

Reading Final Project

Book Review

Your final project this year will be a semester-long event starting at the beginning of the second six weeks. Having picked your own book to read (with teacher approval), you will finally create a book review to share with the class. THIS IS **NOT A BOOK REPORT!** This is a book review.

The main purpose of a book review is not really to say a lot about what happens in the text. The main purpose is to **analyze** the book and to **persuade** others to agree with our opinions.

In order to convince others that their review should be supported, reviewers present their opinions in a clear format, often providing evidence and examples to highlight their arguments. In other words, it doesn't matter what you think of the book – you can hate it, love it, be indifferent about it – *BUT* you have to **support** your opinion.

Ask any football player. Support is important.

Your review will follow this physical format:

12-point Time New Roman type

Cover page (which can be plain or artistically designed.. your choice)

1" margins all the way 'round.

6 pages long (at least)

Your review will follow this ordinal format:

INTRODUCTION – This is a general (and brief) description of the book.

Maximum, your introduction will be two paragraphs long, and should contain the following elements:

- Title, author

- Your overall opinion of the book
- Genre
- Subject – briefly what the book is about, who the main characters are
- Main conflict
- Format – chapter book? Sectional? Picture book? First person? Third person? Appendix? Index? Glossary?
- Target audience – teenagers? Adults? Romantics? Armchair adventurers?

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY – Three paragraphs about the author’s life. This should be retrieved from the Internet or the author’s agent. Remember: plagiarism is bad.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Personal evaluation – There are many issues you could discuss here. This section is where you give your opinions and views on the book. Be sure to back up what you say with evidence from the book (quotes are totally cool and encouraged!) and/or **reasons** for what you say.

- Subject – What is the book about? Is it in the news now (“timely”), or is it a timeless topic? Compare the book to books about the same topic, from the same series (if applicable) or the same author.
- Main characters – Who are the main characters? What is their relationship to each other? Are they convincing? Do you think you get to know the characters as the novel progresses? What is your opinions about them – do you like the, dislike them, admire them, eschew them? Why? What are their personalities like? Did you feel there was a character or characters you feel “close” to? Who were they? Why did you feel close to them? Are you like any of the characters? How?
- Pictures – If there are illustrations (including cover illustrations) do they contribute to the message/atmosphere/theme of the book? Are the illustrations good or bad? Why?
- Target audience – Is the book aimed at boys, girls or both? Adults or children? Do you think the story connects to its intended audience?
- Theme – What are the messages or lessons this book illustrates? Do these messages relate to larger, global issues (caring for the environment, peace)? Are any of the themes or messages topical or timeless? How?

Include personal experiences that relate to the themes or message of the book.

- Comparisons – You may have already made some comparisons, but here some ideas for you to think about anyway: Compare the book with others from the same genre, written by the same author, written on the same topic.. how does your book compare? Why?
- If you have had similar experiences to those in the book say if you think the book portrayed these experiences realistically. Give proof/reasons.
- Potential – Are there any possibilities suggested by the book (scientific advances, ways for people to get along better, social justice)?

CONCLUSION

Your conclusion will also be brief. It should be a single paragraph which summarizes your overall view (re-read your introduction to get an idea of what you should be saying).

Lastly, end with a single sentence that leaves no doubt as to your opinion of the book. Perhaps we'll generate a scaling system, like stars or bookmarks.

Independent Reading Book List

FICTION

What's Eating Gilbert Grape? By Peter Hedges
Snow Falling on Cedars by David Guterson
1984 by George Orwell
A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving
In Cold Blood by Truman Capote
Night by Elsie Wiesel
Walking Across Egypt by Clyde Edgerton
The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
Beloved by Toni Morrison
The Color Purple by Alice Walker
Like Water for Chocolate by L. Esquivel
Bless Me Ultima by R. Anaya
The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara (the novel of the Battle of Gettysburg; Pulitzer winner)

One True Thing by Anna Quindlen
Black and Blue by Anna Quindlen

How to make an American Quilt by Whitney Otto
At Risk
Practical Magic Alice Hoffman
Heaven and Earth
Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur S. Golden
A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving
Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood by Rebecca Wells

Cold Sassy Tree by Burns
Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe
Lés Miserables by Victor Hugo
A Separate Peace by John Knowles
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen
Wuthering Heights by Charlotte Bronte
Saint Maybe by Anne Tyler
Accidental Tourist by Anne Tyler.
Angelas Ashes by F. McCourt
All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

Awakening by Kate Chopin
Beloved by Toni Morrison
Catch-22 : A Novel by Joseph L. Heller
A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess
Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemmingway
Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
Watership Down by Richard Adams
Ivanhoe, by Sir Walter Scott

SCI FI

Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert A. Heinlein
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

Sphere by Michael Crichton
Time and Again by Jack Finney
Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler
Kindred by Octavia Butler (time travel helps set up this fictional slave narrative)

The Ship Who Searched by Anne McCaffery and Mercedes Lackey

Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card
William Gibson --
 Neuromancer
 Count Zero
 Mona Lisa Overdrive
 Burning Chrome
 Johnny Mnemonic: The
Screenplay
 Virtual Light
 Idoru

