**Book Report vs. Literary Analysis**

**Book Report:** A book report (plot summary) is a condensed description of the story in a novel, poem, short story, play, film or other piece of storytelling. *The point of a summary is to explain what happens in the story without discussing the deeper meaning of the literary work.* It does not provide a review of performance or contain the opinions of the author. It also does not retell the complete story, which is why a summary does not contain all the detailed information about the main characters, replay the unfolding drama, or review all of the twists and turns in the plot. Sometimes a book report will contain an interpretation. An interpretation is an explanation of what the student *believes* a work means. Interpretation often occurs when writing literature papers about poetry or complex works such as epic poems. The student interprets the meaning of the literary work, but simply stops there. Instead of trying to analyze the deeper meaning(s) of the literary work, the student interprets what he or she believes the author is trying to portray.

**Literary Analysis**: A literary analysis is where the student **explores deeper meaning and examines the different elements of a piece of literature**. The goal of a literary analysis is to broaden and deepen your understanding of a work. This process requires you to use a sharpened, focused expression of thought to explore a work, especially a narrowed section of it. The process of analyzing a literary work is to carefully examine and sometimes evaluate a specific and narrowed aspect of it. Teachers often provide topics of discussion or ask questions in their assignment instructions (prompts) to guide students on what literary elements need to be analyzed and discussed. Therefore, this requires you to break the literary work’s subject down into its component parts, then carefully analyze in accordance with the requirements.

* **This process means that you need to go beyond superficial reading of the literary work in order to delve more deeply into meaning and understanding.**
* For instance, an analysis of a poem might deal with the different types of images or with the relationship between the poetic form and content of the work. If you were to discuss and explain a play, you might analyze the relationship between a subplot and the main plot, or you might analyze the character flaw of the tragic hero by tracing how it is revealed through the acts of the play. Analyzing a short story might include identifying a particular theme (like the difficulty of making the transition from adolescence to adulthood) and showing how the writer suggests this theme through the point of view from which the story is told.
* How to Ensure that you are in fact writing a Literary Analysis and *not* a Book Report:

1. Begin by development of an idea. This idea can be about a specific part of the literary work, its author, writing style, genre, or elements such as theme, tone, plot, characterization, setting, etc.
2. Centralize this idea by writing the thesis statement. The thesis forms the foundation upon which all supporting ideas will derive. These supporting ideas will form the body of the paper and will always go directly back to the thesis statement.
3. Discuss and analyze each supporting idea at a time. Ideally, each idea is discussed in one or two paragraphs.
4. Find evidence to support *(not explain)* your ideas. Evidence is derived from the following examples from the original literary work:

• Direct quotations • Summaries of scenes, events, etc. • Paraphrases of long quotes

1. Ensure you analyze throughout your entire essay, not merely at the end of the discussion or only in the conclusion paragraph.
2. Draw your analytical conclusion in the closing paragraph. This conclusion should suggest the significance, or the reason the reader should care, about your topic. Again, there is no total right or wrong conclusion in whatever you decide. The key is to ensure your conclusion has been discussed and supported in the body of the paper as introduced by the thesis statement.