Explication Tools

Explicate: 1) to explain something, especially a literary text, in a detailed and formal way, or 2) to explain and develop an idea or theory and show its implications. (Encarta, Microsoft Word)

Initial Encounter Questions/ Observations—freewrite about these, but don’t make the free write your essay:

What is it? Who are the voices? What is happening to the people that belong to the voices? Is the narrator (or speaker) involved in the story? How do I know? What do the words literally say? Did that really happen or did I miss something? What does the text NOT say? What has the author left out? Ah, look, a pattern! Does anything seem odd about this? Why did the author repeat that? Have I read this work enough to understand or notice any patterns?

Questions to address when formally introducing a literary work, research or an interview in writing:
Remember the Journalist’s questions [Who, what (who what when where how and why- i.e. plot summary), when, HOW and WHY?]

1. Who is the author?
2. What kind of text is it? When and where was it published, if important?
3. What is its title?
4. Who is the narrator or speaker (not necessarily the author in a literary text)
5. How does the narrator fit into the story?
6. Who else is in the story, and what are they doing (where, and when implied). Provide a one sentence plot summary.
7. What kind of literary technique will you explain? Or what theory you will develop about how or why the writer made the decisions they made?
8. How does that literary technique (pattern) repeat throughout the work? Give examples. Keep the readers tracking with where you are by giving reference points.
9. Why has the author chosen that literary technique? How has the artistry led to a new theory that you have backed up with quotes from the text or from secondary sources?

If it doesn’t connect to or relate back to your theory, delete it.
Explication Tool (Continued)

Your turn. Use another sheet of paper:

In ____________’s ___________ “(titled)” published in ______, the narrator (explains, witnesses, laments, struggles to) ________________________________________________

Along the way, Last name (author) / or narrator (continues to, uses, repeats, demonstrates, etc) ________________. The use of ________________ and __________________________ creates_____________________________________

(That is your basic thesis statement—come up with better wording)

Body paragraphs: (now prove it, explaining all the recurrences of what you mean, fleshing out your theory with point by point proof. No more summary except to give context to quotes or paraphrases.)

Conclusion: Drive your thesis/ theory home, only now bringing together your work to add up to meaning about the text—not how it is the answer to life’s big secrets (unless you are a preacher), but how that text brings up larger issues for society to discuss or how all the pieces work together to make the work a remarkable work indeed.

Further questions for examining an essay, especially one using any narrative: Write down answers:

10. Who are the characters involved and how do they relate to the author or narrator?
11. What happens in the story—in a sentence or two?
12. What do the main characters want?
13. What obstacles prevent the character from getting what he/she wants?
14. What does the author want? What is the author’s attitude about the theme or toward the audience?
15. How does the author use time? When does the author or action seem close to the present moment? When does the author or action seem far away from the present moment? Why has the author used time to create this depth? What moment seems to be the “source” that inspired the story?
16. How does the setting and description of the setting contribute to the plot in the story?
17. What images/ details/ words are most revealing to the character’s desires or the narrator’s tone?
18. Does the narrator contradict or seem incongruous with what the author seems to be saying by providing details or other dominant impressions? When? How do you know?
19. What rhetorical modes is the author using, and how do those modes support the author’s purpose?

Now your turn: Discuss these questions with a peer about your story in progress.