

How to Complete the *Major Works Data Sheet*

Point of View: First-person (Observant or Participant), Third-person (Omniscient, Limited, Objective)

Genre: autobiography, memoir, journey or quest, bildungsroman, Robinsonade, social realism, courtroom drama, biographical drama, etc.

Characteristics of the selected genre: A work may belong to more than one genre. Provide definitions for the genres to which the work belongs. (You may copy definitions from handbooks of literary terms, online sources, etc. – I’m not going to worry about plagiarism here. This does not have to be in your own words, and you don’t have to give credit for where you got the info.)

Plot Summary Outline: This DOES have to be in your own words. Attach pages as needed, especially if you have a large handwriting. You will need this in the spring to help you review for the exam. Include as much detail as possible.

Author’s biographical information: Look for important details from the author’s life – not trivia. What influenced his writing? Bulleted items are fine.

Historical information about period of publication: Choose items that influenced the author’s writing. This is NOT about the time period in which the novel is set. Look for important events in politics, religion, science, art – anything that helps you put the work in context. Who were the political leaders in England and the U.S.? Was it a time of war? When you do a little research about the novel, do you find historical events that are important to understanding the novel? Workers’ rebellions? Economic depression? Industrial revolution? Bulleted items are fine.

Style: Please do NOT copy this from another source. Develop your own ability to analyze style. Is the author descriptive and ornate? Formal and academic? Informal – even colloquial? Terse? Does he emphasize strong action verbs or use lots of descriptive adjectives? Does he use poetic language (lots of similes, metaphors, imagery, etc.?) Does inverted syntax (reversal of normal word order with subject-verb-object) make his writing formal and difficult to understand? Does he use mostly short, simple sentences or long, complex sentences with lots of adverbial clauses? Is he more abstract or concrete? Select 3 or more style traits that characterize the work.

An example that illustrates style: For each style trait you listed, give an example.

Setting: You must include time AND place. Be as specific as you can. What cities or regions are used in the work? Describe important estates or houses. You may not know the exact year(s) for the work, but you should be able to make a rough estimate. Mid-nineteenth century? Around 1850?

Mood: Describe the atmosphere or emotional condition created in you by this piece of literature.

Symbol: This is not something literal. It is figurative; it must stand for/represent something.

Motif: recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature.

Themes: Remember to state your themes as complete sentences (not general topics) that describe a life lesson you learned from reading the book. The theme you state must include a topic and your opinion about that topic. For example, “Guilt” is technically a correct description of a major theme of *The Scarlet Letter*. “Unresolved guilt is a destructive force with the power to destroy body and soul” is a more useful way to talk about theme. A student who can write this sentence is closer to being ready to write an analytical essay. Put a lot of thought into this. You will not write “A” level essays until you discuss theme with insight. By next May, you will need to be able to read an essay prompt, select an appropriate novel, and identify an important theme in a matter of just minutes. Do **NOT** use study guides to help you. **What was the author trying to say about society or human nature?** Consider these possibilities from *Julius Caesar*: Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. There is a time for rebellion against a government. A powerful orator understands that emotion is a more powerful tool than logic. The uneducated masses are ruled by mob mentality rather than by morals or reason. A despotic ruler may be a better leader than a moral man who lacks an understanding of human weakness. A man’s character may be judged by the way he treats those beneath him. --- Note: Students who write about theme effectively are risk takers. Your statement about theme should not be so risky that it seems ludicrous. Neither should it just state the obvious. A good theme will invite argument. Not everyone would necessarily agree that your statement is true or even that it was something the author was trying to suggest. Your statement should be an idea that you think you could support with details from the novel or play – something that would allow for meaty discussion. List as many themes as you can; fill the space if possible.

Opening Scene Significance: Why did the author choose to begin the book this way, and what is the importance of this scene? Opening scenes usually provide important hints about the theme of a work. They may create tone or foreshadow future events. Best answers will clearly connect something in the opening chapter (or scene of a play) to the **theme** of the work. The answer is NOT, “This is where the author introduces the characters and gets the story going.”

Closing Scene Significance: Why did the author choose to end the book this way, and what is the importance of this scene? Same rules apply as for the opening scene. The answer will NOT be, “This is where things basically wound up and everything worked out. If Character A had not done Action B, then Result C would not have occurred.” Really?!

Characters: Role in the story includes simple character descriptions. Arthur Dimmesdale was the minister who fathered Hester Prynne’s child. His significance is that he was a central character who struggled with hidden guilt and sin. Adjectives to describe him might include: sensitive, tortured, hypocritical, guilty. Include all major characters and all or most minor ones. For most of the works you read this year, this will be a long list. When the AP exam rolls around, you cannot be fumbling on an essay trying to remember if Pumblechook or Wopsle was related to Mrs. Joe. Flubbing names can cost major points. This will help you review in the spring. Take the time to make a complete list.

Memorable Quotes: As you are reading the work, underline, highlight, scribble in the margin, use sticky notes to mark interesting spots. On the MWDS, list 6-10 important quotations from the work. (*Ten* is safer. If I don’t like a few of them, I can reward what you did well.) Look for brief quotations that provide a key to understanding characterization or the theme of the work. Do this yourself. Do NOT pull

quotes from some online study guide. (From *The Scarlet Letter*; you might select, “This rose-bush, by a strange choice, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness . . . we shall not take upon us to determine.” You may use ellipsis, but include enough of the quotation for me to recognize its significance.) Include the page number, and identify the speaker (if needed).

Significance of Quote: Significance is rarely related to plot summary or obvious details about a character. (This quote shows that the character was sweet or had red hair or that the girl was going to get the guy in the end. Blech!) Better comments tie the quotation to the theme of the novel. Look for some symbolism or universal truth that the author was trying to illustrate. (For the quote listed above, you might comment, “Like the rose by the prison door, Hester is a woman who survives in an austere setting. There is a particular beauty about a rose or a woman who can thrive in such a harsh world.”)

(Modified from:

wakechristianacademy.com/.../ClassNotes/SonyaMassengillClassNotes/Guidelines_for_Major_Works_Data_Sheet.doc)