



Professional Development Webinar #10: Teaching Composition 2

Sources: The 3-Sentence Quotation

Using **textual evidence** to support your thesis statement is the crux of writing from literature. Textual evidence, correctly presented, turns opinion into interpretation. It is only when an argument is based on textual evidence that it can properly claim to explain what the book says – and this is the first and foremost goal of literary interpretation.

Finding Textual Evidence:

1. Go back to **three** places in the text that helped you answer the prompt originally. In other words, revisit the passages that gave you the original idea for your thesis statement.
2. Identify specific sentences or phrases in each passage that support aspects of your thesis statement. These can be things said by one of the characters (that is, you can quote dialogue) or things said by the author/narrator (that is, you can quote narration). These pieces of evidence can support your thesis in a variety of ways:
 - a. They can provide illustrations or examples of your thesis. *Huck's forgiving nature is his most powerful characteristic – examples of this trait getting him into and out of trouble from chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7.*
 - b. They can demonstrate logical steps toward your thesis. *Huck goes through a three-step coming of age process in this story – evidence of early immaturity, cataclysmic change, and later maturity.*
 - c. They can prove parts of your thesis. *Huck's combination of naivete and wisdom is the driving force in this novel – evidence from chapter 3 demonstrating his naivete, and from chapter 14 demonstrating his wisdom.*
 - d. They can show reasons why your thesis is true. *Huck's decision to protect Jim is the climax of the story – evidence that conflict A is resolved there; evidence that denouement begins there, evidence that Theme X is emphasized there*

Developing textual evidence:

Once you have identified specific passages in the text that will support your thesis statement, develop them using the “3-Sentence Quotation” formula. This formula involves using three sentences for every piece of textual evidence: a set-up sentence, a quotation, and a follow-up sentence.

The **set-up sentence** prepares the reader for the quotation by quickly describing the situation in which the quotation occurs and linking this situation to the essay’s argument.

Example:

During their first conversation aboard the raft, Huck can tell that the King and the Duke are lying about their identities.

The **quotation** itself comes in the middle of the 3-Sentence formula. It is placed in quotation marks, and includes an author/page citation at the end of the sentence, before final punctuation.

Example:

“It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds” (Twain 237).

The **follow up sentence** explains how the quotation helps prove the thesis statement. It is your most powerful statement of what the quotation means and why it is important. NEVER USE A QUOTATION WITHOUT A FOLLOW UP SENTENCE! The follow-up sentence is where you do most of your interpretive work.

Example:

Huck’s suspicion of the two charlatans suggests that his native instincts are capable of telling right from wrong.

When you put the 3-sentence quotation together, you will find a complete paragraph beginning to take shape:

During their first conversation aboard the raft, Huck can tell that the King and the Duke are lying about their identities. “It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds” (Twain 237). Huck’s suspicion of the two charlatans suggests that his native instincts are capable of telling right from wrong.

Thesis/Sources Assignment

In response to the essay prompt at the beginning of this lesson, write TWO (2) separate thesis statements. For EACH thesis statement, develop THREE 3-sentence quotations (that's a total of six 3-sentence quotations, three for each thesis statement).

Thesis and Sources

Thesis Statement #1

Text of your first thesis statement here.

3-Sentence Quotations

Set-up sentence A. Quotation A (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence A.

Set-up sentence B. Quotation B (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence B.

Set-up sentence C. Quotation C (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence C.

Thesis Statement #2

Text of your second thesis statement here.

3-Sentence Quotations

Set-up sentence A. Quotation A (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence A.

Set-up sentence B. Quotation B (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence B.

Set-up sentence C. Quotation C (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence C.

The Microcosm Paragraph

First, review your previous assignment, paying special attention to the three sentence quotations you have developed. Remember, they explain how the text supports your thesis, so they are key elements in your argument. In fact, you can use the ideas from each of your 3-sentence quotations to summarize your essay even before you compose a draft. Do this by creating a “microcosm” paragraph.

A microcosm is a miniature version of something – containing all of the same parts as the original, but on a smaller scale. A microcosm paragraph contains all the components of your argument in a single paragraph. It is a useful tool for refining your argument before it gets too long and unwieldy. It also helps you to make sure that all the parts of your essay are doing their job of proving your thesis.

To construct a microcosm paragraph, arrange the ideas from your thesis statement and your 3-sentence quotations like this:

- Thesis statement
 - Paraphrased version of your first 3-sentence quotation
 - Paraphrased version of your second 3-sentence quotation
 - Paraphrased version of your third 3-sentence quotation
 - Clincher sentence (paraphrased version of the thesis statement)
- } (in any order)

After you have a draft of your microcosm paragraph, read it closely. Does it clearly state and fully defend an arguable answer to the essay prompt? If not, how can the individual sentences be improved?

