

Leading Book Discussions With Complexity

Intended Audience

Parents to use as a guide for asking complex questions about literature

Materials

- Handout 1: Literary Analysis Wheel—Primary, or
- Handout 2: Literary Analysis Wheel

Note to Families: The Literary Analysis Wheel is used to guide students through analyzing how an author uses literary techniques to develop meaning within a work. The model allows students to see connections between multiple literary elements (e.g., setting impacts conflict, conflict reveals character motives and values, characterization impacts theme, etc.). Note that there are two versions of the model, the Literary Analysis Wheel—Primary (grades 2–4) and the Literary Analysis Wheel (grades 5 and up). The models differ slightly, as more accelerated elements (such as symbolism and tone) are incorporated into the model for older students.

It helps when students have models and frameworks to guide their thinking. The Literary Analysis Wheel can be used to guide students through an analysis of a short story, poem, or novel. First, guide the students to identify elements of the wheel separately (Level 1—Singular Element), and then emphasize a deeper analysis by asking how elements relate to each other (Level 2—Combine Elements). The Literary Analysis Wheel is meant to be interactive. The inner wheel conceptually spins so that its elements interact with each other and the outer wheel. Each element can relate to each other, regardless of its placement on the wheel. Note that although students may write on the wheel, discussion of ideas, especially relationships between combined elements, is encouraged and adds to their complexity of thinking. It is also recommended that for some students you ask a series of comprehension questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how questions) followed by Level 1 questions and then Level 2 questions.

Level 1—Singular Element

Note that with Level 1 questions students are asked about one specific literary element at a time. Forming a base understanding of these is helpful as students move to more complex questions at Level 2.

- **Character:** Who is the main character? What are the values and motives of the characters? What evidence supports this? How does the author reveal character?
- **Setting:** What is the time and place of the story? Does the setting change?
- **Tone/Feelings of the Author:** What is the author’s attitude toward the subject? With what attitude does the author approach the theme?

- **Symbols:** How do objects or names represent more abstract ideas?
- **Point of View:** What is the narrator’s point of view (first person, third-person objective, third-person limited, third-person omniscient, etc.)
- **Language/Structure/Style:** What figurative language and imagery does the author use? What is the author’s style?
- **Plot/Conflict:** What are the significant internal and external conflicts in the story? What are the significant parts of the plot?
- **Mood/Feelings of the Reader:** What is the feeling the reader gets from the story? How is this established?
- **Theme:** What is the author’s main message that can be generalized to broader contexts? (The theme is the author’s take on a given subject or idea.)

Level 2—Combined Elements

Literary experts and great readers focus on relationships, connections, or interactions, which is why more complex questions, with the help of the analysis wheel, are encouraged during analysis of a text. Each literary element can be combined with every other element on the wheel in an exploration of the relationship between those two elements. Note that with some stories, certain pairings of elements lend themselves better than others. For example, in “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” there is a great deal of symbolism, which then lends itself to asking more complex questions about the symbolism and characters, symbolism and conflict, or symbolism and mood. The goal is to help students see and discuss with evidence relationships among different story elements and variables. While example complex questions are provided below, it is often beneficial to ask questions that are more specific to the text. For example, instead of asking “How does the setting affect the mood?” you might ask “How does the setting of the stormy night at the beginning of the story affect the mood? How does the mood change when the sun comes out the following morning?”

Setting+ Another Element:

- How does the setting influence the development of the **theme**?
- How does the setting affect the **mood**?
- What **language** does the author use to describe the setting (e.g., use of imagery, similes, etc.)?
- How does the setting enhance **conflict**? How does the setting provoke plot events?
- How is the setting **symbolic** of a larger idea (e.g., autumn, twilight)?
- How does the setting affect and change the **characters**?
- How does the setting help reveal the author’s **tone/attitude** toward the theme/subject?
- What **conflicts** could only happen in this setting? How does this influence the **plot** and **theme**?

Symbols+ Another Element:

- How do symbols help develop the **theme**?
- How does the author use **figurative language** to establish symbolism? How do symbols relate to key **plot elements** and **conflicts**?
- How do symbols contribute to establishing the **mood**?
- Is the setting symbolic of a **larger idea** (e.g., twilight, autumn)?
- How does the author’s use of symbols reveal the author’s **tone**?
- How are characters symbolic of **archetypes**? What symbols are associated with the characters?

