

Literary Analysis Planning Guide

STEP 1 – Examine Prompt.

Example provided for you below. Study this example well because you will have to do this on your own.

AP Free Response Prompt – 2009 Exam:

A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning. Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

1. What does the prompt specifically ask me to focus on?

One symbol in the novel or play

2. What helpful information does the prompt provide me?

Definition of symbol: object, action, event that represents something bigger than itself

What a symbol does: express an idea, clarify meaning, and enlarge literal meaning

3. What does the prompt ask me to do with this focus topic?

Analyze how it works in the novel/play

Analyze what it reveals about the characters and themes of the novel/play

Do NOT summarize plot

4. What tasks will you need to complete in order to complete this Free Response Essay successfully?

- *Come up with a strong, unique thesis*
- *Find examples from the text to prove my thesis*
- *Analyze these examples and connect them back to my thesis*
- *Explain why this specific symbol is important to this text*
- *Explain if the symbol expresses an idea, clarifies meaning, enlarges literal meaning, or if it does something else*
- *Use the Power Paragraph structure to organize my thoughts*
- *Use strong vocabulary*
- *Compose a strong “so what?!” idea for my conclusion paragraph*
- *Etc...*

5. Examine the prompt and your tasks. Which parts of this Free Response Prompt can you perform well? Which parts of this Free Response Prompt might be challenging for you?

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Identifying a symbol</i>- <i>Identifying the theme</i>- <i>Coming up with an idea for a thesis</i>- <i>Power Paragraph Writing</i>- <i>Writing a good “so what?!” paragraph</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Remembering multiple examples of where the symbol comes up in the novel/play</i>- <i>Stating my thesis in a concise sentence that makes sense to others</i>- <i>Using formal language</i>

STEP 2 – Identify potential literary works.

Potential literary work	Symbols present in this text	Relevant theme from text	Connect symbol to theme
A Doll's House	Christmas tree	The more people try to deceive others, the more they are deceiving themselves. However, the truth will always come out.	Christmas tree starts off pretty and decorated and ends up disheveled and barren. One of the things it could represent is the true status of Nora and Torvald's relationship.
Invisible Man	Sambo Doll	Racism and stereotypes are an obstacle to finding one's true identity.	The dancing Sambo doll represents the stereotypes of African Americans that have continued to exist throughout time (slavery, minstrelsy). This doll represented Invisible Man's difficulties in finding his true self because the doll, or stereotypes of African Americans, would show up at random but important times, reminding him that the present isn't so different from the past.
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead	Coin toss		

STEP 3 – Choose the literary work.

Circle the literary work above that you would like to use and write it below.

I feel that I can write the best free response essay for this prompt on the following work: Invisible Man.

STEP 4 – Brainstorm ideas for this prompt.

Symbols in IM = dancing Sambo Doll (belonged to Tod Clifton)

Things I might want to include: Reinhart, IM looking for his identity, Battle Royale, where the Sambo doll came up, Tod Clifton, moments where IM could be like the Sambo Doll,

Role of this doll in the novel: Tod Clifton was selling the doll on the street corner and IM criticized him for it; IM ended up selling the dolls too, Tod Clifton ends up getting killed (and the riot ensues) – Clifton and IM knew each other before because they were in the Brotherhood (!), Clifton left the Brotherhood and started selling these dolls. IM picked up the doll off the street after Clifton was shot by a cop and took it home with him. This whole time, IM didn't know that the doll had strings (self-realization) and that it didn't dance on its own.

Physical characteristics of symbol: paper doll; has thin black strings that, when used by a puppeteer, make the doll dance; stereotypical image of the black entertainer in the era of minstrel shows.

What is the function of the symbol in the text? It enlarges the literal meaning of stereotypes in the novel and also how they play out in IM's life. Also, the physical characteristics of it each represent a different function of stereotypes (doll= black entertainer or African-Americans in white-dominated society or IM; strings = society's ability to control; puppeteer = anyone who controls it, in IM's case this could be Bledsoe, Jack, Mr. Norton, white men at the Battle Royale, boss at Liberty Paints)

STEP 5 – Plan your essay.

