

Book Report Assignment

The Task

Ah, novels... You are going to read a great deal from now on. For this assignment you are going to read a few novels. This, of course, is one part of the assignment. The most important part is reading the books. The second part requires you to write a paragraph. First you read, and then you write.

The Reading

You will select a novel from a list given to you. You should keep this list with you all the time. You must choose a novel from this list. It must be a novel you have not read previously and it may not be a novel you are currently reading. It is new to you – brand new. Then you will complete your reading of the novel within the time constraints provided (usually within one week, and no more than two weeks). Once you have finished reading the novel, you are free to begin the written portion of the task.

The Writing

For each novel you read, a separate writing task will be assigned. The tasks will vary, but essentially you will be asked to write a **paragraph of approximately 100 words**. The purpose of the written portion of this assignment is to provide the teacher and your parents with some confidence that you understood what you read. It is also to give you an opportunity to practice writing organized paragraphs. Of course, there are *different styles of paragraph* depending on the *purpose* of the writing. For our purposes, we will focus on two separate styles.

- i) **Summary:** In this kind of paragraph you will be asked to explain what happened. Essentially, this is a plot summary. You must select the most significant information from the novel and express it in an organized and interesting manner. You must be able to reasonably include the important information, but exclude the unnecessary. This sounds easy, but it is a challenging task, especially given the constraint of 100 words. As we get further in the year, those who excel at this assignment will likely be those who are able to concise.
- ii) **Argument:** In this kind of paragraph you need to argue a point. This is not the kind of argument you have with your brother or sister or dog, it is an expression of an idea for the purpose of convincing someone of your idea's merit. In this kind of paragraph you will be given a specific topic and told to write about it. For example, you might be given a topic like this: "Was the protagonist a believable character? How did this help or hinder the novel?" Once again you have only 100 words to express yourself, so this can be a challenging assignment. (For those counting, this paragraph is just over 100 words).

Follow the format of Book Report as illustrated below:

Title

Author

- 1. Topic Sentence:** Your paragraph must begin with a sentence that clearly expresses the topic the entire paragraph will seek to argue. Be sure the topic is critical. It must be about something the author has done – it must be about the writing.

For example:

- a) **“Lois Lowry creates a great deal of interest in the introduction through her creation of setting.”**
- b) **“The author develops the character of David very well over the course of the novel.”**
- c) **“Through the use of suspense, the author is able to develop a dark and frightening atmosphere in the novel.”**

Note how the following are poor topic sentences:

“I really liked how brave the main character was.”

“Brian Doyle’s book, *Angel Square*, had a lot of racism in it.”

“The main character in the novel was a really good friend to the other characters.”

- 2. Clarification:** Now, it is usually a good idea to follow the topic sentence with a sentence of explanation. While you may have written a clear topic sentence, it is always a good idea to be sure you have been clear. So,

- a) **“As a result of the uncertainties of time and place, questions continue to arise about the characters and conflicts in the novel.”**
- b) **“David begins the novel as a weak and uncertain boy, but at the novel’s conclusion he is far more certain and well on his way to becoming a man.”**
- c) **“By keeping information from the reader at major points of conflict, the outcome is often unclear. As a result, there is a dark and looming mood at the conclusion of many chapters.”**

- 3. Examples:** It is here that you will bring to light an example or two to support the idea you have just explained. Sometimes you might want to provide a quote in your example, but most of the time, you will just paraphrase or discuss an event. Often in a paragraph this short, one clear example will suffice. However, sometimes you may be compelled to include two examples. That may be fine, but once you start going beyond that, it will be too many.

- a) **“In the very first chapter Lowry makes a big deal of the fact that a fighter plane flies above the community. Terror seems to grip everyone who is forced to scurry indoors. Lowry gives no explanation for the behaviour, but she certainly expects the reader to make comparisons between life inside and outside the book. And, while the main character seems familiar with planes,**

they appear to only be permitted to land on the other side of the river and fly away from the community. Lowry makes these points explicit without offering explanation for them.”

- b) “At the beginning of the novel, David boards the airplane after a teary good bye to his mother. But, when the plane crashes, David is forced to save himself. He finds food, makes his own shelter, and finally manages to signal help. In the end, David has taken responsibility for his own well being and has not only saved himself, but has grown up doing it.”
- c) “Often, at the ends of chapters, the author will leave the reader with a cliff hanger. For example, at the end of chapter 3, the author has the protagonist raising his fist in protest. But, the chapter ends before it is clear what he is going to do with the raised fist. Again, at the end of chapter 7, the author has the main character veer off the road in his minivan. It is clear that he sees a tree approaching through the windshield, but just prior to contact, the chapter ends.”

4. Conclusion: Your conclusion will be short – one or two sentences. It should provide some explanation of how the topic you have been discussing has affected the novel as a whole. Does it help to make the novel better?

- a) **As a result of the unusual setting, Lowry entices her reader to ask questions. And, it is with increasing interest that each new chapter is read.”**
- b) **The author has clearly shown how David’s character has been affected by the wilderness and his need to survive. He has used this situation very well to provide an impulse to the development of his protagonist.”**
- c) **“The use of this cliffhanger technique is a very effective means of providing a looming atmosphere in the novel. This atmosphere, in turn, helps to make the antagonist and the other villains in the novel even more threatening.”**

Study teacher’s comments on the following examples of a Book **Report**:

(1)

The Giver

Lois Lowry

Lois Lowry creates a great deal of interest in the introduction through her creation of setting. As a result of the uncertainties of time and place, questions continue to arise about the characters and conflicts in the novel. In the very first chapter Lowry makes a big deal of the fact that a fighter plane flies above the community. Terror seems to grip everyone who is forced to scurry indoors. Lowry gives no explanation for the behaviour, but she certainly expects the reader to make comparisons between life inside and outside the book. And, while the main character seems familiar with planes, they appear to only be permitted to land on the other side of the river and fly away from the community. Lowry makes these points explicit without offering explanation for them. As a result of the unusual setting, Lowry entices her reader to ask questions. And, it is with increasing interest that each new chapter is read.

Teacher's comments:

Now, if I were editing this I would encourage myself to shorten it. I would ask questions about the point I make in sentence two – if time and place are confusing why do I not make this more clear later. Does the reader ask questions about time and place? What has the arrival of a plane got to do with confusion about time and place...

(2)

Hatchet**Gary Paulsen**

The author develops the character of David very well over the course of the novel, David begins the novels as a weak and uncertain boy, but at the novel's conclusion he is far more certain and well on his way to becoming a man. At the beginning of the novel, David boards the airplane after a good bye to his mother. But, when the plane crashes, David is forced to signal help. In the end, David has taken responsibility for his own well being and has not only saved himself, but has grown up doing it. The author has clearly shown how David's character has been affected by the wilderness and his need to survive. He has used this situation very well to provide an impulse to the development of his protagonist.

Teacher's comments:

Again, the biggest problem here is the length. It can and should be shorter. I would also caution myself to always talk about the author. This paragraph is about Paulsen's writing and not about David. While I may like David, it is what Paulsen has done with his character that I like the most. This should be made clear.