- Re-order your statements
- Re-write your statements
- Add or subtract statements
- Use different texts

You can rearrange and rewrite any of the sentences in your microcosm. When you do, simply go back and apply these changes to your 3-sentence quotations as well.

When it's time to construct a rough draft, the work you have done in writing a careful microcosm will save you considerable time and effort!

“Exploding” the Microcosm into an Outline:

Once your microcosm expresses a tight, well ordered argument that answers the prompt directly, use it to construct an outline of your essay. Here’s how:

As we have said before, a microcosm paragraph contains all of the parts of a complete essay. Let’s look at an example to see which parts of the microcosm correspond to an essay’s various features:

Microcosm Paragraph: *The Biggest Bear* by Lynd Ward

In *The Biggest Bear*, protagonist Johnny Orchard completes a three-step coming-of-age process, allowing author Lynd Ward to make a profound statement about the nature of manhood. As the story opens, Johnny Orchard displays a boy’s obsession with his own reputation. As Johnny’s relationship with his pet bear develops, his character develops as well; he becomes concerned with the welfare of someone besides himself. At the climax of the story, Johnny denies his own selfish interests altogether and freely chooses a man’s responsibilities. As Johnny comes of age in this story, author Lynd Ward suggests that being a man is more complicated than it appears.

“Exploded” Microcosm:

In *The Biggest Bear*, protagonist Johnny Orchard completes a three-step coming-of-age process, allowing author Lynd Ward to make a profound statement about the nature of manhood. **[This will be the subject of the introduction paragraph. You will NOT write an introduction paragraph this week.]**

As the story opens, Johnny Orchard displays a boy’s obsession with his own reputation. **[This will be the subject of body paragraph #1.]**

As Johnny’s relationship with his pet bear develops, his character develops as well; he becomes concerned with the welfare of someone besides himself. **[This will be the subject of body paragraph #2.]**

At the climax of the story, Johnny denies his own selfish interests altogether and freely chooses a man’s responsibilities. **[This will be the subject of body paragraph #3.]**

As Johnny comes of age in this story, author Lynd Ward suggests that being a man is more complicated than it appears. **[This will be the subject of the conclusion paragraph.]**

**Interpretive Essay: *The Biggest Bear* by Lynd Ward
(Sentences from “exploded microcosm” are highlighted)**

Surely the “coming-of-age” theme is one of classic literature’s most powerful devices. When the main character of a story undergoes the painful process of maturing from a child into an adult, the reader is compelled to walk that road with him, vicariously participating in one of the most human of all dramas. In *The Biggest Bear*, protagonist Johnny Orchard completes a three-step coming-of-age process, allowing author Lynd Ward to make a profound statement about the nature of manhood.

The story’s exposition reveals Johnny’s immaturity. Comparing himself with the other families in town, he displays a boy’s obsession with his own reputation. The fact that his family grows apples instead of hunting bears galls him, and he is cut to the quick every time a neighbor comes home with a bear skin. He is especially uncomfortable when his grandfather runs from a bear instead of shooting it:

He was very humiliated. “If I ever see a bear,” he said, “I’ll shoot him so fast he won’t know what hit him. And we’ll have the biggest bear skin in the whole valley” (Ward, 15).

Johnny is clearly desperate to be thought of as manly. Equally clear is that his idea of masculinity amounts to shooting, fighting and conquering. We can also see his self-absorption in this episode: his humiliation proves that he is concerned only with his own interests.

After Johnny’s relationship with his pet bear develops, his character develops as well. Caring for the bear cub teaches Johnny to become concerned with the welfare of someone besides himself. Johnny goes to great lengths to shield the bear from the wrath of his neighbors, taking it East, West and South into the woods to live “like other bears.” His reasons for these efforts are still quite selfish; you might say that he strives to save his own pet for his own use. Nevertheless, he is not the same person who vowed to kill the first bear he laid eyes on. Instead, his eyes are turned ever so slightly away from himself.

At the climax of the story, Johnny completes his coming-of age process. When something must be done to protect the neighbors, Johnny denies his own selfish interests altogether and freely chooses a man’s responsibilities:

They decided there was only one thing left to do. Johnny said he would do it (Ward, 33).

In volunteering to shoot the bear, Johnny denies his own wishes so that his neighbors, who have been his primary antagonists, can prosper. He lays down his life, so to speak, for the good of his friends. Johnny comes to a brand new understanding of manhood. It lies not in conquest, he finds, but in self sacrifice.

Protagonist Johnny Orchard undergoes a coming of age transformation in *The Biggest Bear* - and as he does, author Lynd Ward suggests that being a man is more complicated than it appears. Though this story was written for small children, it nevertheless deals with timeless themes common to many great works of literature. No matter how simple the story, the presence of such eternal themes always has the power to move the reader, and it encourages him to contemplate his own humanity. In this way, classic literature is one of the best aids to a good life.

