The following manual outlines best practices for teachers and students in composing literary analysis. However, the concepts provided here are not meant to replace direct writing instruction, and certain teachers may modify their approach based on personal preference or particulars in the demands of the prompt.
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PRE-WRITING: Steps and Guidelines

Reading and Dissecting the Prompt

*Step 1: Read the Prompt*
Read the whole prompt, more than once.

*Step 2: Break it Down*
Break the prompt down to its simplest format; annotate the prompt for expectations (circle, underline, highlight key terms and phrases)

*Step 3: Draft a Thesis*
Respond to the prompt in one or two sentences. Check to make sure your response covers all aspects of the prompt.

*Step 4: Make an Outline*
Create an organized list or map of tasks you will need to accomplish over the course of your essay. Outline length will depend upon the type of assignment.

*Step 5: Revisit the Prompt*
Make sure all aspects of the brainstorming process address the entire prompt.

PRE-WRITING: Sample Prompt Analysis

Sample Prompt in response to Eugenia Collier’s short story “Marigolds”

*Step 1: Read the Prompt*
In an insightful, well-organized interpretive essay, analyze how one of the central characters from the text changes from the beginning of the story to the end, and interpret how this change contributes to the story’s theme. Identify specific moments in the text and cite textual evidence to support your claims.

*Step 2: Break it Down*
In an insightful, well-organized interpretive essay, analyze how one of the central characters from the text changes from the beginning of the story to the end (1), and interpret how this change contributes to the story’s theme (2). Identify specific moments in the text and cite textual evidence to support your claims (3).

(1) “Analyze” requires the student to interpret an element of the story (for this prompt, character change) as opposed to summarizing the story.
(2) “Interpret” and “theme” require the student to make a connection to the story’s central idea.
(3) “Identify” and “cite” require the student to incorporate “textual evidence” into the essay to support the interpretive claims in sections (1) and (2).
Step 3: Draft a Thesis

Thesis Statements:

- Assist the reader in understanding how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion; in other words, it makes an important argument, which your essay will then validate through detailed support;
- May act as a ‘road map’ for your essay, giving the reader some understanding of what to expect from your responses;
- Directly answer all aspects of the prompt;
- Make claims interpreting the meaning of the piece; they are not facts or details about the story.

Basic Role of a Thesis:

Thesis statements should essentially answer the following two questions:

1. What are you going to prove/demonstrate/illuminate in your essay?
2. How are you going to do so? (i.e. what evidence will you provide?)

Note: In addressing the second question, many teachers may request what is called a ‘forecast.’ A ‘forecast’ essentially gives the specific information or evidence that will be used to demonstrate the thesis. Most often, the forecast will ‘preview’ what is to come in each body paragraph, and should correlate to each topic sentence. Not all teachers require or prefer you to use a ‘forecast,’ so check with your English teacher.

So, our prompt asks us to identify how the central character in the short story “Marigolds” changes and how this change links to the story’s theme. Here is a sample thesis (and non-thesis) examples generated from this prompt:

Examples:

Fact (not a thesis statement):
Lizabeth changes from destroying Miss Lottie’s Marigolds to crying about her actions.

Claim – Initial Idea (appropriate first draft of a thesis statement):
Lizabeth changes from being thoughtless and impulsive to being insightful and compassionate.

Claim – Developing Idea (appropriate second draft of a thesis statement):
Lizabeth changes from a thoughtless, impulsive child to an insightful, compassionate woman and this change reveals the story’s theme of loss of innocence. (Note: Even this thesis could be improved)
PRE-WRITING: Thesis Creation – What NOT to do

Thesis Statement Constructions to Avoid:

Non-Analytical
• Fails to provide specifics of the argument, particularly in connection with the prompt: 
  *Lizabeth changes a lot over the course of the story.*

Insecure
• Lacks a formal, assertive tone in favor of weak construction: 
  *In my opinion, I believe that Lizabeth may be growing up because she keeps mentioning that she is fourteen going on fifteen.*

Abstract Generalization
• Makes a generalized claim, but not in connection with the prompt or the text: 
  *People become more compassionate as they grow up.*

Empty and Vague
• Provides few specifics as to the details of the prompt or evidence being used: 
  *Lizabeth changes from an immature girl to a fully mature woman.*

Simply Listing Facts
• Provides facts rather than ideas in an attempt to forecast: 
  *Throughout the story, Lizabeth throws stones at Miss Lottie’s garden, hears her dad cry, and then ruins Miss Lottie’s flowers.*

Non-Arguable
• Makes a statement about the text that is incapable of sustaining an argument: 
  *Lizabeth is a young, black girl living in Maryland who grew up to plant marigolds.*

PRE-WRITING: Outlining Sample

Step 4: Make an Outline

A. Introduction
   - Thesis: Lizabeth changes from a thoughtless, impulsive child to and insightful, compassionate woman and this change reveals the story’s theme of loss of innocence.

