



**INFORMATIVE/  
EXPLANATORY**



## A Note About Informative/ Explanatory Writing

While argument is based on opinion or belief, informative/explanatory writing is more about explaining a concept, clarifying a process, or describing how something is made or how it works. Most analysis falls into this category, because a writer looks at something by examining its parts. For this reason, we include response to literature in this section.

In the real world, informative writing happens because someone is asking for information. Someone needs to know something or to understand something better. The writer addresses the topic to clear up some kind of confusion.

In academic writing, that situation is simulated but still imaginable.

All compelling writing contains clearly written information and explanations. Arguments cannot be convincing without information; narratives won't sustain a reader without clear explanations.

But in testing situations, the categories are so artificially separated that we recognize the need to strengthen the components of these kinds of writing and attempt to separate them for you. You may notice, naturally, some genre overlap in the student pieces and wonder why we didn't place a piece in a different section of the book. Know that that's because many of these student pieces were not written under rigid testing situations to fit into a testing genre but as part of a varied and rich year's worth of teaching in a classroom.

We marvel at classrooms that produce beautiful analysis. One gorgeous example is the work of Annie Adams, a high school student who analyzed *Of Mice and Men* with a painting, a poem, and an explanation of her thinking about the literary work. Her pieces end this section. They will take your breath away.

# Writing a Graphic Book Review

**What Writers Do** — When readers like a book, they share information about it with other readers, sometimes by writing a book review.

**What This Writer Does** — In her graphic book review, Batya offers intriguing glimpses into Rick Riordan's *Mission Road*. The information she provides will help other readers decide whether they'd like to read it, too.

## Activity for your class:

1. Ask your students to look at the elements included on the page and then read each section.
2. Invite them to go on a treasure hunt for the following sections. Circle and label each one:
  - quotations from the book and Batya's reactions to them
  - a place where the book's genre is mentioned
  - information about the setting, characters, and plot
  - information about the publication of the book
  - her star-rating
  - information about the reviewer

## Challenge for students:

Create a similar review of a book you have read, either in graphic form, with illustrations, like Batya's, or in another form. Use the text structure below to be sure you provide a variety of relevant information in your review.

### Book Review

Information  
about  
publication

Favorite lines,  
with  
commentary

Information about  
characters,  
setting, plot

Recommendation

**“Frankie White” Case Finally Solved!**

**Genre:** Fiction

★★★★★

I recommend this book to people who don't mind confusing talks about guns, Spanish words, or flirtatious conversations.

Rick Riordan's book, *Mission Road*, was published by Bantam Dell in 2005. It is the winner of the Edgars, Shamus, and Anthony Awards. "If you're a fan of fast-paced crime novels and haven't discovered mystery author Rick Riordan yet, you're in for a real treat". – *Lansing State Journal*

"Well worth the price of admissions just for its array of bad cops, good crooks, and swell characters. Throw in Riordan's clever twist at the end, and you're getting top value for your entertainment dollar". – *Texas*

"I could bust out and surprise them, but two against one, me with only a baseball bat and fashionable silk pajamas- I didn't like the odds. I could take down two men, maybe, but the house was still full of people. Armed people. I wouldn't get far" (244).  
I like this excerpt because even though you can tell Tres is in trouble, I like that he's thinking ridiculous things about what he's wearing and not worrying to much about escaping Guy White's house even though it's an emergency. FYI: he's also wearing teddy bear slippers!

Time: twenty-first century  
The place: San Antonio, Texas  
Main characters: Tres Navarre, the White family, Ralph Arguello, and Etch.  
Situation: P.I. Tres is trying to solve an unsolved murder and hiding Ralph, his friend, from the police, for he is wanted for murder. He must solve the case in forty-eight hours, or Ralph will be charged for the murder of Frankie White.  
Dramatic question: Who is guilty of the murder of Frankie White?

"The tiny rooms were packed with a horde of smaller Arguello siblings, cousins and nephews whose names I could never keep straight. The extended family, Ralph informed me, lived with Mama Arguello full-time. Most had dead or missing or apathetic parents" (57).  
Tres is describing the Arguello's house the first time Frankie White and him visit it, when they were in high school. I think it's intelligent to talk about the character's backgrounds because this event is mentioned later in the story and when you read it, you're not so confused about what is happening.

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**MISSION ROAD**

# Analyzing the Rhetorical Effects of Poetic Devices

**What Writers Do** — Writers may closely analyze the specific poetic devices a poet employs and the effect created by those authorial choices.

**What This Writer Does** — In this thoughtful analysis, Alison explores Edgar Allan Poe's word choices, mood, and meaning in the poem "Annabel Lee."

## Activity for your class:

1. Have students read Alison's analysis BEFORE reading the poem "Annabel Lee."
2. As a class, list some things you learn about the poem from Alison's essay (Example: *the title character is dead*).
3. Find examples to highlight the following two things:
  - green: discussions of poetic devices (Example: *repetition of the title, imagery*)
  - yellow: the effect each device has on the reader (e.g., *repetition of the name and use of the final -ee sound create an echo effect; the imagery creates "creepiness"*)

## Challenge for students:

Choose a poem you like or lyrics to a song. Try doing what Alison did, using the main points in the structure below to find and analyze poetic devices.

