

How can you develop a strong evaluation of a selection of literature?

Your evaluation of a work of literature is more than giving your opinion about it. A good evaluation contains an argument supported by evidence taken directly from the text. The following steps will help you understand how to develop a strong evaluation.

Step 1: Break down the selection into literary elements: setting, character, point of view, plot, and theme.

Step 2: Ask questions about the literary elements.

Step 3: Evaluate the work based upon the qualities of good literature.

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Step 1: Break down the selection into literary elements: setting, character, point of view, plot, and theme.

The following elements are the building blocks that make up a story. These are the elements you will be judging in an evaluation.

- **Setting:** time and place of the story
- **Character:** main and secondary characters
- **Point of View:** who is telling the story; the narrator
- **Plot:** sequence of events in a story, including exposition, rising action, climax, falling action (denouement)
- **Theme:** central idea of the story

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Directions: Read the story “A Kind of Murder” on pages 53–60. Fill in a description of each element listed in the chart.

Element	Description	
Setting		
Character(s)		
		<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	
Character(s)		
Point of View		
Plot		<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	
Plot		<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	
Theme		

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Your responses may look like this.

Element	Description	
Setting	Morgan Military Academy	
Character(s)	Mr. Silas Warren—deaf, meek, older teacher Old Beaver—no-nonsense headmaster Hugh Pentecost—popular student at the school	<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	
Character(s)	Sammy—student who is a jokester	
Point of View	Hugh tells the story in first-person.	
Plot	<p>—Mr. Warren, a new teacher at Hugh Pentecost's school, is tormented by the students.</p> <p>—The day Mr. Warren is dismissed he saves the school dog Teddy from drowning.</p> <p>—Mr. Warren is given his job back.</p>	<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	
Plot	<p>–Hugh stands up to the other boys when they start acting up during Mr. Warren’s study hall.</p> <p>–Sammy warns Hugh that the boys will give him the cold shoulder if he continues to stand up for Mr. Warren.</p> <p>–The next time the boys misbehave, Hugh doesn’t help him and Mr. Warren leaves the school.</p>	<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	
Theme	One of the central themes is courage. Mr. Warren doesn't appear to have the courage to stand up to the boys in school, but he saves a dog from drowning. Hugh has the courage to stand up for Mr. Warren once, but then he is so afraid that he will be ostracized by the other boys that he doesn't help Mr. Warren again.	

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Step 2: Ask questions about the literary elements.

Asking questions will help you understand each element of the plot so that you can evaluate the story.

- **Setting:** How does the setting contribute to the plot and the theme?
- **Character:** What are the characters like? Do any characters change during the story? Are the characters believable?
- **Point of View:** How does the choice of narrator affect the reader's understanding? Is the narrator reliable? Are there multiple points of view?

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- **Plot:** How does the plot develop the theme? How does the plot reveal aspects of character? What keeps the plot moving? Does the plot make sense?
- **Theme:** Does the theme flow logically from the other elements of the story?

A basic question to ask about each element is “Why is this important to the main idea of the story?”

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Directions: Fill in the third row in the chart by answering the question “Why is this important?”

Element	Description	Importance
Setting	Morgan Military Academy	
Character(s)	Mr. Silas Warren—deaf, meek, older teacher Old Beaver—no-nonsense headmaster Pentecost—popular student at the school	<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	Importance
Point of View	Pentecost tells the story in first-person.	
Plot	<p>–Mr. Warren, a new teacher at Hugh Pentecost’s school, is tormented by the students.</p> <p>–The day Mr. Warren is dismissed he saves the school dog Teddy from drowning.</p> <p>–Mr. Warren is given his job back.</p>	<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	Importance
Plot	<ul style="list-style-type: none">–Hugh stands up to the other boys when they start acting up during Mr. Warren’s study hall.–Sammy warns Hugh that the boys will give him the cold shoulder if he continues to stand up for Mr. Warren.–The next time the boys misbehave, Hugh doesn’t help him and Mr. Warren leaves the school.	<i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	Importance
Theme	One of the central themes is courage. Mr. Warren doesn't appear to have the courage to stand up to the boys in school, but he saves a dog from drowning. Hugh has the courage to stand up for Mr. Warren once, but then is so afraid that he will be ostracized by the other boys that he doesn't help Mr. Warren again.	

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Your responses might look like this.

Element	Description	Importance
Setting	Morgan Military Academy	Military schools are known for their strictness and the goal of shaping boys into brave men.
Character(s)	Mr. Silas Warren—deaf, meek older teacher Old Beaver—no-nonsense headmaster Pentecost—popular student at the school	Mr. Warren seems weak but shows more courage than other teachers when rescuing the dog. Pentecost learns a lesson about true courage. <i>continued</i>

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Element	Description	Importance
Point of View	Pentecost tells the story in first-person.	We get Hugh's perspective on the events so we can understand his struggle.
Plot	<p>–Mr. Warren, a new teacher at Hugh Pentecost's school, is tormented by the students.</p> <p>–The day Mr. Warren is dismissed he saves the school dog Teddy from drowning.</p> <p>–Mr. Warren is given his job back.</p>	<p>Mr. Warren's rescue of the dog changes Hugh's view.</p> <p><i>continued</i></p>

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Element	Description	Importance
Plot	<ul style="list-style-type: none">–Hugh stands up to the other boys when they start acting up during Mr. Warren’s study hall.–Sammy warns Hugh that the boys will give him the cold shoulder if he continues to stand up for Mr. Warren.–The next time the boys misbehave, Hugh doesn’t help him and Mr. Warren leaves the school.	<p>Hugh’s choice not to stand up for Mr. Warren in the end is an important turning point. Hugh states that he felt like he had murdered Mr. Warren.</p> <p><i>continued</i></p>

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Element	Description	Importance
Theme	One of the central themes is courage. Mr. Warren doesn't appear to have the courage to stand up to the boys in school, he saves a dog from drowning. Hugh has the courage to stand up for Mr. Warren once, but then is so afraid that he will be ostracized by the other boys that he doesn't help Mr. Warren again.	Courage is an important theme in many other works of literature. The nature of true courage is debated in both literature and philosophy.

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Step 3: Evaluate the work based upon the qualities of good literature.

Once you've analyzed the text by breaking it down into its basic elements, you can make a judgment about the quality of the work. In other words, you can say whether the writer did a good job of creating an interesting plot, well-developed characters, a vivid setting, and a thought-provoking theme.

Directions: Use the questions on the following screens to help you evaluate “A Kind of Murder.” Write your answers on a separate piece of paper.

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- **Setting:** Is the setting appropriate to the theme?
- **Character:** Are the characters believable and well-developed? Do you sympathize with or dislike the appropriate characters?
- **Point of View:** Is the point of view appropriate? How well does the point of view communicate the theme?
- **Plot:** How well does the plot advance the author's theme?
- **Theme:** Do all the elements work together to advance the writer's theme? Do you agree or disagree with the main idea of the work?

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You may also want to evaluate the selection based upon some general criteria of good literature.

- Does the work challenge ideas and beliefs?
- Is the work intellectually challenging without being obscure?
- Does the work give you satisfaction or pleasure?