in literature. An object or event may represent sex showing the reader the hidden sexual desires/motives of the characters. An open display of a sexual encounter in literature, like acts of communion, may be replaced in the story to enable the reader to see other hidden things about the characters and their relationships to each other (in this case, look for clues as to what motivates the sexual encounter- is it dominance, submission, sacrifice, rebellion, supplication, love, enlightenment?)

**Pop Culture Example:** The majority of Rap songs on today’s charts talk about the vulgarity of sex and how the man is able to control the woman by sexual encounters. For example, Chris Brown sings/raps about intercourse in a majority of his songs, one song in particular is “Another Round,” featuring Fat Joe. This song demonstrates the weakness of one of the partners in a relationship.

**Literary Example:** One book that tends to have a series of phallic symbols is *Lord of the Flies*. This novel is about a group of boys who are stuck on an island. It appears with every chapter that there is some sort of phallic symbol in disguise as a sexual hint. For example, many of the boys on the island use long pointed spears in order to show dominance.

**Questions:** Is there any evidence of hidden sexual symbolism in your story (long objects, empty containers, etc.)? If so, when in the story are these objects mentioned, and which characters might the objects refer to? Is there an explicit sexual encounter in your story? If so, look at the setting, the descriptive language, and the positions of the characters for clues as to the meaning of this particular sexual encounter... why have these two people come together as they have?

**12. Baptism or Drowning:** If a character in some sense gets wet, watch to see what happens next. If the person emerges from the wet substance a newer, different person, wiser person, you’ve witnessed a baptism; if the person in some sense never returns (he/she is never a whole person afterward, and he/she has in some sense been swallowed up), it’s a drowning. The liquid is usually water, but not always.

**Pop Culture Example:** In James Cameron’s *Titanic*, Captain Edward John Smith stays in his quarters to sink along with his ship. He took his life in his own hands and chose to stay behind because he believed that it was the noble thing to do. This is a drowning because the captain was quite literally swallowed up by the sea and left no trace of his existence.

**Literary Example:** In Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, one of the main characters, Cheswick, drowns. It is reported that he got his fingers stuck in the grate at the bottom of the pool, but one could argue that it was a suicidal action. His drowning represents the growth of McMurphy’s rebellion and how a sense of realism has swept over the men at the ward.

**Questions:** Does your character at any time in the book become wet with any substance- does he take a shower, does she step into the rain, does blood splatter on him, is she doused in alcohol? If so, is there a change in the character following their dowsing? It is positive or negative? Does your character emerge as a new being, or is he/she swallowed up never to return?

**13. Geography Matters:** Location sets the mood, gives us clues as to what characters are feeling, and can actually guide the story. A murder in Calabasas does not mean the same thing as a murder in South Central: the murder will probably occur for different reasons, the characters' relationships will be different, their resources for evading the law or catching the criminal will be more or less depending on experience, money, the skill level of the attorneys, their support structure (family, gang, etc.).

A. If a character travels up or north, it is usually about purity, clarity or vision, isolation, snow, ice, enlightenment, standing out or standing up for something

B. If a character travels south, it's usually about crowds, obscured vision, taking a walk on the wild side, hiding, falling, etc.

### **Popular Culture Examples:**

In the movie *Holes*, the characters' physical environment acts as a metaphor for their emotional states. Camp Green Lake is dry, hard, and hot. It is a physically unpleasant place to be and the people who live there lead unpleasant lives, and the counselors are cruel and the boys are tough and often unfriendly. The camp was also created for criminals which shows how much of a punishment it is to be sent there, and the holes represent the missing components to the curse on the Yelnats family, the holes in some of the characters' lives, and the unknown true history behind Green Lake and Kate Barlow. However, the mountain that Stanley and his great-grandfather call God's thumb, is lush and green. While Stanley is there with Zero he is free of outside threats and he is very happy. It is also on God's thumb that Stanley finds out Zero was actually the one who stole the shoes and because he carried Zero up the mountain and sang to him, the curse on his family was lifted.

In *The Thing*, geography represents the dark and forbidden nature of the movie. Set in the depths of Antarctica, the viewer is instantly put into a setting where the unknown is everything. Since the movie is built upon suspense and horror, the viewer is terrorized instantly by not knowing what is to come next. The characters in the movie are taking risks just to discover the alien species that was frozen in a block of ice causing grave danger to themselves and possibly others. The geography of Antarctica provides a perfect example of the spirit of the unknown and how the human brain conjures up feelings of darkness and terror. The frozen vast desert along with the subzero temperatures of Antarctica cause the viewer to shiver into the depths of their seat awaiting the ominous chaos looming around the corner.