### Point-by-Point Text Analysis

What I notice about the title

What I notice about word choices

What I notice about the speaker's attitudes

What I notice that changes

What I think it all means

**“Annabel Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe**

**TITLE**—The title introduces us to the *sound* of the name, Annabel Lee, which is important for Poe. He repeats her name seven times, and more than half the lines in this poem end with that ee sound. It’s almost like the name is shouted out in the title, and then echoes through the rest of the poem. She is the center of this poem, but we never learn much about her except that she was young, the narrator’s wife, and her name was Annabel Lee. In a way, the sound of her name becomes her, and takes her place. It’s a poem about a girl, but also about the memory of her. She hasn’t left much behind for him but the sound of a name he keeps repeating. The title, always the first thing we read, is a great place for Poe to tip us off to this theme.

**CONNOTATION and DICTION**—In the 5th and 6th stanzas Poe uses romantic metaphors that describe his love for her even after her death and how he thinks of her at almost every moment of the day. In the last couplet of the poem, Poe starts with a poetic description of his wife’s state; *“In her sepulchre there by the sea,”* but then he translates his poetic diction into plain terms with *“In her tomb by the sea.”* Repetition is used here not only to augment her state of being but also for Poe to translate the poetic diction of the first line to simpler terms in the second line. When doing this Poe clarifies it for the reader because with the diction and poetic and mysterious sense that pretty much just stems from the word *sepulchre* makes the idea seem more far off and just an unreal thought. This is because *sepulchre* is more of an unknown word which has a mysterious connotation to it. However in the second line *sepulchre* is broken down to *tomb* which has a very real and concrete connotation to all of us.

**ATTITUDE**—It shows love and death. You learn that the narrator is desperately in love and cannot live without her. He blames God, or the angels for being jealous. He says that he will always love her and he

will never get over her. He is just waiting to die, so he can be with her. *“And so, all the night-tide, I lay down by the side/ of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride.”* The speaker seems increasingly obsessed and unbalanced as the poem goes on, and this is what it all leads to. He is half-alive and half-dead, sleeping in a tomb by the ocean.

**SHIFTS**—The voice, attitude and mood shift from happy to sad and angry in about the second stanza when Poe starts to talk about the death of Annabel Lee and the angels taking her away. In lines 34-37 there is a major shift; the poem goes from past tense to present tense. *“For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams/ of the beautiful Annabel Lee;/ and the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes/ of the beautiful Annabel Lee.”* He was telling a story about something that happened long ago, but now he’s letting us know what’s happening right now. The increasing shifts and imagery in the lines create a creepiness in the poem.

**THEME**—The poem means that the author is deeply depressed without his true love. The message in the poem is that true love exists but may not always be happy. It relates to life because it shows that everything doesn’t go perfect. It shows that life can be hard sometimes but also that it can be beautiful and fun. Readers will be able to relate to this if they have lost a love one. It is understandable that the author is sad. ☆

# Using Quotations to Support a Thesis in a Literary Essay

**What Writers Do** — When writers discuss a literary work, they track their thinking, using direct quotations to highlight specific parts of the book or work that influenced that thinking.

**What This Writer Does** — Selena discusses one of the characters in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, exploring her belief that this character is an archetype. As she does this, she presents quotations from the book and explains what each quotation reveals about the character.

## Activity for your class:

1. Pass out copies and read the piece.
2. Invite students to use highlighters to find the following:
  - blue—the quotations from the book
  - yellow—Selena’s analysis of each quotation (what it shows)
3. Look at the pattern, share, and reflect: Does Selena make her thinking clear? Can you think of other ways to explain the material in the quotes?

## Challenge for students:

Think of an interesting character from something you’ve read. If you were to describe that character with one word (or short phrase), what would it be? Just as Selena did, explain what the character did or said in the story, using quotations and explanations to reveal what those quotations show us. Color-code it the same way you did Selena’s. What do you see?

### Describing a Character

This character is (description)

One way we know (with quotes and explanations)

Another way we know (with quotes and explanations)

These all add up to show us this

### Squealer as the Trickster Archetype in *Animal Farm*

In *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, Squealer is a typical trickster archetype. In the novel a farm is taken over by its overworked, mistreated animals. The animals set out to form a utopia of progress, justice, and equality. Through Squealer's archetype of the trickster, Orwell shows that manipulation can be used for power and control.

Squealer fits every attribute of a trickster. Squealer was such a brilliant talker that the others declared that *"he could turn black into white."* This example shows that Squealer can make you believe what he wants you to believe. He then goes on and tells the other animals that, *"It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples."* This shows that he makes the others believe that he cares for them. Both of these examples prove that Squealer is a trickster. He feels so smart that he can control what the others think and do.

Squealer's character fits the theme that manipulation can be used for power and control. When talking to the other animals, Squealer states that Comrade Napoleon, *"would be only too happy to let you make your own decisions for yourselves. But sometimes you might make the wrong decisions, comrades, and then where should we be?"* This example shows that Squealer manipulates the others into thinking that he knows best. He then goes on and states *"Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?"* This shows that he appeals to the animals gut instincts and prejudices. He justifies decisions by telling them that the pigs want to break the way of Jones. Both examples prove that Squealer manipulates the other animals into believing that they are making the decisions when it's truly the pigs.

Squealer is so selfish and power-hungry that he is willing to bend reality to suit his interests. He gets what he wants through coaxing and treachery. Squealer does this through exploitation which can be used to bully and demean others, a classic characteristic of the trickster archetype. ☆