

Module 7 Exercise 3

How to show evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of an essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Seven Wonders” by Lewis Thomas**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 – 45 minutes**

Reminder

To show an understanding of this objective, you must present an insightful and sensible analysis of the text. At this point, if you completed **Modules 5 and 6, Exercises 3 and 4**, you have found an acceptable main idea or thesis in the text and identified the techniques and devices employed by the author. You should now have a very good understanding of the essay “Seven Wonders.” In order to demonstrate this comprehension through your critical and analytical interpretation of the text, you should write about various parts of the text, reflecting on the writer’s purpose in the development of the discussion while developing your own point of view of his perspective. One of the ways to show an understanding of this is to stand back from the text in order to take a critical stance, and to show what the author is “doing” with the non-fiction essay. There are certain words that will allow you to demonstrate your critical and analytical stance, facilitating your approach to the text and helping you point out the essayist’s purpose. The box below contains some vocabulary that can help you:

Fill in the blank with any of this helpful vocabulary: In his text, the author _____

advocates, appeals to, argues, asserts, calls upon, characterizes, claims, classifies, comments on, contends, conveys, declares, demonstrates, describes, disagrees with, emphasizes, epitomizes, establishes, evokes, explains, expounds on, expresses, illustrates, points out, proposes, proves, puts forth, reacts to, recommends, shows, states, suggests

These words can be integrated into any part of your essay at any time that is appropriate. Vary your vocabulary. Become familiar with these words so you can use them naturally and fit them easily into the flow of your writing.

Instructions

Each of the questions on the next page asks you to take a critical or analytical approach to the text “Seven Wonders” in your response. In your written response (one or two sentences) to each question, **try to build in some of the words from the vocabulary box above**. Compare your answers to those in the **Answer key**.

Exercise 3

1. What purpose does Lewis Thomas serve in defining the word “wonder” at the commencement of his essay? How does this definition help you to understand his text more effectively?

2. One key idea Thomas explores in his text is the critical notion that human beings are clearly the most significant part of the wonders of the world. Express your interpretation of how Lewis sees the role of human beings in the universe.

3. In analysing the text, you no doubt noted that Lewis Thomas wants to provide a truth or commentary about life and existence on the planet Earth through his examples of each of the seven wonders. Summarize what you think his beliefs are, giving three examples.

4. Rather than selecting man-made places around the world, Thomas gives examples of scientifically based wonders. Why? Explain.

5. In reference to the seventh wonder – the human child and the collective masses, “us” – what are the arguments Thomas presents here about the human race? What does he point out about the marvels of the child? What does he convey about the capabilities of the collective masses?

6. Review Lewis Thomas’s first wonder, our own planet Earth. What about Earth does he find so “wonderful”?

7. Thomas also explores an important and vital difference between social insects and human society. What is this difference?

8. Analyse the final paragraph of the text. What message is Thomas trying to convey to his readers through this poignant ending?

Answer key

Your answers will vary. Use these answers as a guide.

1. In the second paragraph of the text, Lewis Thomas **points out** first the irony that “wonder is a word to wonder about.” He then **comments on** the “mixture of messages” the word conveys. For example, he states that wonder is “something marvellous and miraculous, surprising, raising unanswerable questions about itself,” and he also explains that “anything wonderful is something to smile in the presence of, in admiration.” In **conveying** the idea that the word wonder can be defined in more ways than one, he is perhaps opening up the door to allow for an array of potential variations of the “Seven Wonders of the Modern World.” Additionally, the definition **calls the reader’s attention to** the focus of Thomas’s essay.
2. It is evident that Thomas **puts forth** the idea that human beings have a critical role to play in being useful. He even **suggests** that “the drive to be useful is encoded in our genes.” On the other hand, Thomas **establishes** irony in this point that as useful as man should be, he is also capable of “levels of folly and self-destruction to be found nowhere in nature.”
3. Thomas **classifies** the seven wonders by primarily exploring nature’s creations. While doing so, he **expounds on** the power of nature and survival. One example is his **description of** bacteria that have the ability to survive gruelling high temperatures, or the mimosa beetle’s genetic make-up and a receptor cell that reproduces every few weeks. By declaring that various species have the wonderful ability to survive and reproduce almost magically, he is able to set up the sadness of the contrast of man’s potential ability to “self-destruct.”
4. Again, Thomas **asserts** that various practically unnoticed species contain such marvels of nature, life and survival. He **explains** this to emphasize his choice of the “world” as his first wonder.
5. Thomas **contends** that language, a trait that develops in childhood and contributes to human socialization, is an enormous contribution to society overall. This helps him to **prove** his point about human collectivity in the next paragraph.
6. When he **describes** the first wonder, the planet Earth, the world, he marvels at the world’s place in the universe. In doing so, he **claims** that Earth is unique and contains so much still left to discover. This also is his **reaction to** his seventh wonder, the human species, and its capability to protect and also endanger the planet.

7. In **emphasizing** the difference between the social insect and human society, Thomas **expresses** his point of view that insects tend to have only one way of doing things, whereas man, in contrast, has the potential to “build structures for human society never seen before.”
8. In the final paragraphs of the text, Thomas **evokes** man’s potential to create. He even claims that our genes are “coded” to promote affection and respect. This **epitomizes** his central message, that if humans live, respectful of all of nature, there is great human potential on this planet.