

Distilled Notes
American Literature

Name: _____

Instructions: After reading and annotating, the time has come to think about some ideas and concepts you wish to explore. Write those down in the spaces provided. Each section should be fresh—do not repeat ideas from one section to another or regurgitate what we’ve already discussed in class. For help, refer to your “Observation vs. Insight” handout, as well as the partial list of concepts on the back of this page. **Warning:** Any answers that use the following language will be counted wrong—the way..., what..., how..., things..., stuff..., or it. Such language is vague and does not reveal anything.

List 2 **questions** you still have about the work that should provoke further debate or discussion.

Ex. *Harry Potter: Why does Dumbledore remind me so much of Obi-Wan Kenobi or Gandalf? Is that on purpose?*

1. _____

2. _____

List 2 **concepts** you want to discuss. First identify the concept and then define it more clearly in the lines below by suggesting what the author is suggesting about our world through this specific story. Remember, describing what the work is about is not the same as explaining a concept within the work.

Ex. *Lord of Rings*

Concept: *Human Nature*

Explanation: *Gollum as a symbol for those of us who lose ourselves among temptation, greed, and envy, in our quest to possess.*

1. Concept: _____
Explanation: _____

2. Concept: _____
Explanation: _____

List 1 **insightful statement** you have developed regarding the work. Use the back if necessary. Remember, insights go deeper than observations, answering not just *what* but also *why* or *how*. Insights require interpretation.

Ex. *Twilight: What better way for the author to evoke the intensity and romance of young love than to make Edward a vampire, who, in choosing Bella, a human, is literally choosing her for eternity—there is perhaps no bigger compliment and nothing more romantic than to be chosen as someone’s eternal love, a sentiment that I’m sure was not lost on the author’s young readership.*

1. _____

con•cept n. an abstract idea.

A concept is often the cornerstone of good interpretive analysis. Such abstract ideas provide a foundation upon which to build analysis, scaffold our thoughts, and construct meaning. Do not confuse simple “things” or “actions” or “observations” with actual concepts. Below is a partial list of concepts that are often explored within literature. Feel free to use them.

Political Concepts

Democracy
Capitalism
Nationalism
Totalitarianism
Rebellion
Censorship
Freedom
Control
Socialism
Imperialism

Cultural Concepts

Racism
Sexism
Xenophobia
Civil Rights
Community
Alienation
Identity
Class
Change vs. Tradition
Conformity
Nature vs. Nurture
Individualism
Human Nature
Beauty
Love
Faith and Doubt
Fate vs. Free Will
Chaos vs. Order

Social Concepts

Hypocrisy
Truth
Shame
Idealism
Ignorance
Sacrifice
Pride or Vanity
Temptation
Greed
Betrayal
Envy
Regret
Loneliness
Disillusionment
Innocence and Experience
Self-awareness
Self-reliance
Knowledge vs. Wisdom
Dignity
Selfishness
God-complex