Dinosaur Summer by Greg Bear
The Doomsday Book by Connie Willis
Brave New World by Aldous Huxley
The Time Machine by H. G. Wells
Dune by Frank Herbert
Starship Troopers by Robert A. Heinlein

REAL LIFE

Am I Blue by Marion Bauer, ed.,
Do or Die by Leon Bing [gang interviews]
In the Land of Giants by Tyrone Bogue & David Levine
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee by Dee Brown
Two Teenagers in Twenty by Ann Heron ed.,

MYSTERY

Evil Under the Sun by Agatha Christie

BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Dancing on My Grave by Gelsey Kirkland
What's That Pig Outdoors by Henry Kisor
Born on the Fourth of July by Ron Kovic
Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihard
This Boy's Life: A Memoir by Tobias Wolff
Nobody Nowhere : The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic by Donna Williams

Home Before Morning : The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam by Lynda Van Devanter

Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom
Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer
Lost in place: Growing up absurd in Suburbia by Mark Salzman

Run Silent, Run Deep, by Cmdr. Edward Beach
Generation X by Douglas Copland
Days of Grace by Arthur Ashe
Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin

FANTASY

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood
Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut
The Princess Bride by William Goldman

Anne McCaffrey and her Dragons of
Pern books(White Dragon,
Dragonsinger)

Brian Jacques' series beginning with
Redwall

Unquenchable Fire by Rachel
Pollack

Good Omens

Stardust by Neil Gaiman

American Gods

The Stand by Stephen King

Rats Saw God by Rob Thomas

The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton

Truth or Diary by Catherine Clark

The Acorn People by Ron Jones

Ishi: Last of His Tribe by Theodora
Koeber

What Girls Learn by Karin Cook

The Chocolate War by Robert

Cormier

I Am the Cheese by Robert Cormier

HUMOR

Me Talk Pretty One Day by David
Sedaris

The Rachel Papers by Martin Amis

Election by Tom Perotta

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
by Maya Angelou

In today's class we will be focusing on your **INTRODUCTORY** paragraphs for your final project. I don't expect this will take more than the 50 minutes of class time allotted to us, but I could be wrong. Nevertheless, whatever work you can complete today will be printed out at the end of class so I can review it tonight.

An **INTRODUCTION** is a *BRIEF* overview of what will be expounded upon in the rest of the paper. It should be **two** (possibly three) paragraphs long at the maximum. Any more than that and you are no longer being "brief".

Your **INTRODUCTION** should have the following elements in this order:

- Title, author
- Your overall opinion of the book
- Genre
- Subject – briefly what the book is about, who the main characters are
- Main conflict
- Format – chapter book? Sectional? Picture book? First person? Third person? Appendix? Index? Glossary?
- Target audience – teenagers? Adults? Romantics? Armchair adventurers?

For example:

The Golden Compass by Philip Pullman is a wonderful, edge-of your seat fantasy/adventure story set in a world parallel to our own. The hero of the book, Lyra Belacqua, and her daemon, Pan, orphaned residents of Oxford College, find themselves in the middle of a plot by the College and by the Church to discover the nature of Dust. A plot which means the death of many children, maybe even Lyra's!

Ostensibly a young adult fantasy novel, some of the issues and philosophies brought up in the book were more geared towards adults who have perhaps had World Philosophy 101 or Comparative Religion 101 in college. Written in Chapter Book format, The Golden Compass uses the third person narration technique, while also giving us first-person views into Lyra's thoughts.

(of course, in your paper, this would be double spaced ☺)

OK, go to it!

Tomorrow we do AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES. If you don't have your author research papers anymore, then your homework is to get them from the Net again by tomorrow. Come to class with these pages ALREADY printed out! The class will be used for writing, not for research!

The second part of your efforts in this final project will be the **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**. You should have gotten information about the author's life from the internet or their publisher several weeks ago. Basically, you will be using this information to create **THREE** paragraphs about the author's life.

Simple, right?

Right!

READ the information you have. THINK about it. REWRITE it into your own words to tell about the author's life.

Paragraph topics may be along the lines of:

- Personal information - birth/death date, married, children, hobbies, etc.
- Professional information – titles of books, publication dates, how author feels about their books, when started writing, etc.
- Other – other jobs, why they became a writer, relevant quote from author, review quote, etc.

Here is an example of an **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**. Yours, of course, will be double spaced ☺

Terry Pratchett, the author of Wyrd Sisters, was born on April 28, 1948 in the village of Forty Green, England. He claims not to be dead, but there are reports that he has died and been resurrected several times. Others say he never existed at all. In any case, the person who writes the Discworld novels and uses the name "Terry Pratchett" is now slightly over 50 years old and has been writing for the majority of his life, even though he attended a technical school rather than a regular high school. He originally wanted to be a woodworker because "woodwork would be more fun than Latin."