B. Body 1
   - Lizabeth is a thoughtless, impulsive child

C. Body 2
   - Lizabeth begins to change from a thoughtless, impulsive child to an insightful, compassionate woman

D. Body 3
   - Lizabeth is an insightful, compassionate woman

E. Conclusion

Note: The number of body paragraphs you create will depend on the demands of the prompt.
PRE-WRITING: Revisiting the Prompt

Step 5: Revisit the Prompt

Reread the prompt and compare it to your thesis and outline. In the above example, we have addressed a text appropriate to the prompt, identified how that character changes (Lizabeth changes from a thoughtless, impulsive child to an insightful, compassionate woman) and how that change relates to the story’s theme (loss of innocence). This satisfies all aspects of the prompt, as discovered when we broke it down and annotated.

PRE-WRITING: Revise Your Thesis

Step 6: Revise Your Thesis

To make sure the thesis draft is complete and detailed, revisit steps 1 and 2 in “Reading and Dissecting the Prompt.” Be sure that the written thesis addresses all of the elements required by the prompt.

Our thesis: Lizabeth changes from a thoughtless, impulsive child to an insightful, compassionate woman and this change reveals the story’s theme of loss of innocence.

This thesis contains the core elements required by the prompt, but it does not contain a fully developed theme. The thematic topic “Loss of innocence” is not a complete statement, i.e. it does not address the author’s perspective of that topic as it appears in the story.

Revise the thesis into a clear statement that addresses the entire prompt.

For example:

Amidst her destructive, violet outbursts, Lizabeth changes from a thoughtless, impulsive child to an insightful, compassionate woman demonstrating that a loss of innocence may result in a greater understanding of human suffering and a deeper level of empathy.

This thesis is now insightful and complete.
INTRODUCTIONS: Basic Structure

Writing an Introduction Paragraph

The introduction paragraph in an essay of literary analysis functions as follows:

- It focuses the reader’s attention on the topic and arouses curiosity for the reader about what you, as the writer, have to say.
- It specifies your subject and implies your attitude and tone.
- It provides background necessary to understand the thesis statement.
- It comes to a point with the thesis statement which presents the writer’s specific argument.

Structure of the Introduction Paragraph

INTRODUCTION

1. Opening Strategy: Begin with a general statement related to the topic
   (1-3 sentences)

2. TAG: Title, author, genre

   (e.g., character, plot, setting)
   (2-3 sentences)

4. Thesis: What are you going to prove? How are you going to prove it?

INTRODUCTIONS: Opening Strategies

Crafting an Opening Strategy

Opening Strategies are the introductory parts of each essay that aim to grab the reader’s attention. There are many types of opening strategies. The following list provides examples of possible opening strategies. As is always the case, make sure to check with your teacher as to which are acceptable in each class.
INTRODUCTIONS: Opening Strategies

Examples of Opening Strategies:

1. Begin with a broad, general statement of your topic and narrow it down to your thesis statement.
   *At the root of childhood innocence is an ignorance that often obscures the harshness of reality.*

2. Start with an idea or situation that is the opposite of the perspective you will develop.
   *Many have said that ignorance is bliss.*

3. Introduce a relevant incident or brief story; you may connect to a historical event, an anecdote or analogy, or the author’s personal experiences.
   *The Great Depression was a devastating event for thousands of Americans, and children were often forced to grow up very quickly.*

4. Use a quotation.
   *Albert Camus once said “Every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being.”*

5. Begin with an interesting fact or statistic.
   *“More than 16 million children in the United States – 22% of all children – live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level” (nccp.org).*

INTRODUCTIONS: What NOT to do for Opening Strategies

What to Avoid When Composing Hooks or Opening Statements:

- Cliché statements: “Webster’s dictionary defines friendship as …”
- First person point of view: “In this essay, I will show…”
- Rhetorical questions: “Have you ever wondered what would happen…”
- Broad generalizations: “Symbolism is a powerful tool used in literature…”
- Mere plot summary, or irrelevant historical or biographical information
- Most attempts at humor, cleverness, or sarcasm
- Apologies: “Even for an expert in literature who is an avid reader, analyzing character change would be a daunting task. The story is so difficult to read it is overwhelming…”
- Reference to the process of reading: “After turning the pages, the reader begins to feel a part of the world of…”
INTRODUCTIONS: Sample Introduction

Let us begin by revisiting the prompt:

In an insightful, well-organized interpretive essay, analyze how one of the central characters from the text changes from the beginning of the story to the end, and interpret how this change contributes to the story’s theme. Identify specific moments in the text and cite textual evidence to support your claims.