Character+ Another Element:

- How do the characters' actions/beliefs/attitudes/struggles influence the **theme**?
- How do the qualities of the characters affect the conflict as it relates to significant parts of the **plot**?
- How do the characters' actions and responses establish **mood**?
- What characters' thoughts/feelings are hidden and/or revealed by the narrator's **point of view**? How does this impact the reader's experience of the story?
- How does the author use **language** to develop character? Consider dialect, descriptions, use of figurative language, and names.
- Are characters revealed by **symbols**?
- How does the setting affect **character actions**?
- How does the author's **tone** toward the subject influence the development of characters?

Tone+ Another Element:

- How does the author's tone help establish the **theme**? What attitude does the author take in approaching the theme?
- How is the author's tone revealed in the narrator's **point of view** (e.g., the narrator's words and feelings will reveal the attitude of how the author approaches the theme)?
- What **words/phrases** does the author use to establish tone? How does the tone change throughout the story? How is this established through the author's style?
- How is the author's tone revealed in the **plot** and **conflicts**? What specific textual evidence supports this?
- How do the **characters' conflicts** reveal the author's tone toward a subject?
- How does the author's tone aid in developing the **mood** of the story?
- How do **symbols** help reveal the author's tone?
- How do **character actions, values, and conflicts** reveal the author's tone?
- How does the **setting** help reveal the author's tone/attitude toward the subject?

Point of View+ Another Element:

- How does the narrator's point of view shape the **theme**?
- How does the narrator's point of view establish **mood** (e.g., the reader depends on the narrator's perspective in telling the story, so the reader feels the way the narrator does about what is being described)?
- How does the narrator's point of view affect the way the reader views the significant **conflicts** and **plot events**?
- What is the **style** of the narrator? How does the narrator's point of view (specifically, voice and diction) affect the story?
- How is the author's **tone** revealed in the narrator's point of view (e.g., the narrator's words and feelings will reveal the attitude of how the author approaches the theme)?
- What **character thoughts** are revealed or hidden because of the narrator's point of view? How does this impact the reader's experience of the story?

Language/Style/Structure+ Another Element:

- How does the author's use of **figurative language** or imagery contribute to literary elements?
- How does the **dialect** of the characters contribute to our understanding of literary elements?
- How does the author's style and sentence structure enhance the **mood**?

Mood+ Another Element:

- How does the mood help develop the **theme**? What if the mood were different? How would this change the theme of the story?
- How does the author's **point of view** help create mood?
- How does the author's **tone** create mood for the reader?
- How do the **characters' actions, thoughts, and conflicts** contribute to the mood?
- How does the **setting** contribute to the mood?
- How does the author use **specific language** to develop the mood?
- How do specific **symbols** help establish the mood?

Plot/Conflict+ Another Element:

- How does the plot develop the **theme**? How would the theme be different if the story had a different ending?
- How does the conflict reveal the character's **values and motives**?
- How does **setting** impact the conflict and plot?
- What insight about the conflict does the reader have (or not have) as a result of the narrator's **point of view**?
- How do **symbols** represent aspects of the conflict (also consider foreshadowing devices)?
- How do character actions, thoughts, and conflicts reveal the author's **tone**?
- How do the plot and conflict reveal and/or change the **mood**?
- How does the author's **style** contribute to the development of the plot? Why does the author use more language/description on certain aspects of the plot than others?

Theme+ Another Element:

- How does the **plot** impact the theme? How would the theme change if key parts of the plot or ending were changed?
- How does the theme impact the development of the **plot**? If the author wanted to show a different theme, how would he or she have to change the plot of the story? How would the characters' values, motives, and actions change?
- How do the **literary elements** contribute to the development of the theme?

Interpretation:

- Taken altogether, what is your interpretation of the work (e.g. What is the explanation or meaning of this work given the author's use of various literary elements)? How did literary elements combine to create meaning? Support your interpretation by referring to the interaction of multiple elements in shaping your understanding of the work.



