

Definition Essay

To define is to state the precise meaning of something. How does the dictionary define X? How do you define X? What category does X fall into? How is X different from other items in that category?

When you define, you identify the features that distinguish a term, thereby putting a fence around it, establishing its boundaries, and separating it from all others. Knowing these features enables both you and your reader to use the term appropriately.

The definition essay works best during the semester after students have read several works and can choose from two or more to use as development and support.

If included as sections or even particular paragraphs, the student may use description, narration, process, classification, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, and negation (correcting popular misconceptions) to further develop the definition.

Using at least two selections studied, including at least one from the essays in *World of Ideas*, the student will develop an extended definition defining one of the following suggested topics (or others that the instructor devises):

Adaptability, courage,
Corruption, greed, leadership, innocence, loyalty, creativity, wisdom, chivalry,
evil, gender bias, honor, integrity, power, tragedy.

The student chooses the most effective prewriting strategy for him/herself, then develops a thesis and outline, which may be approved by the instructor. This essay may be written in class, in which case the student may bring in a prepared outline, quotations, and a works cited page. Or the essay may be assigned to be completed at home. The essay will include effective, interwoven quotations, correctly documented, from two or more sources to extend and develop the definition essay. The student will produce a final product which is polished and original.

Further practice:

AP timed writings, some of which may be selected from *Hamlet AP Applied Practice*

TEKS #1A-F, 2A-H, 3A-E, 6A-C

THE EPIC HERO

SELECTIONS

Characteristics of the epic - *LOL*, pp. 28-29

Beowulf LOL, pp. 30-60

THE ROMANTIC HERO

SELECTIONS

Geoffrey Chaucer - *The Canterbury Tales LOL*, pp. 107-166

Howard Gardner - "A Rounded Version: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences," *WOI*, pp. 353-372

Giovanni Boccaccio - from *The Decameron*, "Federigo's Falcon," *LOL PP. 171-179*

"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" *LOL*, pp. 209-221,

Characteristics of Romance, p. 222

Valmiki - from the *Ramayana*, *LOL*, pp. 240-249

THE TRAGIC HERO

SELECTIONS

William Shakespeare - *Hamlet*

Essays from *The World of Ideas*:

Aristotle - "Tragedy and the Emotions of Pity and Fear" *WOI pp. 681-696*

Niccolo Machiavelli - "The Qualities of a Prince" *WOI pp. 35-50*

Lao-Tzu - Thoughts from the Tao-te Ching *WOI 19-31*

Hannah Arendt - "Ideology and Terror: a Novel form of Government" *WOI pp. 85-102*

Virginia Woolf - "Shakespeare's Sister" *WOI pp. 797-812*

Simone de Beauvoir - "Woman: Myth and Reality" *WOI pp. 817-830*

TEKS 7A-F, 8A-I, 9A-D, 10A-C, 11B,D, 12A-G, 13E-F

READING/LITERARY STUDY

The following terms relate to the selections studied and will be introduced or reviewed in class. Using a variety of methods, students will analyze the selections, identifying these terms and explaining how these devices impact meaning, tone, mood, etc. Students will be expected to discuss and use these terms in critical essays and discussions.

Epic

Alliteration

Caesura

Kennings

Annotation

Determining audience

Determining author's purpose

Determining main idea

Motivation

Detail

Diction
Vocabulary
Imagery
Point of view
Style
Theme
Tone
Paradox
Simile
Meter
Rhyme
Rhythm
Allusion
Archetypes

Practice multiple choice questions from *Hamlet AP Applied Practice*.

TEKS 7F, 11B-D, 12A-G

INQUIRY/RESEARCH

Ethics of research

Evaluation of sources

Research changes in the language from Anglo-Saxon times to Modern English.

Research various topics relating to the Medieval Period and the works studied.

Research a particular definition topic, using sources such as unabridged dictionary and thesaurus, as well as online sources.

Use MLA form to correctly incorporate quotations and accurately document them. Include a Works Cited page.

Research the Anglo-Saxon or Medieval Periods to develop material for a cultural celebration. Required research:

Music of the period

Art of the period

Games or pastimes of the period

Party favors relating to the period

Food, which relates as closely as possible to the period

TEKS 14A-G

VIEWING/REPRESENTING/PRODUCTION

View the film, *Merlin*, and relate to definition topics, in particular, adaptability, courage, chivalry, honor, gender bias, creativity, and survival.

View "The Battle with Grendel," McDougal Littel, *Literature in Performance*, relating Beowulf to contemporary heroes.

View "The Pardoner's Tale," McDougal Littel, *Literature in Performance*, critiquing this contemporary performance of a Medieval tale.

As a culmination of the study of the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods, students may select one of the periods as a cultural celebration. Research the required aspects of the period, and creatively present the various aspects of the culture. Include a party banner providing a visual interpretation of the period.

View the film, *Elizabeth I*, as an introduction to the Renaissance and Shakespeare.

View the PBS film, *Shakespeare*, as an introduction to Shakespeare and Hamlet.

Listen to *Beowulf* selections on the McDougal disk, noting effects of caesura and alliteration as they impact meaning.

Participate in a class brain storming session relating contemporary superheroes to Beowulf and the epic. Take notes for a future comparison/contrast essay.

Listen to *The Prologue* from *The Canterbury Tales* on the McDougal disk, particularly noting effects of detail, tone, and point of view.

Philosopher's Chair:

Each student selects a philosopher from *The World of Ideas*. Requirements: Annotate, raise questions, write an abstract and, evaluate the writer. Develop one's own views about the issues. Present the philosopher's ideas "in character," bringing a symbol representing the writer to class. Include writing style, main issues, and conclusions or insights in the presentation. Select music relating to the writer, and explain the relationship. After presenting ask the audience to respond in two ways:

- 1) Would their philosopher agree or disagree with this writer? Why or why not?
- 2) Would the student personally agree or disagree with the conclusions. Why or why not?

Analyze/relate the *WOI* essays to *Hamlet*, using the questions in the *World of Ideas* section in this guide.

TEKS 18A-D, 19A-C, 20A-D, 21A

RESOURCES

McDougal Littell - *The Language of Literature*

McDougal Littell - *Unit One Resource Book* - epic and alliteration activities, pp. 9-10

Strategies for Successful Writing - section on writing a definition,

MLA Handbook

Lee A. Jacobus - *A World of Ideas*.

William Shakespeare - The Folgers Library Edition of *Hamlet*

Videos:

Elizabeth

Merlin

PBS *Shakespeare*