Terry's first short story, *The Hades Business*, was published when he was thirteen years old in his school newspaper, but was picked up by a national magazine two years later (1963). His next publication, a children's book called The Carpet People, which foreshadowed his later humorous efforts in the *Discworld* series, was published in 1971. To show just how odd Pratchett was, the publication party was held in the carpet department of Heal's (a British department store). His next book, The Dark Side of the Sun, was published in 1976, followed by Strata in 1981, both of which were humorous science fiction parodies. All this while Pratchett was working as a journalist for the Bucks Free Press. Journalism seemed to be an excellent career choice to him as it did not require heavy lifting. Pratchett reports however, that three hours after joining *Bucks Free Press* he saw his first corpse. He does not say whether this was a positive or negative experience.

In 1987, having just quit the Central Generating Board where he was a public relations writer for three nuclear power plants, Pratchett became a full-time writer when it became obvious that his *Discworld* novels, the advent of which was seen in 1983 with The Colour of Magic, were

going to make him a lot of money, enough to build him the greenhouse of his dreams. In sequence from 1983 to 1987 the *Discworld* novels included Equal Rites, The Light Fantastic, Mort and Sourcery. It was with these triumphs under his belt that Pratchett retired from the working world and became A Writer.

Part Three of your review will be the **CONTENT ANALYSIS** – this is where you can express your opinion AND support it. It does not matter what your opinion is – positive or negative – but you must give REASONS for what you say. Relevant quotes from the book would be totally appropriate here.

The CONTENT ANALYSIS has many sub-parts to it. Today we will be working on:

□ **SUBJECT**

- Main characters
- Pictures
- Target audience
- Theme
- Comparisons
- If you have had similar experiences to those in the book say if you think the book portrayed these experiences realistically. Give proof/reasons.
- Potential

When writing about the SUBJECT you will answer questions such as: *What is the book about (what is the plot, setting, time, main conflict, one minor conflict.. do NOT tell the end of the book!!) ? Is it in the news now (“timely”), or is it a timeless topic? Compare the book to books about the same topic, from the same series (if applicable) or the same author. Was the subject of the book interesting to you? Why or why not?*

There is no upper limit to how many paragraphs this can be. Write until you feel you have said everything you need to say.

You **MUST**, however, use *at least* **ONE** quote from the text that you think BEST supports your ideas about the **SUBJECT**. If you could share one paragraph or quote with others, which would it be? Be sure you explain WHY you are sharing it with us.

Further, you must explain what the title of the book means. How does it fit into the story? What importance does it have to the story? Why do you think the author chose that title?

An example of subject is below (yours, of course, will be double-spaced ☺).....

The Golden Compass is set in a world parallel to our own, at Jordan College, where science, theology and magic are taught as one. Lyra Belacqua, orphan and ward of the Scholars of Oxford, and her daemon (in this world *daemons* are the physical manifestation of a person's soul. They can change their forms (usually animals) to reflect the mood or disposition of their "mate". They are not to be mistaken for *demons*, servants of evil.), Pantalaimon, are well-known among the people of Oxford who regard her not only as a joy but as a major trouble-maker. Lyra becomes involved in a plot to uncover the nature of Dust (a supposedly evil substance that hovers near children and their daemons) when she runs afoul of The Gobblers – people who kidnap children and only children – who have taken her best friend, Roger. Things become worse when she is kidnapped by Mrs. Coulter, a woman who claims to be Lyra's mother.

Mrs. Coulter is a member of the Oblation Board – more famously known as The Gobblers – which has been kidnapping children and performing experiments on them, specifically severing the bond that exists between a human and its daemon. When the bond is severed the daemon disappears and the child dies soon afterwards. Mrs. Coulter and her group believe they are saving children by making them "immune" to Dust, and thereby killing them.

Working against the Board is Lyra's uncle, Lord Asriel, a Scholar of Jordan and explorer. He believes he can find the source of Dust and make its power his own. While Lord Asriel is against Mrs. Coulter and the Board, he is not altogether on Lyra's side, either. Eventually, he traces the source of the Dust and uses its power to declare war on Heaven, opening a gateway to another dimension and stepping through it.

This is the first book in a trilogy (the sequels being The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass), and it derives its name from an artifact of power given to Lyra – an alethiometer, which can detect the truth of any situation. Lyra uses this "golden compass" to aid her friends – the witch queen Serafina Pekkala; Lee Scoresby, a Texan aeronaut; and Iorek Byrnison, a brave bear and king of his people – on her quest to save her uncle from Mrs. Coulter and find out what Dust really is.

The Golden Compass is not what many would consider an "instant children's classic" due to the heavy amounts of theology and mysticism presented therein. Many people may pick it up thinking they are getting a Harry Potter offshoot, but instead wind up with *The Divine Comedy*. It is abnormally dense for a young adult book, much denser than any of Philip Pullman's other books, and yet it contains themes that would be universally accessible – Trust, Adventure, Independence, Good vs. Evil., etc. For example,

in the following paragraph the Scholars of Jordan discuss the history of certain Church doctrines and how they will come to affect Lyra's destiny:

“...As I understand it, the Holy Church teaches there are two worlds: the world of everything we can see and hear and touch, and another world, the spiritual world of heaven and hell. Barnard and Stokes were two – how shall I put it – renegade theologians who postulated the existence of numerous other worlds like this one, neither heaven nor hell, but material and sinful. They are there, close by, but invisible and unreachable. The Holy Church disapproved of this abominable heresy, and Barnard and Stokes were silenced.”

