1. Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a novel or play in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2. Some works of literature use the element of time in a distinct way. The chronological sequence of events may be altered, or time may be suspended or accelerated. Choose a novel, an epic, or a play of recognized literary merit and show how the author’s manipulation of time contributes to the effectiveness of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

3. Some novels and plays seem to advocate changes in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Choose such a novel or play and note briefly the particular attitudes or traditions that the author apparently wishes to modify. Then analyze the techniques the author uses to influence the reader’s or audience’s views. Avoid plot summary.

4. “The experienced reader-evaluates an ending, not by whether it is happy or unhappy, but by whether it is convincing. In other words, he wants the ending to follow logically from the nature of the characters and from the preceding action.” Write a carefully planned and unified essay in which you consider the ending of a play, a novel, or a long narrative poem in the light of this statement.

5. The conflict created when the will of an individual opposes the will of the majority is the recurring theme of many novels, plays and essays. Select the work of an essayist who is in opposition to his society; or from a work of recognized literary merit, fictional character who is in opposition to his or her society. In a critical essay, analyze the conflict and discuss the moral and ethical implications for both the individual and the society. Do not summarize the plot or action of the work you choose.

6. A character’s attempt to recapture the past is important in many plays, novels, and poems. Choose a literary work in which a character views the past with such feelings as reverence, bitterness, or longing. Show with clear evidence from the work how the character’s view of the past is used to develop a theme in the work.

7. A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude. Select a literary work that produces this “healthy confusion.” Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the “pleasure and disquieted” experienced by the reader of the work.
8. Choose a novel or play that depicts a conflict between a parent (or a parent figure) and son or daughter. Write an essay in which you analyze the sources of conflict and explain how the conflict contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid plot summary.

9. A recurring theme in literature is “the classic war between a passion and responsibility.” For example, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with a moral duty. Choose a literary work in which a character confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well written essay clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work.

10. In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose a work of literary merit that confronts the reader with a scene or scene of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the complete work. Do not merely summarize the plot.

11. From a novel or play of literary merit, select an important character who is a villain. Then write a well-organized essay to analyze the nature of the character’s villainy and show how it enhances meaning work. Do not summarize the plot.

12. In a novel or play, a confidant (male) or a confidante (female) is a character, often a friend or relative of the hero or heroine, whose role is to be present when the hero or heroine needs a sympathetic listener to confide in. Frequently the result is, as Henry James remarked, that the confidante can be as much “the reader’s friend as the protagonist’s.” However, the author sometimes uses this character for other purposes as well. Choose a confidant or confidante from a novel or play of recognized literary merit and write an essay in which you discuss the various ways this character functions in the work.

13. A character’s attempt to recapture or to repeat the past is important in many plays, novels, and poems. Choose a literary work in which a character views the past with such feelings as reverence, bitterness, longing. Show with clear evidence from the work how the character’s view of the past is used to develop a theme in the work.

14. The meaning of some literary works is often enhanced by sustained allusion to myths, the Bible or other works of literature. Select a literary work that makes use of such a sustained reference. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain the allusion that predominates in the work and analyze how it enhances the work’s meaning.

15. Many works of literature not readily identified with the mystery or detective story genre nonetheless involve the investigation of a mystery. In these works, the solution to the mystery may be less important than the knowledge gained in the process of its investigation. Choose a novel or play in which you identify the mystery and explain how the investigation illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.
16. Writers often highlight the values of a culture or society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Choose a novel or play in which such a character plays such a significant role and show how that character’s alienation reveals the surrounding society’s assumptions and moral values.

17. Choose a complex and important character in a novel or a play of recognized literary merit who might on the basis of the character’s actions alone be considered evil or immoral. In a well-organized essay, explain both how and why the full presentation of the character in the work makes us react more sympathetically than we otherwise might. Avoid plot summary.

18. In some works of literature, a character who appears briefly, or does not appear at all, is a significant presence. Choose a novel or play of literary merit and write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in the work. You may wish to discuss how the character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters. Avoid plot summary.

19. "The true test of comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter." Choose a novel in which a scene or character awakens "thoughtful laughter" in the reader. Write an essay in which you show why this laughter is "thoughtful" and how it contributes to the meaning of the work.

20. Choose a complex and important character in a novel of recognized literary merit who might on the basis of the character’s actions alone be considered evil or immoral. In a well-organized essay, explain both how and why the full presentation of the character in the work makes us react more sympathetically than we otherwise might. Avoid plot summary.

21. In some works of literature, a character who appears briefly or does not appear at all, is a significant presence. Choose a novel or play of literary merit and write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in the work. You may wish to discuss how the character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters. Avoid plot summary.

22. The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote, "Nobody, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man's mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time."

From a novel or play choose a character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict with one character illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. You may use one of the novels or plays listed below or another novel or work of similar literary quality.
Compilation of prompts for literary analysis