Developing Skills for Evaluation

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: plot, character, setting, point of view, and theme.

Step 2: Ask questions about the literary elements.

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

Developing Skills for Evaluation

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

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Directions: Read the story "Remember Me" on pages 13–23. Fill in a description of each element listed in the chart.

Element	Description	
Setting		
Character(s)		*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	
Character(s)		
Point of View		
Plot		*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	
Plot		
		continued

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	
Theme		

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Your responses may look like this.

Element	Description	
Setting	The setting appears to be in the past, perhaps medieval times. It contains elements of a fairy tale.	
Character(s)	• Young man who has lost his memory • Steward • Young boy • Inn keeper • Woman with blue-green eyes; turns into a crow	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	
Point of View	The main character tells the story in first person.	
Plot	• A young man finds himself in the middle of a road. He has no memory of who he is. He is dressed in fine clothes and jewelry. • He remembers a woman with blue-green eyes who calls him a pig and turns into a crow. • He rides to a small town. No one recognizes him.	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	
Plot	• He trades his jewelry for food and lodging. Then, he works at the inn for food. Finally, he sells his horse. • Two riders from another kingdom find him. He discovers that he is a prince from another kingdom. • The man returns home, but everyone says he is kinder and more considerate than before. The princess he is to marry has familiar blue-green eyes.	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	
Theme	The central theme is that hardship develops character. The prince learns what it is like to have nothing, and he becomes a more humble, considerate person.	

Developing Skills for Evaluation

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?

11

Developing Skills for Evaluation

- **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?"

Developing Skills for Evaluation

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

Element	Description	Importance
Setting	The setting appears to be in the past, perhaps medieval times. It contains elements of a fairy tale.	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

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

Element	Description	Importance
Character(s)	• Young man who has lost his memory • Steward • Young boy • Inn keeper • Woman with blue-green eyes; turns into a crow	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Point of View	The main character tells the story in first person.	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Plot	• A young man finds himself in the middle of a road. He has no memory of who he is. He is dressed in fine clothes and jewelry. • He remembers a woman with blue-green eyes who calls him a pig and turns into a crow. • He rides to a small town. No one recognizes him.	
		continued

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Plot	• He trades his jewelry for food and lodging. Then, he works at the inn for food. Finally, he sells his horse. • Two riders from another kingdom find him. He discovers that he is a prince from another kingdom. • The man returns home, but everyone says he is kinder and more considerate than before. The princess he is to marry has familiar blue-green eyes.	*continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Theme	The central theme is that hardship develops character. The prince learns what it is like to have nothing, and he becomes a more humble, considerate person.	

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Your responses may look like this.

Element	Description	Importance
Setting	The setting appears to be in the past, perhaps medieval times. It contains elements of a fairy tale.	The elements of magic and fairy tales seem appropriate for this type of tale where the main character learns a lesson. *continued*

19

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Character(s)	• Young man who has lost his memory • Steward • Young boy • Inn keeper • Woman with blue-green eyes; turns into a crow	The main character changes, but the reader doesn't know it until he finds his family. The woman the main character remembers is the princess he is going to marry. *continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Point of View	The main character tells the story in first-person.	This helps the reader understand the main character's thoughts and sympathize with his struggles. The reader tries to solve the mystery along with the main character. *continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Plot	• A young man finds himself in the middle of a road. He has no memory of who he is. He is dressed in fine clothes and jewelry. • He remembers a woman with blue-green eyes who calls him a pig and turns into a crow. • He rides to a small town. No one recognizes him.	The loss of the man's memory is a pivotal event because he has the chance to recreate himself as a new person. The fact that he remembers a woman with blue-green eyes is also important. *continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Plot	• He trades his jewelry for food and lodging. Then, he works at the inn for food. Finally, he sells his horse. • Two riders from another kingdom find him. He discovers that he is a prince from another kingdom. • The man returns home, but everyone says he is kinder and more considerate than before. The princess he is to marry has familiar blue-green eyes.	At the end of the story, we find out that the young man may have really been "an arrogant pig." The story hints that the woman with blue-green eyes is the princess he is going to marry, but how the prince came to lose his memory is not revealed. *continued*

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Element	Description	Importance
Theme	The central theme is that hardship develops character. The prince learns what it is like to have nothing, and he becomes a more humble, considerate person.	When the prince loses his memory in a strange place, he can no longer rely on his standing as royalty.

24

Developing Skills for Evaluation

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 "Remember Me." Write your answers on a separate piece of paper.

Developing Skills for Evaluation

- **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?

Developing Skills for Evaluation

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?

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Possible Response: "Remember Me" is an interesting story with elements of a fairy tale. The mysterious young man who has lost his memory immediately intrigues the reader. However, the middle of the story is a bit slow as the lost young man slowly descends into poverty while trying to discover who he is. Because the writer uses first-person point of view, the reader comes to cares about the young man and sympathizes with his problem.

When the man is identified as a lost prince, we learn that his struggles have caused him to become more kind and humble. The fact that the prince's fiancée has blue-green eyes hints that she was the woman in black who caused the prince's memory loss. Some readers may like the ambiguous ending, but others may find it unsatisfying.