“And now Lord Arsriel has taken a picture of one of these other worlds,” the Librarian said. “And we have funded him to go look for it. I see.”

I found this to be totally fascinating and couldn't wait to find out if there really were worlds hidden behind the curtain of the Northern Lights, and if Dust was good or evil or just Natural. The problem, however, is that most teenagers are not equipped, I believe, to read and understand such dense riddles as *The Nature of Life, The Universe and Everything*, which is put forward in this book.

Part Three of your review will be the **CONTENT ANALYSIS** – this is where you can express your opinion AND support it. It does not matter what your opinion is – positive or negative – but you must give REASONS for what you say. Relevant quotes from the book would be totally appropriate here.

The CONTENT ANALYSIS has many sub-parts to it. Today we will be working on:

- Subject
- **MAIN CHARACTERS**
- Pictures
- Target audience
- Theme
- Comparisons
- If you have had similar experiences to those in the book say if you think the book portrayed these experiences realistically. Give proof/reasons.
- Potential

When writing about **MAIN CHARACTERS** questions you should answer will be: *Who are the main characters? What is their relationship to each other? Are they convincing? Do you think you get to know the characters as the novel progresses? What is your opinions about them – do you like the, dislike them, admire them, eschew them? Why? What are their personalities like? Did you feel there was a character or characters you feel “close” to? Who were they? Why did you feel close to them? Are you like any of the characters? How?*

As with SUBJECT, I would like you to pick a quote or passage from your book that best describes one of the **MAIN CHARACTERS** – a quote that really shows their personality – then explain why you picked this quote and what you think it shows about that character.

An example follows (please double space yours where appropriate)...

Contrariwise, there are some very powerful, non-cerebral, emotional moments in which the characters are not just “talking heads” but are “flesh

and blood”, fully developed people. This is the strength of Philip Pullman’s writing – to have powerful characters that the audience can relate to and like and be engaged by.

Lyra is, of course, the most powerful of these characters, as she drives the entire plot along by her actions. She is a passionate girl who has deep seated feeling of compassion and anger and conscience and mischief. Do not expect her to be a “good little girl” who goes blithely to her destiny. Lyra confronts her fate as only a warrior could.

Here, after escaping the clutches of Mrs. Coulter and the Oblation Board, Lyra and her friends discover an horrible sight - a child, Tony Makarios, who has been severed from his daemon. This is akin to meeting a person who doesn’t have a soul – they are unnatural, inhuman, and terrible. Tony was severed from his Ratter by the Gobblers and uses a piece of dried fish as a substitute soul. After Lyra forces John Faa and his people to care for the boy, he dies. Lyra visits the body and makes a frightful discovery:

Where was it?

She pulled the blanket down. It was gone.

She was on her feet in a moment, and her eyes flashed fury at the men nearby.

“Where’s his fish?”

They stopped, puzzled, unsure what she meant; though some of hteir daemons knew, and looked at one another. One of the men began to grin uncertainly.

“Don’t you *dare* laugh! I’ll tear your lungs out if you dare laugh at him! That’s all he had to cling onto, just an old dried fish, that’s all he had for a daemon, to love and be kind to! Who’s took it from him? Where’s it gone?”

Pantalaimon was a snarling snow leopard, just like Lord Asriel’s daemon, but she didn’t see that; all she saw was right and wrong.

“Easy, Lyra,” said one man, “Easy, child.”

“Who’s took it?” she flared again, and the gyptian took a step back from her passionate fury.

“I don’t know,” said another man apologetically. “I thought it was just what he’d been eating. I took it out of his hand because I thought it was more respectful. That’s all, Lyra.”

“Then where is it?”

The man said uneasily, “Not thinking he had a need for it, I gave it to my dogs. I do beg your pardon.”

“It en’t my pardon you need, it’s his,” she said, and turned at once to kneel again, and laid her hand on the dead child’s icy cheek.

This is the passion that Lyra bring to the book, and what kept me reading for all three novels.

Among the many other human characters Pullman created in this world, there are a host of non-humans who are no less engaging than their mortal counterparts, and indeed are more interesting at times. We meet Sarafina Pekkala – the witch queen, who knows of Lyra’s destiny and who proudly and bravely fights by her side; Iorek Bjornsen, deposed King of the Bears whose soul rests in his armor; and Pantalaimon, Lyra’s Daemon, her soul and best friend in the world.

Part Three of your review will be the **CONTENT ANALYSIS** – this is where you can express your opinion AND support it. It does not matter what your opinion is – positive or negative – but you must give REASONS for what you say. Relevant quotes from the book would be totally appropriate here.

