

**PRACTICE WORKSHEET + FULL ANSWER KEY**

# Literary analysis: detail, tension and meaning

Secondary English literature: close-reading practice. Work through the sections in order, or choose the one that matches this week's topic.

| QUESTIONS | SECTIONS | ANSWER KEY  | WORKING SPACE |
|-----------|----------|-------------|---------------|
| 52        | 5        | At the back | Ruled         |

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Before you start

Develop an interpretation from specific details rather than retelling the plot. Consider how diction, imagery, perspective or structure shapes a tension, then explain how the evidence supports a defensible reading.

**WORKED EXAMPLE**

**Original passage: "Mira placed the unopened letter beneath the vase. All evening, she watered flowers that needed no water." What might her actions suggest?**

- 1 The unopened letter suggests that Mira is postponing an encounter with its contents.
- 2 Repeated, unnecessary watering can be read as distraction or displaced anxiety.
- 3 A defensible interpretation is that her attention to a harmless task reveals reluctance to confront an emotionally difficult message; the passage does not tell us what the letter contains.

*Use this method as your model. Set out your own working the same way.*

## Common mistakes to avoid

- Retelling events instead of analysing their significance
- Inventing details that the passage does not establish

There are 52 questions across 5 sections. Write in the ruled space, then mark your work against the answer key at the back. Topics covered: Close reading, Character and perspective, Literary argument.

**SECTION A Close reading a passage**

Read this original passage twice. Build an interpretation from details, not from what you assume happened.

**READ THIS PASSAGE**

Mira placed the unopened letter beneath the vase. All evening, she watered flowers that needed no water. Twice she carried the jug to the sink and back without filling it. When the light went, she did not turn on the lamp; she stood in the doorway with the kettle cooling behind her, listening to a house that had nothing to say.

**1**

Identify one detail that supports an interpretation of avoidance.

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**2**

Why is "Mira has received bad news" less defensible than "Mira seems reluctant to read the letter"?

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**3**

Explain the effect of "flowers that needed no water".

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**4**

Explain the significance of carrying the jug "without filling it".

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**5**

What does not turning on the lamp suggest?

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**6**

Explain the effect of "a house that had nothing to say".

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**7**

Explain the effect of "the kettle cooling behind her".

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**8**

Identify the passage's dominant image and explain its function.

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**9**

Trace how the passage moves from action to stillness.

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**10**

Write a defensible claim about Mira's state of mind with one piece of evidence.

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**11**

Explain why the passage withholds the letter's contents.

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**SECTION B Character and perspective**

*Distinguish the narrator from the author, and inference from invention.*

- 12** Original sentence: "The station clock hurried; Jonah did not." Explain how the contrast may characterise Jonah.

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- 13** Original line: "The empty chair kept its place at dinner." Offer one interpretation of the personification.

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- 14** Explain the difference between a narrator and an author.

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- 15** Explain what an unreliable narrator is and name one signal of one.

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- 16** Explain the effect of a third-person limited perspective.

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- 17** Explain how free indirect style works.

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- 18** Explain what characterisation through action achieves that description does not.

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- 19** Identify a moment in the Mira passage where character is shown rather than stated.

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- 20** Explain what a foil is in literature.

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- 21** Explain why a character's silence can be significant.

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- 22** Write two sentences about how perspective shapes sympathy in a text you know.

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**SECTION C Poetry and figurative language**

Read this original poem aloud twice, then analyse how its comparison is sustained.

**READ THIS PASSAGE**

The orchard keeps its own accounts:  
a windfall for every branch it broke,  
a season charged against the frost.  
Nothing is forgiven; everything is paid.

**23**

Identify the extended metaphor in the poem.

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**24**

Explain the effect of the word "accounts".

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**25**

Explain the effect of "charged against the frost".

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**26**

Comment on the two clauses of the final line.

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**27**

Explain what a metaphor does that a simile does not.

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**28**

Identify the tone of the poem and support your answer.

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**29**

Explain the function of the colon in the first line.

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**30**

Explain how the line breaks affect the reading.

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**31**

Write a claim, evidence and commentary paragraph about the poem's tone.

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**32**

Suggest a theme the poem develops and justify it.

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**SECTION D Structure and literary argument**

A defensible thesis claims something another thoughtful reader could dispute.

**33**

Revise this summary into an analytical claim: "Mira puts away a letter and waters flowers."

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**34**

Write a brief commentary explaining why unnecessary watering supports your claim about Mira.

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35 Explain what makes a literary thesis defensible.

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36 Explain why "the author uses imagery" is not a thesis.

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37 Write a thesis about the Mira passage.

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38 Explain how structure can carry meaning in prose.

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39 Explain the effect of ending a passage on an image rather than an explanation.

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40 Explain what ambiguity contributes to a literary text.

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41 Explain why plot summary weakens a literary essay.

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42 Plan three body paragraphs for an essay on avoidance in the Mira passage.

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## SECTION E Writing and revising interpretation

*Embed evidence in your own sentences and keep the commentary longer than the quotation.*

43 Write a two-sentence introduction for an essay on the Mira passage.

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44 Embed this quotation in a sentence of your own: "flowers that needed no water".

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45 Explain how to introduce a quotation smoothly.

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46 Explain why long quotations weaken an analysis.

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47 Correct: The passage shows that Mira is avoiding, which effects the reader.

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48

Explain why the present tense is used to discuss literature.

