

Assignment For the Summer Reading of Les Misérables
Brentwood Christian School – Brother Robison

This novel has some very rich characters which merit some close consideration. So, you will be writing *three essays* that deal with character analysis (use MLA format and write two pages or about 1000 words). To help you analyze characters consider these questions:

- ✓ What do the major character look like? Is there physical appearance important?
- ✓ What are the major characters likes and dislikes?
- ✓ What are the major characters strengths and weaknesses?
- ✓ What are we told about the major characters' backgrounds and prior experiences? What can we infer?
- ✓ Are these characters developed for the most part through the narrator's comments and descriptions or through the character's actions and dialogue?
- ✓ Do these characters act in a way that is consistent with how readers expect them to act?
- ✓ Why do readers tend to be sympathetic or hardened towards these characters?

Taken from: Laurie Kirszner and Stephen Mandell, *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing Portable Edition*, Boston: Thomson/Heinle, 2001, p. 64.

Here's another list:

- ✓ What motivates or moves these characters?
- ✓ What are the struggles, emotions, and temperaments of these characters?
- ✓ Do the characters lean more toward wickedness or righteousness? Why?
- ✓ What do the character's possessions reveal about them?
- ✓ How closely does the character follow, react towards, or rebel against their society and culture?
- ✓ What events have impacted or shaped these characters?
- ✓ What does the characters' speech reveal about them?
- ✓ How has history and the times affected these characters?
- ✓ How do these characters react with other characters?

Based upon Linda Anderson, editor, *Creative Writing: A Workbook with Readings*, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 70-85.

So, what is involved in writing a character analysis? One website gives this advice:

Here are the important things that you must include in the outline.

- **Discuss the Personality of the Character**

The readers know the characters through the words they use. Therefore, when analyzing the character, the reader must read through and between the words and lines.

The reader could do it by analyzing the character's speech and the kinds of words they use.

As the story progresses, it leaves hints here and there for readers to find on their own. These include things like: how others describe them, or what they do in certain situations, or some details from their perspective.

- **Discuss the Role of the Character**

Each character should have a defined role in the story. The more personality traits s/he has, and unique ones at that, will help define her/his category - be it antagonist or protagonist.

- **Summarize the Development of the Character**

Character growth is an important part of the analysis. Identify and discuss how the character developed in the course of the story and how the character matured.

The characters go through a series of changes throughout the story and when analyzing the character, discussing this progression is important.

Taken from: <https://www.myperfectwords.com/blog/general/character-analysis>

Alright, with these general ideas in mind, here are some specifics (chose three).

Cosette is a major character in the novel. Write an expository essay (one relating information) which describes her relationship to Jean Valjean and to Marius. Use materials from the novel itself to support your ideas.

Eponine is not a major character, but she is an interesting one. In a cause and effect essay discuss what are the driving forces that cause her to act as she does. You might also discuss her relationship to the other characters and how she contributes to the plot. Draw from the novel itself.

Jean Valjean and Javert are the novel's protagonist and antagonist. Write a compare and contrast essay (one which shows similarities and differences) on these two characters' lives, personalities, and goals. Use materials from the novel to support your ideas.

Marius is another major character. Your descriptive essay (one that explains specific events and actions) will focus on the changes that take place in his life throughout his presence in the novel. It should explain how he is introduced, how he develops, and how he matures and changes (were they for the better or for the worse). Use the novel's history to support your ideas.

I hope you enjoy this read! Feel free to email me if you have any questions: probison@brentwoodchristian.org. This will be due on the third day of school if you have enrolled before August 1. It will be due a week after school if you enrolled after August 1.