The CONTENT ANALYSIS has many sub-parts to it. And today we will be working on:

- Subject
- Main characters
- Pictures
- **Target audience**
- Theme
- Comparisons
- If you have had similar experiences to those in the book say if you think the book portrayed these experiences realistically. Give proof/reasons.
- Potential

Of all the sections we've been working on, this is potentially the easiest. In your INTRODUCTION, you have already identified the **TARGET AUDIENCE** of your book. Use that information to answer the following questions in a paragraph or two: *Is the book aimed at boys, girls or both? Adults or children? Do you think the story connects to its intended audience? How or how not?*

An example follows (again, yours will be double-spaced ☺)

The Golden Compass is supposedly geared towards young adults, but the issues and theories dealt with in its pages are not (to my mind) easily understood by young adults. I have no doubt that the story and characters are intriguing, but the major conflicts that develops in the book – that of Lord Asriel declaring war on Heaven, Dust being Fallen Angels – may be to much like *Paradise Lost* for most teens to understand.

This book is a perennial favorite with some of my well-read friends (one of whom has a Ph.D. in Old English Literature) and we are always finding new issues to discuss within the text, new questions like “If Dust is Fallen Angels, why do they hover near children? Why do they want to help Lyra if she is trying to save Heaven?” Of course, we always have something to say. I may not be the best person to judge this. Perhaps it is a failing of the text or of myself, but the questions I come away with (which I believe to be essential to understanding the text) seem beyond the scope of understanding for most teens.

Part Three of your review will be the **CONTENT ANALYSIS** – this is where you can express your opinion AND support it. It does not matter what your opinion is – positive or negative – but you must give REASONS for what you say. Relevant quotes from the book would be totally appropriate here.

The CONTENT ANALYSIS has many sub-parts to it. Today we will be working on:

- Subject
- Main characters
- Pictures
- Target audience
- **Theme**
- Comparisons
- If you have had similar experiences to those in the book say if you think the book portrayed these experiences realistically. Give proof/reasons.
- Potential

THEME is not one of the easiest things to discuss, because it takes practice to recognize it. Basically a **THEME** is a single idea that the book or story expounds upon (“discusses at length”). For example, a **THEME** in a biology class might be “*reproduction*”. During that **THEME** the teacher may talk about reproductive organs, mating patterns of animals, the Kinsey Scale, population explosion, Zero-Growth Theory, Negative-Growth Theory etc. All these topics relate to the main **THEME** of “*reproduction*”.

In literature, a **THEME** may also be looked at as a “lesson the author tries to teach the reader”. To figure out what the theme is, one may ask oneself, “*What did I learn from this story?*” The answer is the **THEME**.

When writing about **THEME**, do your best to answer the following questions: *What are the messages or lessons this book*

illustrates? Do these messages relate to larger, global issues (caring for the environment, peace), or are they more human (about everyday people and their problems)? Are any of the themes or messages topical ("important right now") or timeless ("always important")? How? Include personal experiences that relate to the themes or message of the book.

My example (non-double spaced, yours should be non-non-double-spaced.. ☺):

The Golden Compass is no exception to this rule. Eleven year-old Lyra (who becomes 13 by the end of the series) leaves the Scholars of Jordan (in effect, her parents) initially to save her friend friend Roger and the other kidnapped children, but as her mission becomes more complex, she comes to realize she is saving Creation Itself. And as noted by one of the Jordan Scholars, she must fulfil her destiny “in complete ignorance of who she is, and what role she must play.” Lyra is almost in a double-blind situation – her guardians are ignorant of what she is doing, but she is also as ignorant. Lyra simply follows her heart, her passions form one place to the next, fighting Evil and doing What’s Best, even though she does not know how or where her adventure will end.

Ah! To be fifteen again and saving the world! It’s much different fighting Evil when you’re in your thirties.

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The CONTENT ANALYSIS has many sub-parts to it. Today we will be working on:

- Subject
- Main characters
- Pictures
- Target audience
- Theme
- **Comparisons**
- **If you have had similar experiences to those in the book say if you think the book portrayed these experiences realistically. Give proof/reasons.**
- Potential

You may have already made some **COMPARISONS**, but here some ideas for you to think about anyway:

If your book is **FICTION**, compare the book with others from the same genre, written by the same author, written on the same topic.. How does your book compare? Is it better written? Worse? Does it handle the subject with more skill or less? Why?

Suppose you read a romance, did you feel the author handled it as well as Danielle Steele? If your book was a fantasy, is it as good as Neil Gaiman's fantasy books? If you read something by David Sedaris, does it compare well to his other books?

If your book was **NON-FICTION** or deals with **REAL-LIFE ISSUES**, then ask yourself: was the story portrayed in a realistic manner? If you have found yourself in situations similar ("*similar*", not "*exactly the same*" ☺) to that of the main character, would you

be willing to write a few paragraphs about your experience and how reading this book made you feel?

Suppose your book was written on teenage pregnancy, have you yourself been pregnant or been a father or had a friend who was in a similar situation? Or perhaps your book is about runaways – have you ever run away? Known someone who has lived on the streets? Did this book give a realistic description of Life n the Streets or not?

My example reads (please forgive my single spacing. Do as I say (double space), and not as I do (single space)):

Again, the most glaring difference between this book and others of its genre is the philosophical nature of the conflicts – Good and Evil are not so clear cut here. The Devil may be in the details, but it's the Philosophy “there is no good or evil but what saying makes it so” wherein many characters “fall”. The depth of The Golden Compass sets it apart from *Harry Potter* or even *Buffy*.