An introductory paragraph related to the above prompt may read:

At the root of childhood innocence is an ignorance that often hides the harshness of reality. (1) In the short story “Marigolds” by Eugenia W. Collier, a young protagonist, Lizabeth, has to confront the hopelessness that exists in her poverty-stricken, Depression-Era shantytown. (2) As a fourteen-year-old she is unaware of the severity of her situation until the beauty of Miss Lottie’s marigolds provokes an extreme reaction, which makes her aware of the suffering of other people. (3) Amidst her destructive, violent outbursts, Lizabeth changes from an ignorant, selfish child to an insightful, compassionate woman, demonstrating that a loss of innocence may result in a greater understanding of human suffering and a deeper level of empathy. (4)

Numbered Breakdown of the Strategies Seen Above:

(1) Opening Strategy: A broad statement related to the central topic

(2) TAG: includes title of the story, author, and genre, with transition from hook.

(3) This section provides background information regarding the story, including the introduction of the main characters, the basic plot, and the conflict in relation to the question of the prompt – note the movement from general to specific in terms of relevant details.

(4) This last sentence gives the thesis, as crafted previously, with transition and flow from previous statements. (It may also include the forecast of the paragraphs that will follow in the essay response, if required by the teacher.)
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Basic Organization

Paragraph Organization

Now that the introduction paragraph is completed and gives the reader a clear sense of the essay’s purpose, provide the details of the argument in support of the prompt. These details, when organized in a logical structure, compose “the body” of the essay, or argument. Each body paragraph should address one or more aspects of the thesis statement. The body paragraphs should be the largest part of your essay.

Each body paragraph should include the following:

1. Topic Sentence/Interpretive Claim
2. Context, or Transition
3. First piece of Textual Evidence (usually in the form of direct quotation)
4. Analysis
5. Context, or Transition
6. Second piece of Textual Evidence (usually in the form of direct quotation)
7. Analysis
8. Concluding Sentence

BODY PARAGRAPHS: Topic Sentences

Topic Sentences

Also known as an interpretive claim, the topic sentence is the opening statement of each body paragraph, which serves to expand upon one of the major aspects of the thesis. This sentence is a specific and detailed assertion that addresses one aspect of the thesis.

Developing a Proper Topic Sentence

Topic Sentences should:

• Support an aspect of the thesis
• Make a claim, NOT state a fact
• NOT just be specific details about the plot, characters, or situations of the text, but should include specific references to the text in support of the claim
• NOT be generalized statements that can apply to anything or anywhere
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Topic Sentence Examples

Examples: Fact versus Claim

**Fact:** After Lizabeth destroys the marigolds, she claims that this is when she lost her innocence.

*Why this is factual:* she did destroy the marigolds and she did directly tell the reader that she lost her innocence. There is no argument; there is nothing that can be disputed.

**Claim:** In the aftermath of the second attack on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth’s revelations about the harshness of human suffering and the necessity of compassion mark her transition into a thoughtful, compassionate woman.

*Why this is a claim:* instead of merely pointing out an idea that the author directly stated, the topic sentence interprets the event’s influence on her perspective and connects that change to larger thematic ideas.

Examples: General versus Specific

**General:** As a result of her behavior at the end of the story, she has changed and grown tremendously.

*Why this is general:* it does not specify the type of behavior, how she has changed, or how she has grown.

**Specific:** In the aftermath of the second attack on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth’s revelations about the harshness of human suffering and the necessity of compassion mark her transition into a thoughtful, compassionate woman.

*Why this is specific:* Instead of simply referring to her “behavior” in general, the topic sentence clearly presents the incident that serves as an catalyst to her change. In addition, it specifically mentions how she changes and connects those changes to the broader themes.

BODY PARAGRAPHS: Linking Topic Sentences to Thesis

**The Basic Idea**

The topic sentence of each major body paragraph should be constructed by referring to – and elaborating on – specific details in the thesis. In order to assure that the topic sentences continually relate back to the thesis statement of your introduction, make sure to utilize similar language throughout.
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Linking Topic Sentences to Thesis

Crafting Topic Sentences from the Prompt and Thesis: Examples

In order to do this, let us revisit the prompt:

In an insightful, well-organized interpretive essay, analyze how one of the central characters from the text changes from the beginning of the story to the end, and interpret how this change contributes to the story’s theme. Identify specific moments in the text and cite textual evidence to support your claims.

And let us revisit the thesis created from the prompt:

Amidst her destructive, violent outbursts, Lizabeth changes from an ignorant, selfish child to an insightful, compassionate woman, demonstrating that a loss of innocence may result in a greater understanding of human suffering and a deeper level of empathy.

Topic sentences that could be derived from the above thesis statement are:

**Body Paragraph 1:**

Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story.

**Body Paragraph 2:**

After this first assault on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth experiences the beginning of a change into a more thoughtful, compassionate person.

**Body Paragraph 3:**

In the aftermath of the second attack on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth’s revelations about the harshness of human suffering and the necessity of compassion mark her transition into a thoughtful, compassionate woman.

**Notes on these examples:**

The logical structure of the thesis should translate directly to the order of the body paragraphs.

If students have created a forecast statement, that statement will determine the content and the order of the essay’s body paragraphs.