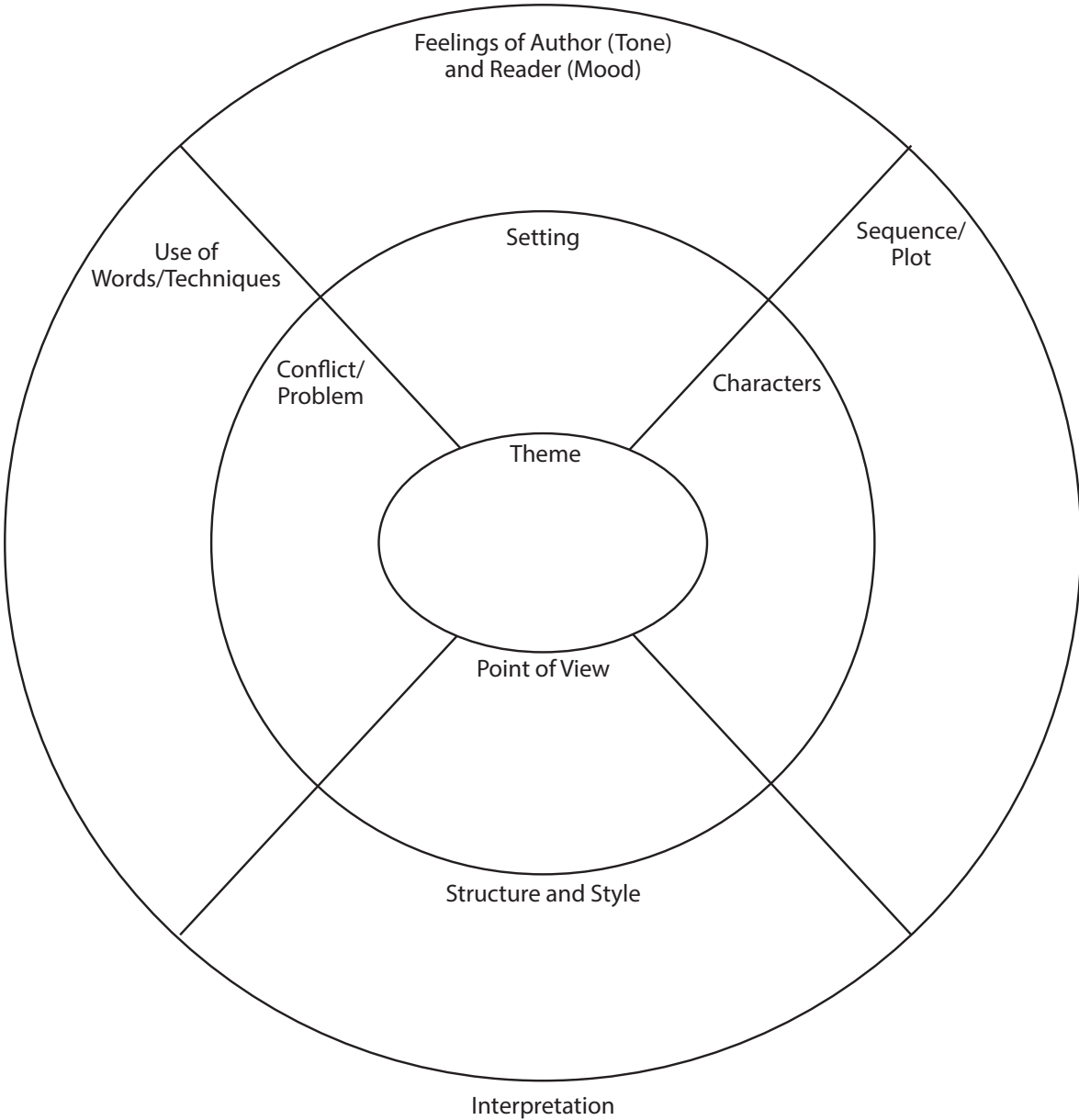
Note. This resource has been adapted for at-home use from the following Programs for Talented Youth curriculum for advanced students in conjunction with Prufrock Press as a way to support student learning through the COVID-19 shelter-at-home. Adapted from *Perspectives of Power: ELA Lessons for Gifted and Advanced Learners in Grades 6–8* (pp. 175–179), by T. Stambaugh and E. Mofield, 2016, Prufrock Press. Copyright 2016 by Prufrock Press. Adapted with permission.

Handout 1

Blank Literary Analysis Wheel—Primary

Directions: Draw arrows across elements to show connections.

Text: _____



Created by Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D., & Emily Mofield, Ed.D., 2017.



