

Waiting for Godot prompts

1977

In some novels and plays certain parallel or recurring events prove to be significant. In an essay, describe the major similarities and differences in a sequence of parallel or recurring events in a novel or play and discuss the significance of such events. Do not merely summarize the plot.

1985

A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude.

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Select a literary work that produces this "healthy confusion." Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the "pleasure and disquietude" experienced by the readers of the work.

1989

In questioning the value of literary realism, Flannery O'Connor has written, "I am pleased to make a good case for distortion because I am coming to believe that it is the only way to make people see."

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Write an essay in which you "make a good case for distortion," as distinct from literary realism. Analyze how important elements of the work you choose are "distorted" and explain how these distortions contribute to the effectiveness of the work. Avoid plot summary.

1993

"The true test of comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter." -- George Meredith

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Choose a novel, play, or long poem in which a scene or character awakens "thoughtful laughter" in the reader. Write an essay in which you show why this laughter is "thoughtful" and how it contributes to the meaning of the work.

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Choose a novel, play, or long poem by one of the following authors or another author or one of comparable merit.

1994

In some works of literature, a character who appears briefly, or does not appear at all, is a significant presence.

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Choose a novel or play of literary merit and write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in the work. You may wish to discuss how the character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters. Avoid plot summary.

2001

One definition of madness is "mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it." But Emily Dickinson wrote: "Much madness is divinest Sense / To a discerning Eye."

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Novelist and playwrights have often seen madness with a "discerning Eye." Select a novel or a play in which a character's apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the "madness" to the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2009

A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning.

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Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2012

“And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” - Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*

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Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.