Some claims made in certain paragraphs could be complex – thus, they may need further development. This secondary sentence might be considered a ‘sub-claim.’
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Context For Using Textual Evidence

Introducing Textual Evidence: Context

Once a claim has been established, students must then work to support it with evidence from the text. However, in order to provide the reader with a solid foundation for understanding the textual evidence chosen as support – as well as the analysis of that textual evidence – students will need to provide some context.

Context may include (but is not limited to) the following, dependent upon the type of prompt:

- The basic plot as occurring earlier and immediately within the location of the quotation
- Background information about the narrator, speaker, or character(s)
- The narrative or historical situation

A full summary of the text is not needed here – work under the assumption that the reader is familiar with the text. The context here should be a brief, relevant summary to allow the reader to know where the piece of evidence appears in the structure of the work.

BODY PARAGRAPHS: Sample Context

Here is an example of context built upon the first body paragraph topic sentence:

**Topic Sentence:** Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story.

**Context:** In order to relieve their boredom amidst the midsummer heat, Lizabeth and her friends, without really understanding why, feel that they…

BODY PARAGRAPHS: Evidence Selection

Picking Your Quotations and Other Evidence

When providing textual evidence in support of the topic sentences and the thesis there are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Evidence should be well-chosen and relevant,
2. Evidence should be more than simple plot-detail,
3. Evidence should illuminate deeper meaning beyond the text,
4. Evidence should be integrated into your own authoritative voice.
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Quotation Integration

Integrating Your Quotations Fluidly

Students should aim for the most seamless integration possible – the reader should be able to read the sentence aloud without noticing any transition between the context and the textual evidence. To do this, students should choose only the most necessary part of the text and paraphrase surrounding details. The best examples of quotation-integration include some kind of lead-in statement.

Sample levels of integration:

*High-level integration:*

In order to relieve their boredom amidst the midsummer heat, Lizabeth and her friends, without really understanding why, feel that they “had to annoy [Miss Lottie] by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in [their] youth and mocking her age” (3).

*Mid-level integration:*

Lizabeth and her friends said, “we had to annoy her by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in our youth and mocking her age.”

*Non-integration:*

“We had to annoy her by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in our youth and mocking her age.”

Sample integration of evidence built upon our sample topic sentence and context:

*Topic Sentence:* Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story.

*Context Leading into Evidence:* In order to relieve their boredom amidst the midsummer heat, Lizabeth and her friends, without really understanding why, feel that they “had to annoy [Miss Lottie] by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in [their] youth and mocking her age” (3).
**BODY PARAGRAPHS: Analysis Basics**

**Illuminating Your Argument: Analysis**

Once evidence has been presented, students will need to explain what it represents on a deeper level. Students will want to give “what this quotation shows” without using the phrase “this quotation shows.” The analysis should explain what the evidence demonstrates in relation to the topic sentence and the thesis. Students should aim to connect the quotation to the context. Keep in mind, *this* is the hardest part of the essay – it is here where students demonstrate learning, show understanding, and make connections beyond the simple wording of the text. This should be the longest part of the paragraph, and should be argumentative, clear, and explicit; students should not simply assume that the reader will figure out what the quotation is showing in relation to the thesis by the simple act of presenting it. The amount of analysis in your paper should far outweigh the amount of evidence. For each piece of evidence, consider writing no fewer than two sentences of analysis.

**BODY PARAGRAPHS: Sample Analysis**

Sample integration of evidence built upon our sample topic sentence and evidence:

**Topic Sentence:** Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story.

**Context Leading into Evidence:** In order to relieve their boredom amidst the midsummer heat, Lizabeth and her friends, without really understanding why, feel that they “had to annoy [Miss Lottie] by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in [their] youth and mocking her age” (3). **Analysis:** On one hand, the pebble-throwing and name-calling reveal the cruelty of the children’s behavior, while the childish “dancing away” from Miss Lottie indicates an ignorance to how their actions affect her. Feeling young and invincible, Lizabeth lacks respect for Miss Lottie’s age and an understanding of the important role that the marigolds play in her life.

*Note: You need to include two pieces of evidence per paragraph, so before you conclude, provide another block of context, evidence, and analysis. (See sample paragraph to come.)*

**BODY PARAGRAPHS: Concluding Statements**

**Completing the Body Paragraph**

Although sentences need to be working to support the thesis throughout, students may need to explicitly connect to the main argument of the paragraph in relation to the overall direction of the thesis statement. This section may not be necessary if the analysis includes clear connections to the thesis (and – depending upon the prompt – the theme of the work). If the thesis statement points out a theme, this may be a good place to connect it to your argument – if you have not done so already.
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Sample Body Paragraph

Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story. (1) In order to relieve their boredom amidst the midsummer heat, Lizabeth and her friends, without really understanding why, feel that they (2) “had to annoy [Miss Lottie] by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in [their] youth and mocking her age.” (3) On one hand, the pebble-throwing and name-calling reveal the cruelty of the children’s behavior, while the childish “dancing away” from Miss Lottie indicates an ignorance to how their actions affect her. Feeling young and invincible, Lizabeth lacks respect for Miss Lottie’s age and an understanding of the important role that the marigolds play in her life. (4) As the encounter escalates, Miss Lottie’s “impotent rage” provokes an uncontrollable impulse in Lizabeth to shift her attack from the marigolds to Miss Lottie herself, further revealing her ignorance and selfishness (5): “Then I lost my head entirely, mad with the power of inciting such rage, and ran out of the bushes in the storm of pebbles, straight toward Miss Lottie, chanting madly, ‘Old witch, fell in a ditch, picked up a penny and thought she was rich!’” (6) Lizabeth once again attacks Miss Lottie from a state of thoughtlessness, demonstrated by the fact that she had “lost [her] head” and gone “mad” with power. This rare, overwhelming feeling of power for young Lizabeth blinds her to the fact that she is abusing a defenseless old woman. (7) Unaware of the reasons behind her actions and the effects they have on Miss Lottie, Lizabeth remains in a state of immature selfishness, failing to see that the power she feels comes at the expense of someone else’s suffering. (8)
BODY PARAGRAPHS: Decoding the Sample Body Paragraph

*Numbered Breakdown of the Strategies Seen On the Previous Page:*

1. Topic Sentence: includes reference to thesis, and expands upon the idea with specific examples

2. Context: gives specific details regarding the situation of the text surrounding the textual evidence selected

3. First Piece of Textual Evidence: note the integration using a lead-in.

4. Analysis: explicitly introduces information regarding the evidence’s purpose in serving the thesis.

5. Context: gives specific details regarding the situation of the text surrounding the textual evidence selected


7. Analysis: explicitly introduces information regarding the evidence’s purpose in serving the thesis.

8. Concluding Statement: connects the main idea of the paragraph to the thesis.

*Note: Essays require more than one body paragraph. The number of body paragraphs will be determined by the demands of the prompt and the complexity of your thesis.*
CONCLUSIONS: The Basics

Purpose

The conclusion paragraph, while considerably more open-ended than the other parts of the essay, serves an essential purpose. The conclusion paragraph in an essay of literary analysis functions as follows:

- It brings closure to the essay and clarifies the main claims of the argument by restating the thesis and echoing the introduction and body paragraphs without listing the points covered in the essay, and;

- It creates a broader implication of the ideas discussed and answers the questions: so what? Or why do we care?

Organization

Organization of the conclusion paragraph should be similar to the introduction in that it ranges from general to specific; you do not need to repeat the arguments you make in the exact order outlined by your body paragraphs, but make sure the general idea is revisited in a logical fashion. Like the introduction, the conclusion acts as a ‘bookend’ to the heart of your argument. Unlike the introduction, however, the conclusion moves from specific to the much broader implications of meaning.

Structure of the Conclusion Paragraph

CONCLUSION
1. Restatement of the thesis
2. Summary revisiting the main points of the essay’s argument (as organized by topic sentences)
3. Concluding thoughts, or connection to the real world (shows you have learned from your study of the topic, or that you have been enlightened.)
CONCLUSIONS: Suggestions

Consider the following strategies:

1. **Reiterate the main arguments of your essay with clarity and precision**

   Re-word your thesis statement using new language, or at the very least, discuss the main points of your essay at the beginning of your conclusion.

   **Thesis statement:** Amidst her destructive, violent outbursts, Lizabeth changes from an ignorant, selfish child to an insightful, compassionate woman, demonstrating that a loss of innocence may result in a greater understanding of human suffering and a deeper level of empathy.

   **Re-statement for conclusion:** After her childish destruction of the marigolds, Lizabeth becomes aware of the anguish of others.

2. **Contribute at least one new thought to make the conclusion compelling.**

   First, re-read your essay. The thesis you have chosen should have strong support from the evidence you’ve provided. Then, ask yourself any of the following questions in order to decide what this new idea should be:

   - What is important about my thesis?
   - What other interpretations can I take away from the main argument of my thesis?
   - How does my thesis pertain to larger ideas outside the text? Does it naturally shed light on historical events or broader world issues?
   - What have I learned as a result of exploring my thesis in the paper?

3. **Use a “clincher” at the end of your conclusion to finish with a powerful idea.**

   This statement could be:

   - a true conclusion drawn from the rest of the conclusion paragraph,
   - a broader implication of the subject,
   - an opinion based on the previous discussion,
   - a prediction or forecast, or
   - a final statement of the meaning of the story or its title.
CONCLUSIONS: What NOT to Do

Avoid:

- Copying and pasting your original thesis without re-wording it
- Making insupportable generalizations that extend far beyond the scope of your claims
- Keeping the reader in the dark about where your ideas are going
- Posing questions that are not pertinent to the topic at hand
- Alluding to a totally unrelated, off-topic idea that feels disjointed from your essay
- Apologizing for the quality (or lack there of) of your paper
- Using extreme exaggeration or improbable conclusions
- Beginning with phrases like “In conclusion,” or “To conclude” (for some teachers)

CONCLUSIONS: Sample Conclusion – Reviewing the Process

Let us begin by revisiting the prompt:

In an insightful, well-organized interpretive essay, analyze how one of the central characters from the text changes from the beginning of the story to the end, and interpret how this change contributes to the story’s theme. Identify specific moments in the text and cite textual evidence to support your claims.

