

SIFT

When exploring how a writer uses literary elements and stylish techniques to convey meaning or theme, this technique is helpful to begin practicing this literary analysis. This method allows you to "sift" through the parts in order to comprehend the whole.

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| <i>Symbol</i> | <p>Examine the title and text for symbolism.</p> <p>Some examples of interpretations from John Steinbeck's <i>The Pearl</i>...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The doctor may represent willful evil (inhumanity).✓ The pearl dealers may exemplify conspiracy and exploitation.✓ Kino could represent the common man oppressed by society. |
| <i>Images</i> | <p>Identify images and sensory details.</p> <p>Writers use language to create sensory impressions and to evoke specific responses to characters, objects, events, or situation 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. Consider these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ What do I see, hear, taste, smell, or feel?✓ What effect is the author trying to convey with these feelings? |
| <i>Figures of Speech</i> | <p>Analyze figurative language and other devices.</p> <p>Writers form images by using figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, personification, irony and allusion. Some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ "A town is like a colonial animal."✓ "The essence of pearl mixed with essence of men and a curious dark residue was precipitated."✓ "The black distillate was like the scorpion, or like hunger in the smell of food, or like loneliness when love is withheld."✓ "The poison sacs of the town began to manufacture venom, and the town swelled and puffed with the pressure of it." |
| <i>Tone and Theme</i> | <p>Discuss how all devices reveal tone and theme.</p> <p>A close examination of word choice, imagery, and detail reveal the narrator's attitude or tone and contributes to the reader's understanding.</p> <p>To determine theme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Summarize the story.✓ List the subject or subjects that emerge from their summaries, such as evil, injustice, inhumanity, corruption, poverty, tradition, individuality, survival...✓ 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 to perceive what insights about life the author is revealing about each subject and to refine the process of determining meaning in a text. <p>Some examples of themes (from subjects listed above):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The defeat of an individual is inevitable when society sets out to destroy him.✓ Even though everything a man possesses may be lost or destroyed, he need not be defeated.✓ When man becomes a threat to society, that society sets out to destroy him.✓ When a poor man has an ambition to rise above, he faces fierce opposition.✓ Evil forces are always conspiring to defeat the good.✓ Justice is often withheld from economically deprived racial minorities. |