Part Three of your review will be the **CONTENT ANALYSIS** – this is where you can express your opinion AND support it. It does not matter what your opinion is – positive or negative – but you must give REASONS for what you say. Relevant quotes from the book would be totally appropriate here.

The CONTENT ANALYSIS has many sub-parts to it. Today we will be working on:

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- **Potential**

Potential – Are there any possibilities suggested by the book (scientific advances, ways for people to get along better, social justice)?

Part Four of your paper will be the **CONCLUSION**. In the **CONCLUSION**, you simply restate your opinion of the book in general terms. It should be no more than ONE paragraph in length.

If you are uncertain what to say, read your opinion as stated in the **SUBJECT, MAIN CHARACTER, TARGET AUDIENCE** and **THEME** sections. The opinions you stated in these, should be (briefly) said here again. Say if you would recommend this to your best friend or not.

For example (in standard-teacher-non-double-spaced-contra-student format ☺)...

In conclusion, I would enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone who is interested in pseudo-mystical, religious, fantasy thrillers. The plot is well developed, the characters are engaging, and even though it reads a bit “older” than Young Adult The Golden Compass is nevertheless fascinating. I enjoyed every page. My best friend would get a copy for their birthday.

Lastly, using a 5-star scale, rate the book on the following axes:

OVERALL - ★★★★★
PLOT - ★★★★★
CHARACTERS ★★★★★
INTEREST ★★★★★

That’s it!

Assemble all the parts of your paper (in order!), then check your formatting (Times New Roman, 12-point type, 1” margins all the way around or your paper will be handed back to you ungraded). Make a quick **cover page**, then print!

An example begins on the next page (pretend the author biography isn't off topic 😊)!



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Sean McGrath

Period 2

Mr. McGrath

May 20, 2002

The Golden Compass by Philip Pullman is a wonderful, edge-of your seat fantasy/adventure story set in a world parallel to our own. The hero of the book, Lyra Belacqua, and her daemon, Pan, orphaned residents of Oxford College, find themselves in the middle of a plot by the College and by the Church to discover the nature of Dust. A plot which means the death of many children, maybe even Lyra's!

Ostensibly a young adult fantasy novel, some of the issues and philosophies brought up in the book were more geared towards adults who have perhaps had World Philosophy 101 or Comparative Religion 101 in college. Written in Chapter Book format, The Golden Compass uses the third person narration technique, while also giving us first-person views into Lyra's thoughts.

Terry Pratchett, the author of Wyrd Sisters, was born on April 28, 1948 in the village of Forty Green, England. He claims not to be dead, but there are reports that he has died and been resurrected several times. Others say he never existed at all. In any case, the person who writes the Discworld novels and uses the name "Terry Pratchett" is now slightly over 50 years old and has been writing for the majority of his life, even though he attended a technical school rather than a regular high school. He originally wanted to be a woodworker because "woodwork would be more fun than Latin."

Terry's first short story, *The Hades Business*, was published when he was thirteen years old in his school newspaper, but was picked up by a national magazine two years later (1963). His next publication, a children's book called The Carpet People, which foreshadowed his later humorous efforts in the *Discworld* series, was published in 1971. To show just how odd Pratchett was, the publication party was held in the carpet department of Heal's (a British department store). His next book, The Dark Side of the Sun, was published in 1976, followed by

Strata in 1981, both of which were humorous science fiction parodies. All this while Pratchett was working as a journalist for the Bucks Free Press. Journalism seemed to be an excellent career choice to him as it did not require heavy lifting. Pratchett reports however, that three hours after joining *Bucks Free Press* he saw his first corpse. He does not say whether this was a positive or negative experience.

In 1987, having just quit the Central Generating Board where he was a public relations writer for three nuclear power plants, Pratchett became a full-time writer when it became obvious that his *Discworld* novels, the advent of which was seen in 1983 with The Colour of Magic, were going to make him a lot of money, enough to build him the greenhouse of his dreams. In sequence from 1983 to 1987 the *Discworld* novels included Equal Rites, The Light Fantastic, Mort and Sourcery. It was with these triumphs under his belt that Pratchett retired from the working world and became A Writer.

The Golden Compass is set in a world parallel to our own, at Jordan College, where science, theology and magic and taught as one. Lyra Belaqua, orphan and ward of the Scholars of Oxford, and her daemon (in this world *daemons* are the physical manifestation of a person's soul. They can change their forms (usually animals) to reflect the mood or disposition of their "mate". They are not to be mistaken for *demons*, servants of evil.), Pantalaimon, are well-known among the people of Oxford who regard her not only as a joy but as a major trouble-maker. Lyra becomes involved in a plot to uncover the nature of Dust (a supposedly evil substance that hovers near children and their daemons) when she runs afoul of The Gobblers – people who kidnap children and only children – who have taken her best friend, Roger. Things become worse when she is kidnapped by Mrs. Coulter, a woman who claims to be Lyra's mother.