Adding transition sentences

In order for the points of your argument to work together, each must flow naturally from the preceding one, and flow just as naturally into the next one. At the same time, readers of your essay must always be reminded of the overall point you are trying to make, even when a certain paragraph doesn't mention it explicitly. The sentences that do this important work are Transition Sentences, and they appear at the beginning and end of each paragraph.

There two types of transition sentences.

Topic Sentences appear at the beginning of a paragraph. They declare the point that the paragraph will make and how that point relates to the thesis. They may also explain how the paragraph's point flows naturally from that of the previous paragraph. Topic sentences must always do the first of these jobs; they only need to do the second job if it hasn't already been done by the previous clincher sentence.

Clincher Sentences appear at the end of the paragraph. They summarize the point that has just been made and restate how it supports the thesis. They may also hint at how this point paves the way for the argument to be made in the next paragraph. Clincher sentences must always do the first of these jobs; they only need to do the second job if it will not be done by the upcoming topic sentence.

The space between two paragraphs always needs a transition – either from the preceding clincher sentence, or from the following topic sentence. It does not have to come from both places at once.

Transition sentences are as important as 3-sentence quotations. They allow you to interpret the story for your readers and convince them of the truth of your thesis statement. As with follow-up sentences, transitions give you a powerful opportunity to do your interpretive work.

Notice the transition sentences in the essay about *The Biggest Bear* on the next page (they are underlined):

Interpretive Essay: *The Biggest Bear* by Lynd Ward (Sentences from “exploded microcosm” in yellow)

Surely the “coming-of-age” theme is one of classic literature’s most powerful devices. When the main character of a story undergoes the painful process of maturing from a child into an adult, the reader is compelled to walk that road with him, vicariously participating in one of the most human of all dramas. In *The Biggest Bear*, protagonist Johnny Orchard completes a three-step coming-of-age process, allowing author Lynd Ward to make a profound statement about the nature of manhood.

The story’s exposition reveals Johnny’s immaturity. Comparing himself with the other families in town, he displays a boy’s obsession with his own reputation. The fact that his family grows apples instead of hunting bears galls him, and he is cut to the quick every time a neighbor comes home with a bear skin. He is especially uncomfortable when his grandfather runs from a bear instead of shooting it:

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After Johnny’s relationship with his pet bear develops, his character develops as well. Caring for the bear cub teaches Johnny to become concerned with the welfare of someone besides himself. Johnny goes to great lengths to shield the bear from the wrath of his neighbors, taking it East, West and South into the woods to live “like other bears.” His reasons for these efforts are still quite selfish; you might say that he strives to save his own pet for his own use. Nevertheless, he is not the same person who vowed to kill the first bear he laid eyes on. Instead, his eyes are turned ever so slightly away from himself.

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Protagonist Johnny Orchard undergoes a coming of age transformation in *The Biggest Bear* - and as he does, author Lynd Ward suggests that being a man is more complicated than it appears. for small children, it nevertheless deals with timeless themes common to many great works of literature. No matter how simple the story, the presence of such eternal themes always has the power to move the reader, and it encourages him to contemplate his own humanity. In this way, classic literature is one of the best aids to a good life.

Microcosm/Outline Assignment

Use the ideas from your three-sentence quotations to develop a microcosm paragraph; then “explode” this microcosm into an outline of three body paragraphs that flesh out the argument for your thesis. Each section of the outline will include an edited 3-sentence quotation from the previous assignment and a selection of transition sentences that combine your textual evidence into a smooth argument.

Your assignment should look like the image on the following page, in outline form with Roman Numerals and lettering:

Student Name

Age (in years)

Book Title

Assignment #

Due Date

Microcosm and Outline

Microcosm Paragraph

Thesis statement. Paraphrased version of 3-sentence quotation from previous assignment. Paraphrased version of 3-sentence quotation from previous assignment. Paraphrased version of 3-sentence quotation from previous assignment. Clincher sentence.

Outline

(Please use the actual sentences that will appear in your essay for each line of this outline.)

I. Thesis Statement

II. Topic Sentence for Body Paragraph #1

- a. Set-up sentence(s)
 - b. Quotation
 - c. Follow-up sentence(s)
 - d. Clincher Sentence for Body Paragraph #1
- } 3-sentence quotation from previous assignment (edited)

III. Topic Sentence for Body Paragraph #2

- a. Set-up sentence
 - b. Quotation
 - c. Follow-up sentence
 - d. Clincher Sentence for Body Paragraph #2
- } 3-sentence quotation from previous assignment (edited)

IV. Topic Sentence for Body Paragraph #3

- a. Set-up sentence
 - b. Quotation
 - c. Follow-up sentence
 - d. Clincher Sentence
- } 3-sentence quotation from previous assignment (edited)