Let us also review the basic points of the argument of our samples:

**Thesis:**
Amidst her destructive, violent outbursts, Lizabeth changes from an ignorant, selfish child to an insightful, compassionate woman, demonstrating that a loss of innocence may result in a greater understanding of human suffering and a deeper level of empathy.

**Topic Sentence 1:**
Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story.

**Topic Sentence 2:**
After this first assault on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth experiences the beginning of a change into a more thoughtful, compassionate person.

**Topic Sentence 3:**
In the aftermath of the second attack on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth’s revelations about the harshness of human suffering and the necessity of compassion mark her transition into a thoughtful, compassionate woman.
CONCLUSIONS: Sample Conclusion

And here it is, following the prompt and outlined ideas presented earlier:

After her childish destruction of the marigolds, Lizabeth becomes aware of the anguish of others. She recognizes that her violent behavior arises from her own selfishness and ignorance and that understanding and empathy allow her to see the adults around her in an entirely new way. She sees her father not as a stable, secure center of the family, but as another human susceptible to the harshness of reality. She views Miss Lottie not as a witch, but as a woman who suffers from a pain similar to her own. In accepting the difficulty of her own situation, Lizabeth understands Miss Lottie’s efforts to create beauty out of desolation. In her childhood ignorance, Lizabeth sees only the “perfect ugliness” of the marigolds, but as an empathetic woman, she grasps the significance of their beauty and the beauty of compassion itself.
COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Definitions and Common Terminology for Essay Writing and Expectations

Terms about Introductions

Opening Strategy

- **Alternate Terms**: Opener, Opening Sentence, Hook
- **Basic Definition**: The first sentence of an introductory paragraph in an essay that clearly connects to the content of the essay. This initial sentence draws in the reader and orients the reader to the general topic of the essay.

Contextual or Background Sentence(s)

- **Alternate Terms**: “TAG” (“Title, Author, Genre”) Sentence, Pivot Sentence, Textual Tie-in, Background Information, Thesis Lead-in
- **Basic Definition**: The sentence(s) in the middle of the introductory paragraph are where the writer introduces the title, author, and genre of the work. The function of these sentences is not only to introduce the work, but also to connect with the opening ideas established in the opening of the paragraph. These sentences should provide contextual information that is relevant to the thesis statement (thesis lead-in).

Thesis Statement

- **Alternate Terms**: Main argument (of essay), interpretive claim (of essay)
- **Basic Definition**: A statement that covers the main claims that the writer will assert in the essay as connected to the prompt. The length of this statement could range from one sentence to a few sentences depending on the complexity of the prompt (and the expectations of the teacher).
- **Expectations**: Must provide an interpretive claim (must be debatable), must center on ideas rather than facts, must clearly address the prompt. The thesis statement should generally come at the end of the introduction. The thesis might include a forecast (or serve as a road-map for) the main points of the essay.

Terms about Body Paragraphs

Topic Sentence

- **Alternate Terms**: Interpretive claim, main argument (of paragraph), main support
- **Basic Definition**: The first sentence of a body paragraph that addresses a claim derived from the thesis
- **Expectations**: The writer must provide an interpretive claim; in essence, the writer must present a point that he/she will prove in the paragraph. Must center on ideas rather than facts (no plot points), must directly be tied to the text (should not resemble a hook).
COMMON TERMINOLOGY (Continued)

Terms about Body Paragraphs (Continued)

Quotation Context

- **Alternate Terms**: Transition, Quotation Embedding, Quotation Set-up
- **Basic Definition**: The contextual information or commentary that serves as a smooth transition between the claim and the supporting evidence
- **Expectations**: If the supporting evidence is a quotation, then the writer must include sufficient contextual information needed to understand the evidence (this may include: who is speaking, to whom that person is speaking, when this quotation is occurring within the text, etc.).

Quotation Lead-in

- **Alternate Terms**: Stem, Anchor, Quotation integration
- **Basic Definition**: Provides a smooth transition from the context to the presentation of the quotation.
- **Expectations**: Students should work to fluidly move from their prose to the quoted material.

Textual Evidence

- **Alternate Terms**: Concrete details, supporting details, quotations, paraphrase, plot references, textual support, supporting evidence, proof
- **Basic Definition**: The specific examples or quotations from a given text that students use as evidence to support their claim(s).
- **Expectations**: Strong textual evidence offers ample room for deep interpretation. Quotations should be selected for their relevance to the thesis. Writers should provide only the relevant parts of quotations necessary to prove their analysis and claims. Writers must integrate quotations in a fluid and grammatically correct manner.