Mrs. Coulter is a member of the Oblation Board – more famously known as The Gobblers - which has been kidnapping children and performing experiments on them, specifically severing the bond that exists between a human and its daemon. When the bond is severed the daemon disappears and the child dies soon afterwards. Mrs. Coulter and her group believe they are saving children by making them “immune” to Dust, and thereby killing them.

Working against the Board is Lyra’s uncle, Lord Asriel, a Scholar of Jordan and explorer. He believes he can find the source of Dust and make its power his own. While Lord Asriel is against Mrs. Coulter and the Board, he is not altogether on Lyra’s side, either. Eventually, he traces the source of the Dust and uses its power to declare war on Heaven, opening a gateway to another dimension and stepping through it.

This is the first book in a trilogy (the sequels being The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass), and it derives its name from an artifact of power given to Lyra – an alethiometer, which can detect the truth of any situation. Lyra uses this “golden compass” to aid her friends – the witch queen Serafina Pekkala; Lee Scoresby, a Texan aeronaut; and Iorek Byrnison, a brave bear and king of his people - on her quest to save her uncle from Mrs. Coulter and find out what Dust really is.

The Golden Compass is not what many would consider an “instant children’s classic” due to the heavy amounts of theology and mysticism presented therein. Many people may pick it up thinking they are getting a Harry Potter offshoot, but instead wind up with *The Divine Comedy*. It is abnormally dense for a young adult book, much denser than any of Philip Pullman’s other books, and yet it contains themes that would be universally accessible – Trust, Adventure, Independence, Good vs. Evil., etc. For example, in the following paragraph the Scholars of

Jordan discuss the history of certain Church doctrines and how they will come to affect Lyra's destiny:

“...As I understand it, the Holy Church teaches there are two worlds: the world of everything we can see and hear and touch, and another world, the spiritual world of heaven and hell. Barnard and Stokes were two – how shall I put it – renegade theologians who postulated the existence of numerous other worlds like this one, neither heaven nor hell, but material and sinful. They are there, close by, but invisible and unreachable. The Holy Church disapproved of this abominable heresy, and Barnard and Stokes were silenced.”

“And now Lord Arsiel has taken a picture of one of these other worlds,” the Librarian said. “And we have funded him to go look for it. I see.”

I found this to be totally fascinating and couldn't wait to find out if there really were worlds hidden behind the curtain of the Northern Lights, and if Dust was good or evil or just Natural. The problem, however, is that most teenagers are not equipped, I believe, to read and understand such dense riddles as *The Nature of Life, The Universe and Everything*, which is put forward in this book.

Contrariwise, there are some very powerful, non-cerebral, emotional moments in which the characters are not just “talking heads” but are “flesh and blood”, fully developed people. This is the strength of Philip Pullman's writing – to have powerful characters that the audience can relate to and like and be engaged by.

Lyra is, of course, the most powerful of these characters, as she drives the entire plot along by her actions. She is a passionate girl who has deep seated feeling of compassion and anger and conscience and mischief. Do not expect her to be a “good little girl” who goes blithely to her destiny. Lyra confronts her fate as only a warrior could.

Here, after escaping the clutches of Mrs. Coulter and the Oblation Board, Lyra and her friends discover an horrible sight - a child, Tony Makarios, who has been severed from his daemon. This is akin to meeting a person who doesn't have a soul – they are unnatural, inhuman, and terrible. Tony was severed from his Ratter by the Gobblers and uses a piece of dried fish as a substitute soul. After Lyra forces John Faa and his people to care for the boy, he dies. Lyra visits the body and makes a frightful discovery:

Where was it?
She pulled the blanket down. It was gone.
She was on her feet in a moment, and her eyes flashed fury at the men nearby.
“Where’s his fish?”
They stopped, puzzled, unsure what she meant; though some of their daemons knew, and looked at one another. One of the men began to grin uncertainly.
“Don’t you *dare* laugh! I’ll tear your lungs out if you dare laugh at him! That’s all he had to cling onto, just an old dried fish, that’s all he had for a daemon, to love and be kind to! Who’s took it from him? Where’s it gone?”
Pantalaimon was a snarling snow leopard, just like Lord Asriel’s daemon, but she didn’t see that; all she saw was right and wrong.
“Easy, Lyra,” said one man, “Easy, child.”
“Who’s took it?” she flared again, and the gyptian took a step back from her passionate fury.
“I don’t know,” said another man apologetically. “I thought it was just what he’d been eating. I took it out of his hand because I thought it was more respectful. That’s all, Lyra.”
“Then where is it?”
The man said uneasily, “Not thinking he had a need for it, I gave it to my dogs. I do beg your pardon.”
“It en’t my pardon you need, it’s his,” she said, and turned at once to kneel again, and laid her hand on the dead child’s icy cheek.

This is the passion that Lyra bring to the book, and what kept me reading for all three novels.

Among the many other human characters Pullman created in this world, there are a host of non-humans who are no less engaging than their mortal counterparts, and indeed are more interesting at times. We meet Sarafina Pekkala – the witch queen, who knows of Lyra’s destiny and who proudly and bravely fights by her side; Iorek Bjornsen, deposed King of the Bears whose soul rests in his armor; and Pantalaimon, Lyra’s Daemon, her soul and best friend in the world.