Thesis					
In Ralph Ellison's novel, <i>Invisible Man</i> , the dancing Sambo doll symbolizes the control that society has over a person's own identity and this symbol enlarges the literal meaning of the control that white American society had over African American identity. The experiences of Invisible Man as he discovers his identity truly exemplify the different characteristics of this important symbol.					
Claim #1		Claim #2		Claim #3	
The physical characteristics of the Sambo doll are significant.		Who or what makes the Sambo doll "dance" represents who actually has control over the actions of the characters in <i>Invisible Man</i> .		The events that surround the Sambo doll in the novel are significant because they parallel the experiences of Invisible Man himself.	
Evidence #1	Evidence #2	Evidence #1	Evidence #2	Evidence #1	Evidence #2
The doll is made of paper and is puppeteered by "invisible black strings.	Physical features of the doll; a minstrel black performer	Clifton as the one who made the doll dance.	"Dancing" as performing for whites to affirm stereotypes of blacks; many instances when characters in IM "dance".	Clifton left the Brotherhood and started selling the doll on the street.	Clifton was punished for selling the Sambo doll without a permit.
Supporting details					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IM didn't know the doll had strings - Strings are black and not white = Could be interpreted as: those controlling the dance of the puppet, like Clifton, are black. This is deceiving because it is white society that actually controls the minstrel's dance. The blackness of the strings represents the common deception that blacks like IM or Bledsoe are in control of their own actions when in reality their actions are being controlled or puppeteered by white-dominated society. - Represent society's control - Paper as a weak material = doll can be easily destroyed but it isn't, society gives it power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Represents the inescapable history in which IM is living his life. The minstrel is not only a performer who sings and dances. The significance of the minstrel goes beyond entertainment. Those who are black are invited to "stages" to perform; IM has performed on multiple "stages" including Battle Royale, getting the scholarship for college, speaking at the Brotherhood rally. - Stereotypical features of black minstrels represent how whites see blacks not how blacks see themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Todd Clifton was the one who controlled the dance of the doll. He's the one who is selling it and distributing it in Harlem. However, he's not the one who created it. The ones who created it are those who truly have power in society: white men. Clifton may think that he is in control of his actions; <i>however</i>, he is the one being controlled by the stereotype of blacks in American society. - Similar to Bledsoe thinking that he has control over his high position in the college. He thinks that he is in control of his actions; however, he is also being controlled. He did not create his position in the college; the whites created it. They made him – they can break him too. And he has no control over that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jim Trueblood telling his story of incest and poverty to Mr. Norton. - IM at the Battle Royale performing for the white businessmen. - IM's sexual relationships with white women; they never saw him for who he was. They only saw him as the stereotype of a black man. Sybil used him to act out her fantasy of being raped by a black man. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clifton was a former member of the Brotherhood and he left because he felt like he was being used by them, similar to how a black minstrel is used to entertain whites. - It is ironic that he was selling the doll. He left the Brotherhood because he was against blacks being used by them for their own purposes yet he was selling a doll that represents exploitation of blacks by white society. - IM left the Brotherhood after realizing that he was being exploited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clifton was selling the doll illegally because he did not have a permit to sell it. In <i>IM</i>, in order to "perform" for whites, you have to have "permission" from them. When a black man such as Clifton tries to represent blacks without the permission of whites, he is punished. Similar to IM who holds a funeral for Clifton yet is punished by the Brotherhood for doing this without their permission. - By making their own decisions about their actions, Clifton and IM were punished by white society. In Clifton's case, this ultimately led to his demise.
So What?! Conclusion					
The dancing Sambo doll is not only a representation of white society's control over the African-American characters in Ralph Ellison's novel, <i>Invisible Man</i> ; the dancing Sambo doll also represents the potential ability of Tod Clifton, the Invisible Man, Jim Trueblood, and even Dr. Bledsoe to represent their own identities in society. By including this simple symbol in the novel, Ralph Ellison was making a statement about stereotypes. In society, a stereotype is a puppet. The perception is that the puppet cannot make decisions for itself; it is simply a piece of paper that is controlled by a puppeteer. However, humans are not puppets. They have individual identities and make their own choices. The moment when the human realizes that they need to cut the "invisible black strings" is the moment when they begin to truly define themselves.					