Analysis

- **Alternate Terms**: Commentary, Interpretation, Evaluation (if appropriate), Insight
- **Basic Definition**: The interpretation of the significance of the textual evidence and its relevance to the thesis.
- **Expectations**: Strong analysis should persuasively validate the main claims of the topic sentence (and, by extension, the thesis), and avoid generalities. Strong analysis showcases close reading and observational skills that dissect the quotations. This may include using direct references to the language of the quotations; analyzing ambiguities, complexities, contradictions, and nuance; identifying and analyzing the usage of literary devices; and illuminating historical, political, philosophical, and social commentary.
Terms about Body Paragraphs (Continued)

Concluding Sentence

- **Basic Definition:** The final sentence of a body paragraph that connects the main idea of the paragraph back to the essay’s thesis.

Terms about Conclusions

Concluding Paragraph

- **Alternate Terms:** Conclusion
- **Basic Definition:** The final paragraph in which students restate their thesis, summarize body paragraph points, and offer a final insight for the reader.
- **Expectations:** The conclusion paragraph serves similar purposes as the introduction, only the order of information is typically reversed. Where the introduction should start broadly and end with a specific thesis, the conclusion should start with a restated thesis and broaden to larger ideas. Thesis must be expressed with new, original phrasing so that it is not redundant. Once writers have reiterated your thesis, they should briefly summarize the principal points of the body paragraphs in order to provide an overview of their main arguments. The last piece of insight can include larger societal or historical implications, provided it supports previous ideas from the essay and works organically within the scope of your topic.
STYLE GUIDE: MLA Formatting Guidelines and Tips

Formatting Your Document:

- Margins: 1 inch, all the way around (except for the header)
- Everything is double-spaced
- Do NOT add additional spaces before or after paragraphs, titles, or anything else
- Type everything in 12 point, Times New Roman font
- Center your title after you have provided your heading, no bold or emphasis

Heading:
Basics: Appears ONLY on the first page, on the LEFT hand side of the document, and should feature the following information in the following order:

- Your name
- Your teacher’s name (i.e. Mr. Smith)
- Your course title (i.e. English 9 College Prep)
- The due date with day, month (spelled out), year (i.e. 24 September 2013)

Header:
- Appears on every page (including your Works Cited page) against the right margin, .5 inches from the top
- Should feature your last name and the page number

Internal Citations:
- After any quote or researched information, you must provide an internal citation
- For literary works, this means using the author’s last name and page number in parentheses with a space between the two, but no p. or pg. or commas (Smith 5).
- If you only have one work being referenced, you may just use page numbers.

Works Cited:
- Your final page must be a Works Cited page that includes the full bibliographic information for any resource that you cited in your text
- Retain basic margins and other formatting elements
- Double-spaced, but no extra spacing between entries
- Entries need to be alphabetized
- If entries exceed one line, subsequent lines should use hanging indents
- Should be titled “Works Cited” (centered)

Information for what to include in your bibliographic entries can be found:
- [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
- In The MLA Handbook (always available for use in the library)
- EasyBib is an online resource that can help you as well, but make sure that you take the time to format the citations is gives you and fill in missing information.
SAMPLE ESSAY: Desperate Beauty

At the root of childhood innocence is an ignorance that often hides the harshness of reality. In the short story “Marigolds” by Eugenia W. Collier, a young protagonist, Lizabeth, has to confront the hopelessness that exists in her poverty-stricken, Depression-Era shantytown. As a fourteen-year-old she is unaware of the severity of her situation until the beauty of Miss Lottie’s marigolds provokes an extreme reaction, which makes her aware of the suffering of other people. Amidst her destructive, violent outbursts, Lizabeth changes from an ignorant, selfish child to an insightful, compassionate woman, demonstrating that a loss of innocence may result in a greater understanding of human suffering and a deeper level of empathy.

Lizabeth’s thoughtlessness in her first attack on Miss Lottie’s garden demonstrates her ignorance of the cruelty of Miss Lottie’s suffering; Collier uses this ignorance to reveal the childish selfishness that characterizes Lizabeth at the beginning of the story. In order to relieve their boredom amidst the midsummer heat, Lizabeth and her friends, without really understanding why, feel that they “had to annoy [Miss Lottie] by whizzing a pebble into her flowers or by yelling a dirty word, then dancing away from her rage, reveling in [their] youth and mocking her age” (3). On one hand, the pebble-throwing and name-calling reveal the cruelty of the children’s behavior, while the childish “dancing away” from Miss Lottie indicates an ignorance to how their actions affect her. Feeling young and invincible, Lizabeth lacks respect for Miss Lottie’s age and an understanding of the important role that the marigolds play in her
life. As the encounter escalates, Miss Lottie’s “impotent rage” provokes an uncontrollable impulse in Lizabeth to shift her attack from the marigolds to Miss Lottie herself, further revealing her ignorance and selfishness: “Then I lost my head entirely, mad with the power of inciting such rage, and ran out of the bushes in the storm of pebbles, straight toward Miss Lottie, chanting madly, ‘Old witch, fell in a ditch, picked up a penny and thought she was rich!’” (3). Lizabeth once again attacks Miss Lottie from a state of thoughtlessness, demonstrated by the fact that she had “lost [her] head” and gone “mad” with power. This rare, overwhelming feeling of power for young Lizabeth blinds her to the fact that she is abusing a defenseless old woman. Unaware of the reasons behind her actions and the effects they have on Miss Lottie, Lizabeth remains in a state of immature selfishness, failing to see that the power she feels comes at the expense of someone else’s suffering.

