

A step-by-step guideline for writing letter essays about fiction

Letter Essay = Response to a Book (not a summary!)

Unless otherwise noted, letter-essay will be due on the final Friday of the month

- Write it on Monday...
- Read it over (& make changes) on Tuesday...
- Print it out and read it ALOUD on Wednesday...
- Make final edits on Thursday...Print & bring in to class.

Paragraph One: After your greeting, provide the author, title, and genre of the book. Include a brief summary of the plot – the Who, What, Where, When, and Why of the book. Summary should never be more than 1/4 of your total essay.

Paragraph Two: Discuss the book's theme. The theme is the author's message. It's not a condensed summary of the plot. It's a generalization about people or about life. For example, in *The Hunger Games*, Nature Academy students identified the following themes: "Tyranny always leads to rebellion" "If it's wrong, do all you can to fix it" "When a person is kind to others, the kindness will come back to him" After you identify a theme, explain what plot events support it. Include paraphrased examples or quoted passages to support your assertions about theme. (For help with theme, review the notes in the reading section of your reading/writing log.)

Paragraph Three/Four: Offer interpretations of the text. An interpretation is an observation you make about the characters, plot, or themes of the book that aren't directly stated by the author. For example, a reader can interpret that Katniss, the main character from *The Hunger Games*, is a kind and brave person because she helps another despite great personal risk- even though the author never states that explicitly in the novel.

For ideas on formulating interpretations, see the "sentence openers" glued to the inside back cover of your lit. log. As always, support your thoughts with examples, preferably in the form of quoted passages, from the text.

Paragraph Four/Five: Comment on the writing and structure of the book. Look back over the book and comment on word choice, cliffhanger chapter endings, chapter titles, illustrations, use of dialogue, action sequences, descriptive language... Be sure to quote sentences or particular word choices that you find especially compelling or disappointing. Explain your opinions in detail.

Paragraph Five/Six: Evaluate. What is good/bad about the book? Is it appropriate for middle-school readers in terms of vocabulary, subject matter, pacing? How does it compare with similar books you have read, movies you have watched, or real-life events you have observed or experienced? If there is a part you would change, add more to, or omit, please share your opinions! As always, support your views with specific examples – preferably with passages quoted from the text.

Conclusion: Encourage me to purchase, retain, or ban the book from the classroom library.

Reminder: You must include one or more copied chunks of text (passages quoted from the book) plus explanations of why you chose those passages in every letter-essay!

Reminder #2: Letter-essays should be submitted in final draft form- edited, written in ink or word-processed (preferred) using 12-point font. Hand-written work may be single-spaced; word-processed works should be double-spaced. Remember a proper heading!