

Do not write on this sheet. You must turn it in with your essay.



Great Expectations -- Dickens

Critical Analysis Essay

A.P. ENGLISH LITERATURE & COMPOSITION

Archbishop Moeller High School, Mr. Rose

Choose one of the following prompts and respond to it in a well-crafted essay. See page 2 for tips and reminders on composition. You are expected to use your book for supports. Remember to document all quotations by giving the page number in an in-line citation: Example: "quote" (20).

I. Satire: In satire, human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, ideally with the intent to bring about improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, the purpose of satire is not primarily humor in itself so much as an attack on something of which the author strongly disapproves, using the weapon of wit. In *Great Expectations* Charles Dickens uses satire to depict and criticize aspects of life and society in Victorian England. Identify three targets of Dickens's satire in the novel. Then explain how Dickens goes about satirizing these targets. Be sure to refer to specific scenes of the novel in order to support your answer.

II. Inciting Force: From the first, Estella treats Pip with contempt and deliberately humiliates him. Yet his response is to love her. In a well-crafted essay discuss how Pip's life is transformed as a result of his meeting Estella and his experience at Satis House.

III. Bildungsroman: Pip's development or education, which has been called a "snob's progress," makes this novel a *bildungsroman*; a novel of education or formation, the *bildungsroman* typically follows the hero's progress from childhood innocence to adult experience. In a well-crafted essay discuss how and explain why Pip's financial and social rise, which results from his having "expectations," is accompanied by an emotional and moral decline or deterioration. In your opinion, does Pip become a snob, or does he hold true to his values?

IV. Redemption: *Great Expectations* is not just about criminality and guilt but also about redemption [redemption: atonement for guilt, deliverance from sin or crime]. Redemption in this novel comes from love; it may be selfless love for a particular individual, like Joe's love for Pip, or compassion for other human beings, like Joe's kind feelings for the convict Magwitch. Redemption should not be confused with happiness; redemption may be the result of disillusionment or may even result in death. In a well-crafted essay explain how and why *Great Expectations* is a novel about redemption.

V. Moral Theme: Identify a central moral theme of *Great Expectations* and explain how Dickens dramatizes that theme. A moral is a lesson concerning what is right or prudent, that can be derived from a story, a piece of information, or an experience.

VI. The Role of London: When Pip arrives in London, he is scared by its "immensity" and notices that it seems "rather ugly, crooked, narrow, dirty." London at this time was a center of commercial activity. During the years of the Victorian empire, the city was the capital of the powerful British Empire. In a well-crafted essay, explain the role of London in *Great Expectations*. What affect does it have on Pip and other characters in London?

VII. Good and Evil: For much of *Great Expectations*, Pip seems to believe in a stark division between good and evil, and he tends to classify people and situations as belonging to one extreme or the other: for instance, despite their respective complexities, he believes that Estella is good and the convict Magwitch is evil. A contemporary reviewer (in 1861) of *Great Expectation* believed Dickens "follows the maxim of the

great master of characterization, and seeks ‘the soul of goodness in things evil’”? In a well-crafted essay, explain how the character of Abel Magwitch illustrates the reviewer’s opinion.

XIII. Joe Gargery: Joe Gargery is the steadiest and most loyal friend to Pip, yet the two men are quite different. Where Pip is ambitious and eager to move ahead at almost any cost, Joe is content to stay in his place. As a result, he is one of the most authentic and likeable characters in *Great Expectations*. In a well-crafted essay explain Joe’s role in the novel’s development. Consider why Joe is a necessary contrast to Pip. You may also want to consider what Pip’s request for forgiveness and Joe’s response say about the nature of “great expectations” and self-improvement.

IX. Revenge: Revenge is a motivating factor for both positive and negative behaviors in *Great Expectations*. Choose one or more instances in which a character is acting in a way that is vengeful and analyze the significance of the characters’ behavior in the overall scope of the plot. Characters that might make particularly good analyses include Magwitch, Miss Havisham, and Orlick.

Tips:

1. Read the question carefully and be sure your essay addresses the question directly.
2. Write a thesis statement (your assertion or claim).
 - Your thesis should make a clear and specific observation about the text in answer to the prompt.
 - Your thesis should be a strong, clear, and debatable assertion that can be supported by the text.
3. Make an outline of the supports for your thesis statement.
 - Your supports should specifically reference evidence from the text.
 - Be sure to use at least one direct quotation in each body (support) paragraph.
4. Be sure to include an introduction and conclusion.
 - An introduction should situate your essay in context, moving from general to specific, leading up to your thesis.
 - A conclusion should show the significance of your thesis statement and not simply repeat your introduction or your thesis.
5. Write out a draft of your essay: double-space and write in pen.

Simple 5-paragraph format – NOTE: You are not restricted to this format

- I. Introduction (concludes in thesis statement with blueprint)
- II. Body: Support paragraph 1
 - Details and quotations
- III. Body: Support paragraph 2
 - Details and quotations
- IV. Body: Support paragraph 3
 - Details and quotations
- V. Conclusion