### **Literary Examples:**

In Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, geography plays a major role in the flow and direction of the story. In the novel, the Congo River is the key to Africa for Europeans. It allows them access to the center of the continent without having to physically cross it or in other words, it allows the white man to remain always separate or outside. As a result, Africa is reduced to a series of two-dimensional scenes that flash by Marlow's steamer as he travels upriver. The river also seems to want to keep Europeans from Africa altogether. Its current makes travel upriver slow and difficult, but the flow of water makes travel downriver, back toward "civilization," which is rapid and seemingly inevitable. Marlow's struggles with the river as he travels upstream toward Kurtz reflect his struggles to understand the situation in which he has found himself. The ease with which he journeys back downstream, on the other hand, represents his compliance to Kurtz and his "choice of nightmares."

In *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse, geography represents the travels of the wandering soul in search for answers and enlightenment in life. Geography plays a key role in describing the journey of Siddhartha through India. Some of the key geographical scenes in the novel include that of the calming river that Siddhartha spends many years as a ferryman on. Siddhartha describes the river as "all-knowing" and a calmer of souls. Hesse uses the great river as a way to inform the reader of Siddhartha's soon to be enlightenment. As well as the use of the river annotation, Hesse uses the forest to describe Siddhartha's escape from civilization and into a world of the unknown, where the answers in life are just around the corner.

**Questions:** What might journeys from one location to another tell you about the shift in tone or mood in a story: does it go from clarity to darkness or obscurity to enlightenment? Does the environment around the setting also give you clues as to what the characters' behaviors and attributes will be (is it isolated, crowded, country, city, gloomy, bright)? What about the background story and history of the location-is it a thriving land that overcame struggles or was it once a beautiful place that is now a wasteland? How might this information impact your story line and the characters living in this environment?

**14. Season Matters:** Season, like weather, may indicate hidden aspects of character or plot development. Don't look only at the seasons themselves, but also at names with season components in them—remember Winterbourne (death, coldness) and Daisy (flowers come up in the spring).

**Spring:** youth, inexperience, fertility, new life, abundance

**Summer:** heat, passion, adult sexuality

**Fall:** middle age, beginning of death, wasting away, illness, drying up, self-discovery

**Winter:** old age, end of life, purity, death, preparation for rebirth, coldness

**Pop Culture Example:** Buffy Summers (from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) is aptly named. Her character's abilities stem from a controlled form of demon possession (from the hot fires of hell), but the control enables the character to use this heat and energy for good (just as we associate summer warmth with good times).

**Literary Example:** In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," the leopard dies at the top of an icy mountain, free, preserved forever, clean; as contrasted with the protagonist, who dies at the base, in a company of people who care little for him, surrounded by decaying heat, insects, and vultures.

**Questions:** What season(s) does the story take place in? Do the character's names reflect aspects of the seasons? Do city, street, or place names reflect seasonal changes? What might this tell the reader about the characters, places, or events that will transpire in these locations?

**15. Marked for Greatness:** This guidepost is present when a unique aspect of a character's physical appearance illuminates something about him/her as an individual. In many cases a character's outward appearance reflects his/her inner character. The physical traits of characters often destine them to a certain fate or calling.

**Pop Culture Example:** In J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, protagonist Harry gets a lightning bolt scar on his forehead as a baby as the result of an attack by one of the novel's great villains, Voldemort. It becomes not only his defining physical characteristic, but burns whenever danger is imminent as well. The scar he received in this death-defying incident brings him fame, but it also gives him the significant responsibility of destroying Voldemort and restoring order.

**Literary Example:** The monster in Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, was known for his physical grotesqueness and his gruesome appearance. Shelley made the monster's undesirable appearance an important part of her novel to demonstrate the human tendency to isolate those who are different. Seeing as he had trouble fitting in with society because of his appearance, people viewed him as an outcast and did not give him the opportunity to fit in and blend in with the rest of society. In Shelley's novel and other novels alike, many physically undesirable characters are shunned from society and automatically marked for doom.

**Questions:** What makes a certain character stand out when compared to other characters (eyes, hair, scars, disabilities/abilities, etc.)? Does a character's physical appearance make him/her socially desirable or detested? What might specific traits say about a character?

**16. Blind for a Reason:** Blind characters often "see" what others do not – having heightened senses in other areas (at least in literature). If a character has a vision problem, is there a way in which he/she sees more clearly than the rest?

**Pop Culture Example:** The movie *Ray* tells the life of the famous blind pianist Ray Charles. Ray is an exceptional jazz pianist, but he is completely blind by age seven. However, this blindness in no way hinders his piano-playing ability. His blindness allows him to concentrate on the music and block everything else out. The fact that he was able to become such a good pianist in spite of his blindness helped to elevate him to fame. It also made for a good enough story to base a movie on.

**Literary Example:** *Out of Darkness: The Story of Louis Braille* tells the story of Louis Braille, the man who invented the Braille alphabet. Louis Braille accidentally blinded himself when he was three years old. He did well in school but wanted to do more. When he was young, the only way blind people could read was through feeling raised letters and this made the process of reading long and difficult. Ironically, Braille's blindness made him have an easier time seeing the solution of this problem. Braille's alphabet system worked so well since it was created by a blind person, who knew the difficulties that blind people had reading books.