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49

Name two things to cut when revising a literary essay.

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50

Write a concluding sentence that extends rather than repeats your thesis.

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51

Explain how to handle a detail that resists your reading.

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52

Find one sentence in your paragraph that summarises rather than interprets, and rewrite it.

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## Answer key

Work each section before you check it. These are model answers: an equivalent method, or a different well-supported interpretation, can be just as correct.

### SECTION A - CLOSE READING A PASSAGE

1. The letter remains unopened and is placed beneath the vase; either detail can support avoidance when explained in context.
2. The contents are unknown. Her actions support reluctance, but the passage does not establish that the news is bad.
3. The action has no practical purpose, so it reads as displacement rather than care.
4. The routine has become empty of purpose, which suggests her attention is elsewhere.
5. A withdrawal from ordinary activity, or a reluctance to let the evening move on.
6. The personified silence externalises her isolation and the absence of any answer.
7. An abandoned ordinary comfort marks time passing while she stands still.
8. Water, repeatedly present but never used, which suggests activity without purpose.
9. It begins with placing and watering, then reduces to standing and listening, which enacts her withdrawal.
10. A claim such as anxious avoidance, supported by a specific detail from the passage.
11. The uncertainty is the subject; naming the contents would replace her state of mind with a plot fact.

### SECTION B - CHARACTER AND PERSPECTIVE

12. The contrast between a hurried clock and Jonah suggests hesitation or resistance to the urgency of departure; the wider text would refine that reading.
13. The chair is treated as if it maintains a role, which may suggest that an absent person remains emotionally present in the household.
14. The narrator is the voice telling the story within the work; the author is the writer who created that voice.
15. A narrator whose account cannot be fully trusted; a signal is a gap between what they say and what the text shows.
16. The reader is confined to one character's knowledge, which creates sympathy and controls what is withheld.
17. Third-person narration takes on a character's idiom and thought without quotation, blurring narrator and character.
18. It lets the reader infer, which is more persuasive than being told.
19. Any action, for example the unnecessary watering, from which the reader infers her state.
20. A character whose contrast highlights qualities in another.

21. What is not said can carry pressure, evasion or grief that speech would resolve.
22. Two sentences naming the perspective and its effect on the reader's alignment.

### SECTION C - POETRY AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

23. The orchard is described as a business keeping accounts, with losses charged and debts paid.
24. It imposes an unsentimental, transactional logic on nature.
25. It treats damage as a debit in a ledger, which makes loss feel systematic rather than accidental.
26. The balanced pair states a hard law: no mercy, only settlement, which closes the poem with finality.
27. A metaphor asserts identity rather than comparison, which makes the association more complete.
28. Austere or unsentimental, created by the financial diction and the flat final statement.
29. It presents what follows as the contents of those accounts.
30. Each line completes one item in the ledger, which reinforces the accounting structure.
31. A paragraph naming the tone, quoting a precise detail and explaining how it produces that tone.
32. A supported theme, for example that natural cycles are indifferent rather than merciful.

### SECTION D - STRUCTURE AND LITERARY ARGUMENT

33. Mira's unnecessary care for the flowers reveals how an ordinary routine can become a way to postpone confronting uncertainty.
34. Because the flowers need no water, the action is not explained by practical care alone. Its repetition redirects her attention from the unopened letter, supporting a reading of anxious avoidance.
35. It makes a claim another thoughtful reader could dispute, and the text can support it.
36. It states a fact about the text without claiming what that imagery achieves.
37. A defensible interpretive claim about the passage that its details can support.
38. The order and pacing of information shape what the reader knows and when, which creates tension or revelation.
39. It leaves interpretation with the reader and avoids closing the meaning down.
40. It sustains more than one supported reading, which can be the point rather than a flaw.
41. It repeats what the reader already knows instead of explaining how the text creates meaning.

42. Three distinct aspects, each with its own evidence, that together support one thesis.

#### SECTION E - WRITING AND REVISING INTERPRETATION

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43. A sentence establishing the passage and a defensible thesis.
44. For example: The detail of flowers that needed no water marks her care as displacement rather than purpose.
45. Integrate it grammatically into your own sentence and keep it short enough to analyse.
46. They take the space commentary needs and shift focus from your argument to the text's words.
47. The passage shows that Mira is avoiding something, which affects the reader.
48. The text continues to act on each new reader, so the present tense is conventional.
49. Plot summary, and any technique named without an explanation of its effect.
50. A sentence stating what the interpretation reveals about the text's wider concern.
51. Acknowledge it and either qualify your claim or explain why the reading still holds.
52. The identified sentence rewritten so that it explains significance rather than restating content.

## Review and next steps

Mark your work against the answer key, record your score for each section, then answer the three questions below. Bring this page to your next lesson so your tutor can start from what actually blocked you.

**Which question did you find hardest, and what exactly stopped you?**

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**Rewrite the corrected working for that question here.**

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**Which section do you want to practise again before your next lesson?**

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## Score record

| SECTION                                | QUESTIONS | NUMBER CORRECT | PRACTISE AGAIN? |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|
| A. Close reading a passage             | 11        |                |                 |
| B. Character and perspective           | 11        |                |                 |
| C. Poetry and figurative language      | 10        |                |                 |
| D. Structure and literary argument     | 10        |                |                 |
| E. Writing and revising interpretation | 10        |                |                 |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>52</b> |                |                 |

### Keep going with one-to-one support.

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