The Golden Compass is supposedly geared towards young adults, but the issues and theories dealt with in its pages are not (to my mind) easily understood by young adults. I have no doubt that the story and characters are intriguing, but the major conflicts that develops in the book – that of Lord Asriel declaring war on Heaven, Dust being Fallen Angels – may be too much like *Paradise Lost* for most teens to understand.

This book is a perennial favorite with some of my well-read friends (one of whom has a Ph.D. in Old English Literature) and we are always finding new issues to discuss within the text, new questions like “If Dust is Fallen Angels, why do they hover near children? Why do they want to help Lyra if she is trying to save Heaven?” Of course, we always have something to say. I may not be the best person to judge this. Perhaps it is a failing of the text or of myself, but the questions I come away with (which I believe to be essential to understanding the text) seem beyond the scope of understanding for most teens.

The Golden Compass is no exception to this rule. Eleven year-old Lyra (who becomes 13 by the end of the series) leaves the Scholars of Jordan (in effect, her parents) initially to save her friend Roger and the other kidnapped children, but as her mission becomes more complex, she comes to realize she is saving Creation Itself. And as noted by one of the Jordan Scholars, she must fulfil her destiny “in complete ignorance of who she is, and what role she must play.”

Lyra is almost in a double-blind situation – her guardians are ignorant of what she is doing, but she is also as ignorant. Lyra simply follows her heart, her passions form one place to the next, fighting Evil and doing What’s Best, even though she does not know how or where her adventure will end.

Ah! To be fifteen again and saving the world! It’s much different fighting Evil when you’re in your thirties.

Again, the most glaring difference between this book and others of its genre is the philosophical nature of the conflicts – Good and Evil are not so clear cut here. The Devil may be in the details, but it’s the Philosophy “there is no good or evil but what saying makes it so” wherein many characters “fall”. The depth of The Golden Compass sets it apart from *Harry Potter* or even *Buffy*.

In conclusion, I would enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone who is interested in pseudo-mystical, religious, fantasy thrillers. The plot is well developed, the characters are engaging, and even though it reads a bit “older” than Young Adult The Golden Compass is nevertheless fascinating. I enjoyed every page. My best friend would get a copy for his birthday.

OVERALL – ★★★★★
PLOT – ★★★★★
CHARACTERS – ★★★★★
INTEREST – ★★★★★

Book Review Final Grade

ELEMENT	POINTS	COMMENTS
INTRODUCTION _____/5 TITLE/AUTHOR _____/5 OPINION _____/5 GENRE _____/5 SUBJECT _____/5 CONFLICT _____/5 FORMAT _____/5 TARGET AUDIENCE	_____/35	
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY _____/5 INTEREST _____/5 ACCURACY _____/5 LIFE _____/5 WORK _____/5 PERSONAL INFO	_____/25	
SUBJECT _____/10 WELL-DESCRIBED _____/10 ACCURATE _____/5 PLOT _____/5 CONFLICT _____/10 OPINION _____/5 TITLE EXPLANATION _____/5 QUOTE _____/10 EXPLANATION	_____/60	
MAIN CHARACTERS _____/10 WELL-DESCRIBED _____/10 ACCURATE _____/10 OPINION _____/5 QUOTE _____/10 EXPLANATION	_____/45	
TARGET AUDIENCE _____/5 WELL-DESCRIBED _____/5 EXPLANATION	_____/10	
COMPARISONS _____/5 WELL-DESCRIBED _____/5 ACCURATE _____/10 CONTRAST _____/10 PORTRAYAL	_____/30	
CONCLUSION _____/5 WELL-EXPRESSED _____/5 FRIENDS	_____/10	
RATING _____/5	_____/5	THIS IS AN "ALL OR NOTHING" DEAL. EITHER IT'S THERE OR IT ISN'T.
PHYSICAL FORMATTING: 12 POINT TIMES NEW ROMAN COVER PAGE 1" MARGIN NON-SECTIONALIZED		IF ANY OF THESE ARE NOT MET THE PAPER WILL BE HANDED BACK UNGRADED, AND APPROPRIATE LATE PENALTIES WILL BE APPLIED.

PAGINATION		<p>SIX PAGES ARE REQUIRED. THE FORMULA</p> <p>(TOTAL PAGES X 16.7%)(TOTAL GRADE) = FINAL GRADE</p> <p>WILL BE USED TO CALCULATE THE FINAL GRADE FOR THIS PAPER.</p>
LATE	<p>_____ -10% DAY ONE</p> <p>_____ - 50% DAY TWO</p> <p>_____ NG DAY THREE</p>	

Final grade _____/220 = % =

0	1	2	3	4	5
Element was not present.	Element was present but not explained or supported with quotes from the text or personal experience.	Element was present, but barely explained or supported with quotes from the text or personal experience.	Element was present but only partially explained or supported with quotes from the text or personal experience.	Element was present, but not fully explained or supported with quotes from the text or personal experience.	Element was present, fully explained and supported with quotes from the text or personal experience.