**Questions:** Do any of your characters have some sort of physical disability that there is some compensation for? Does one see poorly, but have a special inner sight, is one unable to walk, but acts and accomplishes more than all the rest? Is one unable to hear, but is yet one who truly "listens" and takes into consideration what others have to say?

**17. It's Never Just Illness:** When a character has a disease in which the disease may indicate certain aspects about the character:

- A. Heart disease may indicate a failure of the heart . . . failure to love, failure in courage
- B. Paralysis may indicate a failure to act or do something necessary
- C. Tuberculosis (a wasting disease) may indicate the character is wasting away from something . . . but what?
- D. STD—reflects of the effects of immorality on the innocent. The innocent suffer because of another's immorality
- E. Plague—wrath, communal aspect of suffering on a large scale. Despair and isolation from devastation
- F. Malaria—directly translates into "bad air." Symbolizes Possible foreshadowing about the sick character, future events, or the town

**Pop Culture Example:** Darth Vader in the Star Wars series suffers from severe burns after losing a fight. He is forced to live in a suit that allows him to live. However, as discovered later in the movies this suit more represents a strong barrier allowing him only to be displayed as a ruthless leader of the galaxies. When his helmet is removed, the viewer is shown his more compassionate side. His illness is masked by his suit but his burns are not just an illness. His illness represents his past compassionate self that was locked away.

**Literary Example:** Zeena from *Ethan Frome* is a known hypochondriac whose health declines and improves at her whim. This depression in her health might symbolize her declining emotional health as Maddie Silver, Ethan Frome, and the whole town of Starkfield get her depressed.

**Questions:** What illness does your character have? What are the symptoms? What is the prognosis (i.e. is it fatal, temporary, etc.) How was the disease contracted? (from behavior, or heredity). What might these details indicate? Is the disease fatal or crippling? What might the symptoms represent?

**18. Irony Trumps All:** If the writer is using irony, any of the previously mentioned ideas may be reversed or negated. Popular Culture Example: In the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, Andrea Sachs is a recent college graduate who wants to make a name for herself in the journalism world. Andrea lands a job at a fashion magazine, which she considers a shallow, and swears that she will never become caught up in the fashion industry. By the end of the movie, Andrea has let her job at the fashion magazine interfere with her relationships and consume her life.

**Literary Example:** In J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield consistently calls people "phony". However, as Holden wanders aimlessly throughout the book, he changes his appearance as he meets different people. Holden even states that he is "the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life."

**Questions:** Did you find evidence for any of the previously mention literary analysis guideposts in which the end of the story reverses the expected outcome (e.g. did your Christ figure become a serial killer, was Emily Wintersworth the warmest hearted person in the book, did the quest fail to lead to self-knowledge?) Once you have identified irony, is the author trying communicate something more specific to you as the reader than merely to expect the unexpected? What might that specific idea be?

**19. Color Wheel:** Most of us associate colors with emotions, or with other associated objects. Examples:

**Red** can represent love, passion, anger, hostility, blood, bloodlust, danger, death, heat.

**Orange** can represent heat, supernatural and Halloween, the dead/dying through its connection to autumn.

**Yellow** can represent sunshine, energy, liveliness, age, decay, deterioration, gold.

**Green** can represent jealousy, growth, newness, naiveté, inexperience, money.

**Blue** can represent sadness, depression, heaven in its connection to the sky, freedom and the limitlessness through its connection to the sky/ocean.

**Purple** can represent passion, royalty, twilight, dark spirituality, sensuality.

**Black** can represent death, night, depression, emptiness, sensuality, decadence. White can represent purity, death, coldness, absence of passion, frigidity.

**Brown** can represent the earth, fertility, decay, drying up, health, dark sensuality

**Pink** can represent newness, naiveté, a rosy outlook, an unrealistic outlook, vulnerability, girlhood, softness.

**Grey** can represent age, decay, death, fading away, vulnerability, softness.

**Pop Culture Example:** The 2010 Oscar winning film *Black Swan*, directed by Darren Aronofsky, exhibits a dual nature of the symbolic black color. Two ballerinas are contrasted based primarily on color and the meanings behind the colors. The black swan represents the sensual ballerina, daring, feared, and erotic, whereas the white swan epitomizes the pure and innocent ballerina. As the film's main character, played by Natalie Portman, begins to learn the role of the black swan, the role begins to overtake her. Blackness overwhelms her from the inside out, revealing darkness, hints of depression, as it wipes away her purity.

**Literary Example:** Often times, yellow can represent gold, and thus, wealth. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's, *The Great Gatsby*, the abundance of the golden yellow color highlights Gatsby's "old money," in contrast to the more modern appeal of green paperbacks. Gatsby flashes his wealth through his gold automobile and gold tie, making it known that he has solidified himself in the old money community. In this way, the gold color represents both the wealth and age aspects of Gatsby in the great American classic.