

A Typical Answer to the Second Term Exam in American Literature

*Students are asked to choose ONE topic and discuss it in a well-thought ESSAY.
(The essay should not exceed 300 words)*

Points to be assessed:

- The structure of the essay (Introduction, through which the problematic is stated, development section, and conclusion) 2pts
- the topic or theme asked for and the way it is being developed. 8pts
- the ideas should be communicated in an organized manner 1.5pts
- there should be a link between the ideas via the use of the coordinating conjunctions 1.5pts
- grammatical mistakes, and well as spelling mistakes. 1.5pts
- the use of punctuations 1.5pts
- illustrations from the novels 4pts

Topic One – Hemingway and the Iceberg Theory in *The Sun Also Rises*

Introduction

- Briefly introduce Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" (what is unsaid is as important as what is said).
- State thesis: In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway's minimalism and omission reveal the characters' psychological wounds and emotional dislocation.

Body Paragraphs

1. Use of Understatement

- Jake Barnes's war injury is never explicitly described but haunts the entire narrative.
- His love for Brett is understated, reflected in reserved dialogue and sparse narration.
- Example: Jake and Brett's final conversation ("Isn't it pretty to think so?") emotionally charged but subtly conveyed.

2. Omission as Insight

- Hemingway omits inner monologues; instead, reveals emotions through dialogue and external action.
- The reader infers emotional depth: e.g., characters' excessive drinking and aimless travel reflect their inner despair and postwar disillusionment.

3. Subtext and Emotional Struggles

- Robert Cohn's insecurity and alienation are not overtly analyzed but shown through social dynamics.
- Brett Ashley's independence masks emotional trauma—conveyed through her relationships, not internal explanation.

Conclusion

- Hemingway's use of omission and restraint allows readers to engage actively with the subtext, revealing the "lost generation's" internal struggles through what is left unsaid.

Topic Two – Individual vs Society in *The Great Gatsby*

Introduction

- Introduce Fitzgerald's use of characterization to reflect Modernist concerns.
- Thesis: Through the characters' inner lives and societal roles, *The Great Gatsby* explores the tension between individual desires and social expectations.

Body Paragraphs

1. **Jay Gatsby: Reinvention and Illusion**

- Gatsby's self-made identity and pursuit of Daisy represent personal ambition clashing with class-based social constraints.
- His desire to rewrite the past confronts a rigid social structure (East Egg vs. West Egg).

2. **Daisy Buchanan and Social Expectations**

- Torn between Gatsby (romantic desire) and Tom (social security).
- Reflects the modernist theme of constrained female agency within patriarchal norms.

3. **Nick Carraway as Observer**

- Caught between admiration and moral judgment.
- His ambivalence reflects the modern individual's struggle to locate meaning in a morally ambiguous society.

Conclusion

- Fitzgerald's characters embody the dissonance between the internal self and external roles, highlighting Modernist concerns with alienation, disillusionment, and identity.

Topic Three – Postmodern Features in *A Good Man is Hard to Find*

Introduction

- Introduce Flannery O'Connor's story as a postmodern work.
- Thesis: The story's fragmented structure, irony, and narrative play highlight postmodern concerns with identity, morality, and reality.

Body Paragraphs

1. **Narrative Structure and Fragmentation**

- Shifts in perspective and unreliable narration reflect a lack of stable truth.
- The Grandmother dominates the narrative yet is morally ambiguous herself.

2. **Irony and Subverted Morality**

- Misfit, though a murderer, articulates existential questions and challenges religious platitudes.
- The Grandmother's moment of grace occurs in a grotesque, violent context—upends traditional moral resolution.

3. **Blurring Fiction and Reality**

- The Misfit's philosophical dialogue and the grandmother's performative piety question what is "real."
- Story's use of Southern Gothic humor underscores its self-aware critique of morality.

Conclusion

- O'Connor uses irony, narrative disruption, and dark humor to critique moral certainty, reflect cultural dislocation, and highlight postmodern themes of fragmentation and ambiguity.