

Interpretation and Analysis

To **analyze** means "to break into parts and examine the components."

To **interpret** means "to offer possible meanings."

The phrase "**close reading**" also is sometimes used to describe this kind of writing, as it requires close examination—detailed, careful reading sentence by sentence—of one or several small parts to critically (thoughtfully and carefully) explain a work of literature. (A small part may mean: as little as a line in poetry, a paragraph in short stories and essays, or a page or two in books.)

You then apply your question*, step by step, to the elements or the parts of the work that help prove your tentative answer, significant part by significant part.

As you develop your interpretations step by step, you quote and paraphrase the elements or parts in the work in order to show how they exist. In this way, your readers can see for themselves that the way you interpret each element or part appears reasonable. You are, in effect, proving to the reader that your interpretation is sensible, both at each step of the way and in the overall view.

What a text **says: summary** - talks about or restates the same topic as the original.

What a text **means: interpretation** - analyzes the text and asserts a meaning for the text as a whole.

*The question we asked for the first two paragraphs of *Of Mice and Men* was What does the setting reveal? Other questions that lead to interpretive thinking and an analytical answer are (and they happen in order):

1. What is significant about _____?
2. Why?
3. So what?