List of Writing Prompts

1. Characters do what they do because of their various motivations and desires. Often, their desires conflict with their ethical or moral responsibilities. For example, a personal belief, a love, a thirst for vengeance, a resolve to rectify a wrong, or some other ambition may cause a character to conflict with a moral obligation. Write about a literary work in which a character’s motivations/desire conflict with his/her ethical responsibilities.

**Remember that you are analyzing the literary text--not commenting on whether or not the behaviors are ethical or “right” in your opinion.** Instead, you should focus on the moral dilemma the character experiences and analyze how he/she wrestles with this dilemma beyond what is obvious in the plot. What literary elements draw out this conflict?

**Literary Works (choose one from either of the lists below):**

**Stories:**
- “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (O’Connor, 1953)
- “The Blue Hotel” (Crane, 1898)
- “The Things They Carried” (O’Brien, 1990) - 5.4 in *Journey into Literature*
- “Greasy Lake” (Boyle, 1985)

**Drama:**
- *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1606) - Appendix B in *Journey into Literature*

2. Write an analysis of a key character in a literary work. Describe two to three key actions of the character, or how the character responds to events. What do the actions reveal about the character? Do the character’s actions fit together, or do they contradict each other? If they contradict, what does that contradiction say about the character’s emotional and mental capacity? Analyze the character’s psychological background. Why does the character act in the way he/she does? How does the author’s characterization in the text reflect this psychological background?

**Literary Works (choose one from either of the lists below):**

**Stories:**
- “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” (Oates, 1966)
- “Interpreter of Maladies” (Lahiri, 1999)
- “Sonny’s Blues” (Baldwin, 1957)
- “Sweat” (Hurston, 1926)

**Drama:**
3. Most often, literary works have both internal conflict (individual v. self) and external conflict (individual v. individual, society, nature, or technology). Additionally, one can often find that a character’s internal conflict is linked to an external one. Choose a text in which both an internal and external conflict are evident to you. How does the external conflict illuminate the internal one? What meaningful parallels or incongruencies do you observe when comparing the two, and what is the significance within the context of the story?

Literary Works (choose one from either of the lists below):
Stories:
"No Name Woman" (Kingston, 1975)
"Sonny’s Blues" (Baldwin, 1957)
“The Things They Carried” (O’Brien, 1990) - 5.4 in Journey into Literature

Drama:
Macbeth (Shakespeare, 1606) - Appendix B in Journey into Literature
Mistaken Identity (Cooper, 2008) 14.3 in Journey into Literature

4. In some stories, characters come into conflict with the culture in which they live. Often, a character feels alienated in his/her community or society due to race, gender, class or ethnic background. Choose a text that shows this kind of conflict. How is the character alienated from community and how does she/he respond to it? What does that character’s alienation say about the surrounding society’s assumptions, morality and values? In what way(s) do literary elements reflect how that society defines race, gender, class and/or ethnicity? How does this create conflict for the character?

Literary Works (choose one from any of the lists below. If you choose to write about poetry, you may choose up to two poems from the Poems list):
Stories:
"Sonny’s Blues" (Baldwin, 1957)
“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” (Marquez, 1955)
“A Hunger Artist” (Kafka, 1924) – 7.5 in Journey into Literature

Poems:
“Theme for English B” (Hughes, 1951)
5. Setting is an important component of any story. Consider the role that setting has in one of the works. How is this particular setting integral to the story? Does the protagonist conflict with the setting or have particular interactions with it? How does the protagonist’s relationship with the setting connect with his/her development as a character?

Literary Works (choose one from any of the lists below. If you choose to write about poetry, you may choose up to two poems from the Poems list):

Stories:
“Greasy Lake” (Boyle, 1985)
“The Blue Hotel” (Crane, 1898)
“The Things They Carried” (O’Brien, 1990) - 5.4 in Journey into Literature
“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (LeGuin, 1973)

Poems:
“The Raven” (Poe, 1845) - 9.7 in Journey into Literature
“A Point West of Mount San Bernardino” (Delgado, 2013)
“To Live in the Borderlands Means You” (Anzaldúa, 1987)
“Smokey the Bear Sutra” (Snyder, 1969)

Drama:
A Midsummer's Night Dream (Shakespeare, 1590)

6. Tone is a literary element that poets and authors use to affect a certain mood, emotion, setting, and/or message. Choose a story, drama, or poem in which you observe a unique tone. Analyze the tone in detail, illustrating specific qualities of it by offering several textual examples of each quality. Why is this tone important in understanding the conflict and theme of the text? How does it contribute to both?

Literary Works (choose one from Stories OR one from Drama OR one of the selected pairs from the Poems list):

Stories:
“Good Country People” (O'Connor, 1953) - 6.6 in *Journey into Literature*
“Guests of the Nation” (O'Connor, 1931)
“A Rock Trying to Be a Stone” (Troncoso, 1997)
“Sweat” (Hurston, 1926)

**Poems:**
“Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” (Thomas, 1952) - 11.2 in *Journey into Literature*
“Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World” (Alexie, 2009) - 11.2 in *Journey into Literature*

“Bright Copper Kettles” (Seshadri, 2010)
“Theme for English B” (Hughes, 1951)

“Ways of Talking” (Jin, 1996)
“What It’s Like to Be a Black Girl” (Smith, 1991) - 11.1 in *Journey into Literature*

“Burial” (Che, 2014)
“Blood” (Nye, 1986)

**Drama:**
*The Importance of Being Earnest* (Wilde, 1895) - 14.3 and Appendix C in *Journey into Literature*