Paragraph Construction

Based on a model by Greg Fraser

The Three-"Ied" Monster

Method of Building Forceful Analytical Paragraphs

1. **Identify** a specific element in the text that supports your thesis statement.
2. **Illustrate** its place in the text (in other words, quote the lines(s) where the element appears).
3. **Interpret** its function. Give a detailed analysis as to how the specific element supports your thesis. Explain its significance in the text in relation to your thesis. Develop probing and provocative interpretations.

   The third “eye” should always be the largest.

---

**Example 1:**

**Thesis:**

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison breaks with the typical expectations surrounding the mother figure in order to refashion the archetype: the traditional sweet, gentle, care giving role most often assigned to the nurturing soul called Mother. Morrison’s portrayal certainly provides her readers with a fuller picture of a mother with a hint of suggestion for them to embrace the whole.

**Paragraph:**

*Helene Wright and Eva Peace represent Morrison’s primary matriarchs in Sula. The early experiences of these women shape their own capacities as mothers, and in turn, affect their children’s capabilities.* For example, Helene is taken and reared by a strict grandmother, because her mother works and lives as a prostitute. Helene’s physical beauty increases her grandmother’s level of fear that she too might go astray. Her grandmother’s love removes her from harmful circumstances in order to provide the opportunity for a better life, but the fears induce a pattern of behavior that will last for generations. The tight, religious reign effectively squelches “any sign of her mother’s wild blood” (Morrison 17). Helene receives the mantle of fear and with it proceeds forward in the rearing of her own child, Nell. Interestingly, Helene experiences an unimagined fulfillment in motherhood. “Her daughter was more comfort and purpose than she had ever hoped to find in this life” (18). In Helene, Morrison reveals an underlying motivation of self-interest. This
unattractive quality functions in mothers without detection for the most part. However, Morrison brings it to light as she describes Helene’s unconscious desires to mold Nell into an object that will reflect her own well constructed respectability. “Under Helene’s hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nell showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter’s imagination underground” (18). Rather than nurturing her child’s own personality, she “enjoyed manipulating her daughter” (18). Helene’s love for Nell is tarnished by her own needs. While she enjoys the work of childrearing, she never truly knows her daughter. Subsequently, Nell orders her life after the pattern she inherits from her mother.

**NOTE**: Illustrating examples and interpreting them are interspersed throughout the paragraph so that, at times, you might cite an example and interpret its significance all in the same sentence. In other words, illustration and interpretation are not necessarily separate or sequenced in the paragraph so that you cite all your examples first and then interpret them last. This would be clunky and awkward. As you illustrate examples, follow through by interpreting their significance, citing more examples, drawing conclusions about their significance and meaning to the text, and making clear connections to the thesis. Remember though, the meat of an analytical paragraph should consist of interpretation, not merely cited examples from the text.

---

**Example 2:**

**Thesis:**

In the characters of Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald explores the loss of innocence as well as different individual’s attempts to recapture it and the detrimental consequences of each. The struggle to deal with their lost innocence connects Tom and Gatsby in a profound way: their personalities, actions, and tones are all manifestations of their inability to cope with the loss of their innocence.

**Paragraph:**

Through the characterization of Gatsby, Fitzgerald provides insight into the individual's struggle to recapture innocence and how this attempt to return to the past produces damaging consequences. To begin, the first image of Gatsby portrays him as a man haunted by longing and desperation. Nick perceives Gatsby who “stretched out his arms towards the dark water [...and at] a single green light” (26). The green light seemingly represents Daisy, yet through closer examination it comes to symbolize his longing for something pure, for something innocent: the water symbolizes the dark abyss that Gatsby creates because of his unavailing pursuit of the past. Also, the idea that this light lays perpetually out of reach demonstrates the futility of Gatsby’s attempt to obtain the past and the unattainable; moreover, the fact that Daisy’s dock is east of Gatsby’s house, further exemplifies his reaching for the past; with his arms stretching towards the green light, Gatsby yearns like a child who reaches for its mother’s warm, safe embrace. Furthermore, Gatsby’s last moments of innocence occur while he is with Daisy before experiencing the malady of war. Therefore, Gatsby projects his longing for innocence onto Daisy, though he truly desires what she represents -- his lost innocence. When Gatsby gives himself to
Daisy “she [blossoms] for him like a flower and the incarnation [is] complete” (117). The word incarnation takes on two meanings here: complementing the image of Daisy blooming like a flower - - sexual innuendo -- and as Gatsby metamorphosing into a creature of experience. The latter use further exemplifies Gatsby’s loss of innocence and why he projects this loss onto Daisy. Because Gatsby shares his last moment as an innocent being with Daisy, he subconsciously perceives her as a means to restore his innocence. Therefore, his entire life revolves around attaining Daisy which, for reasons he cannot comprehend, he believes will eliminate all the pain and anguish that accompany experience.

**NOTE:** In this paragraph, the writer really “milks” each example, expounding upon and drawing out layers of meaning and linking ideas to the thesis. Don’t rush through crucial points of your analysis where you are setting up, foreground, and proving your theory or thesis. Remember, when you cite an example, spend some time exploring your insights and developing probing and provocative interpretations.