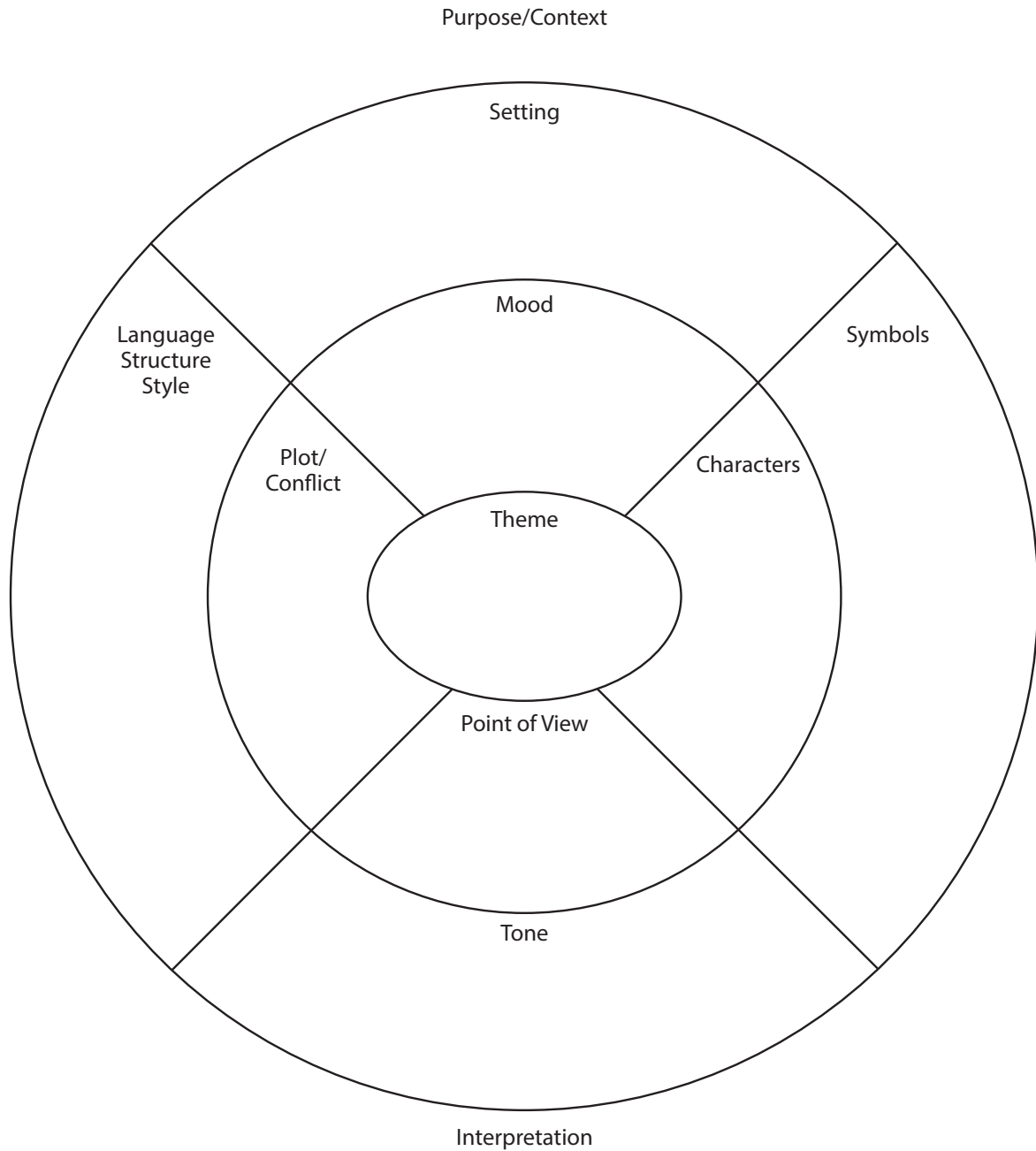
Note. From *Interactions in Ecology and Literature: Integrated Science and ELA Lessons for Gifted and Advanced Learners in Grades 2–3* (p. 30), by T. Stambaugh, E. Fecht, and E. Mofield, 2018, Prufrock Press. Copyright 2018 by Prufrock Press. Reproduced with permission.

Handout 2

Blank Literary Analysis Wheel

Directions: Draw arrows across elements to show connections.

Text: _____



Created by Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D., & Emily Mofield, Ed.D., 2015.



Note. From *Encounters With Archetypes: Integrated ELA Lessons for Gifted and Advanced Learners in Grades 4–5* (p. 32), by T. Stambaugh, E. Mofield, E. Fecht, and K. Knauss, 2019, Prufrock Press. Copyright 2019 by Prufrock Press. Reprinted with permission.