After this first assault on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth experiences the beginning of a change into a more thoughtful, compassionate person. The roots of Lizabeth’s empathy begin to appear as she reacts with shame and confusion to the mockery of Miss Lottie and to the suffering of her father, both of which expose her to painful adult realities. After her initial attack on Miss Lottie, Lizabeth remembers, “Suddenly I was ashamed, and I did not like being ashamed. The child in me sulked and said it was all in fun, but the woman in me flinched at the thought of the malicious attack that I had led” (3). The shame that Lizabeth feels is the first sign of an emerging sense of empathy for the pain Miss Lottie has experienced, a new feeling that allows her to identify her actions as a “malicious attack.” Lizabeth is still in the midst of change, however, as the ignorant “child” in her, attempting to deny the responsibilities of her actions, tries to continue to believe that her behavior “was all in fun.” The next critical moment in Lizabeth’s coming to terms with the reality of human suffering goes beyond a mere childish
prank. Later that day, she witnesses her father weeping “helplessly and hopelessly in the dark night” over his continuing failure to find steady employment (4). Seeing her father “sobbing like the tiniest child” causes Lizabeth to experience a “feeling of great bewilderment and fear,” which leads to “one great impulse toward destruction” (4). Lizabeth begins to understand the depth of her father’s suffering, but she is unable to fully accept this painful truth. Life becomes momentarily “out of tune” for Lizabeth when she grasps, seemingly for the first time, that her own suffering in this situation is caused by someone else’s suffering, her father’s. This marks her entrance into adulthood as she begins to understand that adults are flawed and fragile, forcing her to confront the problems of the adult world. The “bewilderment and fear” provoked by her father’s suffering drives Lizabeth to take her own suffering out on someone else, resulting in the ruin of Miss Lottie’s beautiful garden.

In the aftermath of the second attack on Miss Lottie’s marigolds, Lizabeth’s revelations about the harshness of human suffering and the necessity of compassion mark her transition into a thoughtful, compassionate woman. After witnessing Miss Lottie’s reaction to Lizabeth’s destruction of her most prized possession, Lizabeth realizes the depths of Miss Lottie’s pain: “For as I gazed at the immobile face, with the sad, weary eyes, […] the witch was no longer a witch but only a broken old woman who had dared to create beauty in the midst of ugliness and sterility” (5). Once the marigolds are destroyed, Lizabeth’s childish notion of Miss Lottie being a witch is destroyed as well. She sees the sad reality of Miss Lottie’s pain and appreciates her attempt to “create beauty” in a barren world of hopeless poverty. Though Lizabeth is unable to explain the significance of this realization as a child, reflecting on it as an adult, Lizabeth can articulate the wisdom she obtained in the moment of her change: “Innocence involves an unseeing acceptance of things at face value, ignorance of the area below the surface. In that
humiliating moment, I looked beyond myself and into the depths of another person” (5).

Lizabeth recognizes her loss of innocence once she comprehends the true meaning of innocence itself, namely that innocence consists of perceiving things from an ignorant perspective, whereas maturity requires seeing things as they truly are. Once she looks “beyond herself” and sees outside the scope of her own emotions and struggles, Lizabeth can perceive the severity of Miss Lottie’s emotions and struggles. The shame that Lizabeth feels for contributing to Miss Lottie’s burden marks Lizabeth’s ability to move beyond her selfish, childish ignorance. Seeing beyond her own situation and feeling compassion for another person, Lizabeth now possesses the emotional maturity to understand and empathize with another person’s suffering.

After her childish destruction of the marigolds, Lizabeth becomes aware of the anguish of others. She recognizes that her violent behavior arises from her own despair and that understanding and empathy allow her to see the adults around her in an entirely new way. She sees her father not as a stable, secure center of the family, but as another human susceptible to the harshness of reality. She views Miss Lottie not as a witch, but as a woman who suffers from a pain similar to her own. In accepting the difficulty of her own situation, Lizabeth understands Miss Lottie’s efforts to create beauty out of desolation. In her childhood ignorance, Lizabeth sees only the “perfect ugliness” of the marigolds, but as an empathetic woman, she grasps the significance of their beauty and the beauty of compassion itself.
Works Cited