

The SIFT Method of Literary Analysis

Using the SIFT method of literary analysis, you can "sift" through the parts in order to comprehend the whole.

- S** **Symbol:** examine the title and text for symbolism
- I** **Images:** identify images and sensory details
- F** **Figures of Speech:** analyze figurative language and other devices
- T** **Tone and Theme:** discuss how all devices reveal tone and theme

Symbol

Since the title of a work often contains symbols that hint at theme, reexamine the title. Identify and explain any symbols you find in the text. Explain how and why the author uses those symbols. Don't forget that colors are also used in symbolism.

Imagery

Writers use language to create sensory impressions and to evoke specific responses to characters, objects, events, or situations in their works. The writer "shows" rather than "tells," thus allowing the reader to participate in the experience more fully. Therefore, imagery helps to produce mood and tone. When reading a piece containing imagery, ask yourself these two questions:

- * What do I see, hear, taste, smell, or feel?
- * What effect is the author trying to convey with these images?

Figures of Speech

Writers form images by using figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole, and personification. Find examples in the work and discuss how these figures of speech help to convey effect and meaning.

Tone

A close examination of word choice, imagery, and detail reveals the narrator's attitude or tone and contributes to the reader's understanding. In a few words, explain the tone.

Theme

Finally, identify central themes. Remember: ask your self what subjects (thematic words) emerge from your reading -- injustice, social protest, corruption, tradition, individuality, etc. Write a sentence about each subject listed based on insights gained from analyzing symbolism, imagery, figurative language, and other devices. Because all rhetorical and literary devices lead to tone and theme, this process will help you perceive what insights about lift the author is revealing about each subject and to refine the process of determining meaning in a text.