

Five Ways to Use a Quotation in Literary Analysis

1. Analyze a word and/or image from the quotation. Explain how the word's denotation and connotation reveal or reinforce the meaning of the passage. Explain how the image's sensory details reveal or reinforce the point the quotation illustrates.

Ex: Nick looks back on Gatsby's life and says, "it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams" (Fitzgerald 6). The use of the word "preyed" indicates Nick sees Gatsby as being under attack and helpless. The "dust" that surrounds Gatsby prevents him from being seen for what he really is.

2. Explain how the information in the quotation relates to a significant action, characterization, or idea from the text. You are pointing out an important connection the reader might not have noticed.

Ex: Nick notes Gatsby's displays in front of Daisy: "He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them one by one before us..." (Fitzgerald 97). With this action, Gatsby proves successful in impressing Daisy with his possessions. The beauty that Daisy sees in a pile of shirts shows the value she places on wealth.

3. Sometimes what a quotation doesn't say is more important than its surface details. Explain how the information the quotation lacks relates to a significant action, characterization, or idea from the text.

Ex: In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman describes a colleague's death and says, "when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral" (Miller 81). Loman aspires to be like that salesman, but fails to see, however, the negative parts of that man's life. When Willy dies on the job, no family or friends attend his funeral, only business acquaintances.

4. Discuss the symbolism of an object mentioned in the quotation.

Ex: In describing Gatsby's obsession with Daisy, Nick says, "he had committed himself to the following of a grail" (Fitzgerald 156). Much like the followers of the holy grail, Gatsby desperately searches for Daisy. Much like the followers of the grail, Gatsby ends up dying trying to attain his magic cup (Daisy) to fill the emotional void in his life.

5. Explain the irony of the quotation. Discuss both the literal level of the quotation, and its ironic implications.

Ex: Gatsby's funeral is a great disappointment: "The minister glanced several times at his watch, so I took him aside and asked him to wait for half an hour. But it wasn't any use. Nobody came" (Fitzgerald 182). Gatsby threw enormous parties with multitudes of people, but ironically not one of those people showed up at his funeral. In achieving the American Dream, Gatsby had forfeited true friends.