

How to show evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of an essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

To show an understanding of this objective, you must present an insightful and sensible analysis of the text. At this point, if you completed **Modules 5 and 6, Exercises 1 and 2**, you have found an acceptable main idea or thesis in the text and identified how the author has employed techniques and devices. You should now have a very good comprehension of the essay “Dance with the Giraffe.” In order to demonstrate this comprehension through your critical and analytical interpretation of the text, you must be able to distinguish between summary and analysis. Remember that a summary is simply a paraphrased or abridged version of the text containing no analysis. You must also show that you have clearly understood and not misread the text.

Instructions

Carefully read each of the following passages. Determine whether the paragraph is a summary or whether it reflects an acceptable analysis of the text. Determine whether the response would be considered an acceptable or unacceptable text analysis. Write a sentence or two to explain why you have come to this decision.

Exercise 1

1. In the essay, the writer tells about an experience she has as the owner of a small ranch, a protected habitat for over 1,000 animals. She observes the death of Nick, the giraffe. When Nick arrives at Fossil Rim, he is already unhealthy. Then, one day, Nick falls down from a standing position and over a 24-hour period goes through the process of dying. Toward the end of the essay, the reader knows Nick has died when the writer says, “At last Old Nick left this world.”

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

2. Nick is a giraffe measuring eighteen to twenty feet tall. He is chestnut brown with white patches and is part of a subspecies known as the reticulated giraffe. One winter afternoon when an animal caretaker is cleaning his hooves, he ends up “going down” horizontally.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

3. In the essay “Dance with a Giraffe,” Christine Jurzykowski explores the intricate relationship that exists between all living beings. In her personal essay, Jurzykowski describes the dying process of a giraffe and how she is a partner in his dying. Through this interaction with Nick, just prior to his death, the writer experiences a vivid emotional connection not only with the animal but with the cycle of life and, as she states at the end of her essay, “the nature of nature.”

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

4. We know how close the author is to Nick, the giraffe, because she says that when she was holding the giraffe in her arms, she experienced in his body the push and pull of death. She goes on to say that “part of being alive is in knowing everything belongs to something else.” Finally, Jurzykowski recalls, “you are my friend, you are safe here, you will be taken care of.”

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

5. The metaphor illustrated in the title of the text, “Dance with a Giraffe,” describes the powerful “dance steps” Jurzykowski takes as she guides Nick through the final stages of his precious life. Additionally, the herd of giraffes performs a dance of their own as they “paced methodically” in a circle for a few hours prior to Nick’s death. Through the use of this metaphor, the reader develops a sense of the “web of relationships that includes all living things.”

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

Answer key

1. **Unacceptable.** This is a **summary**. This passage only tells what happens in the essay, but it never comments on the significance or meaning of any of the events.
2. **Unacceptable.** This is not only a **summary**, but it also contains almost straight **paraphrasing**, as well.
3. **Acceptable.** This passage is clearly **critical and analytical**.
4. **Acceptable.** But please be careful with this borderline type of analysis. Although this passage contains a series of lines basically copied from the text, it also includes a very small sampling of critical commentary. There is a **lead-in line** about Nick's relationship to the author. Try to avoid this type of analysis, because if you include too much paraphrasing or use of the language of the text, you can be penalized under the **Expression** criterion.
5. **Acceptable.** This passage is clearly **critical and analytical**.

How to show evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of an essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **15 minutes**

Reminder

To show an understanding of this objective, you must present an insightful and sensible analysis of the text. At this point, if you completed the exercises in **Modules 5 and 6** based on this text, you should have a good sense of the thesis, as well as a satisfactory understanding of some of the techniques and devices Jurzykowski used. In order to demonstrate this understanding through your critical and analytical interpretation of the text, you will now assess the validity of several interpretations of “Dance with a Giraffe.”

Instructions

Determine whether each of the following statements is an acceptable interpretation or a misreading of the text.

Exercise 2

1. When Jurzykowski introduces the reader to her personal story about her “dance with a giraffe,” she tells of her first experience with the magic of nature. She explains how she took care of an abandoned baby anteater and then how she kept it safe. In describing this event, the author prepares the reader for the completion of the cycle of life as she details her account of the giraffe’s death.

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

2. The writer mentions that she has lived in several different places: Brazil, Poland, Paris, New York, Texas, Africa, South America, as well as the southwest of the United States. Clearly, Jurzykowski’s experience of having lived in so many different places shows that she is very knowledgeable about many species in the animal kingdom.

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

3. Jurzykowski states that Nick the giraffe was always unhealthy and that she knew he would die an early death. She states in the fourth paragraph of the story that “being with Old Nick brought this feeling to me.”

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

4. It is interesting to note that Jurzykowski points out that not only did Old Nick know he was dying but that the herd of giraffes knew this, as well. This “knowing” that the animals shared indicates the intricacy of the web of nature.

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

5. In the opening and closing paragraphs, the writer states “You are my friend; you are safe here; you will be taken care of.” The reason she does this is to reveal that “everything belongs to something else” and “nothing exists in isolation.”

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

6. One of the concerns that Jurzykowski mentions is the weight of Old Nick, the three-thousand pound animal. She was afraid that because of the animal’s size she would feel overwhelmed in her “dance with the giraffe.”

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

7. In her discussion of man’s partnership with nature, Jurzykowski becomes almost spiritual in her observations and in asking her philosophical questions. At one point in the process, she even “prays” that she will be guided through the vigil. In doing so, the author is attempting to make sense of the mystery that surrounds the cycle of life—of living and dying.

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

8. Within minutes of Old Nick’s death, university researchers arrived on the scene to observe the dead giraffe and to offer Christine Jurzykowski advice on how to proceed at that point. Jurzykowski felt embarrassed about her appearance and her obvious sadness over Old Nick’s passing.

Acceptable _____ Misread _____

Answer key

1. This passage is **acceptable**. Here the explanation introduces some of the details of how the author was first attracted to the animal world and her connection with nature.
2. **Misread**. This explanation is incorrect. The author did not live in all of the places listed.
3. **Misread**. She did not necessarily expect an early death even though Nick did arrive at Fossil Rim with health problems. There is no clear evidence in the text to support the premise.
4. This is **acceptable**. In this passage the notion of “knowing” and its meaning is explored.
5. This is **acceptable**. The statement clearly reflects the central thesis of the text.
6. **Misread**. This is completely made up; yet it is almost convincing.
7. This is **acceptable**. If a student were to write a rant, however, the marker would probably note that the student had not met the objective.
8. **Misread**. There is no evidence the university researchers arrived at the compound to see the giraffe, specifically. The author notes having to compose herself in order to respectfully receive her university “guests.”