Literary Analysis: Step by Step
Reminder: What is Literary Analysis?

Literary analysis involves examining all the parts of a novel, play, short story, or poem—elements such as character, setting, tone, and imagery—and thinking about how the author uses those elements to create certain effects.

A literary essay isn’t a book review: you’re not being asked whether you liked a book or whether you’d recommend it to another reader. It is NOT a summary of the text.

A literary essay asks, “How does this piece of literature actually work?” “How does it do what it does?” and, “Why might the author have made the choices he or she did?”
The Seven Steps

No one is born knowing how to analyze literature; it’s a skill you learn and a process you can master. As you gain more practice with this kind of thinking and writing, you’ll be able to craft a method that works best for you. Until then, here are seven basic steps to writing a well-constructed literary essay:

1. Ask questions
2. Collect evidence
3. Construct a thesis
4. Develop and organize arguments
5. Write the introduction
6. Write the body paragraphs
7. Write the conclusion
Step 1: Ask Questions

When you’re assigned a literary essay in class, your teacher will often provide you with a list of writing prompts. Lucky you! (YAY!). Then, start asking yourself questions like:

What struck you the most? Did a particular scene get stuck in your mind? Can you relate it something else? What scene was the most powerful? Was something very interesting or surprising?
At this point, you don’t need to know exactly what you’re going to say about your topic; you just need a place to begin your brainstorming process. You can help direct your reading and brainstorming by formulating your topic as a question, which you’ll then try to answer in your essay.

Now try to come up with some questions surrounding the theme you chose from *Harrison Bergeron*.

YOU WILL HAVE 5 MINUTES TO COME UP WITH QUESTIONS
Step 2: Collect Evidence

Keep track of passages, symbols, images, or scenes that deal with your topic. Eventually, you’ll start making connections between these examples and your thesis will emerge.

Find SPECIFIC details from the text that you can use in your analysis. REMEMBER support needs to enhance your thesis so it must be connect.

YOU HAVE 10 MINUTES TO COLLECT EVIDENCE WITH YOUR TEAM AND WRITE IT ON A PIECE OF PAPER.
Step 3: Construct a Thesis

A thesis statement is like a controller for the Xbox 360® or PlayStation 3®. When you are playing a video game, what would happen if the controller was disconnected from the game console? Your character would probably die and you would lose the game! Well, it’s the same thing with your thesis statement. If you don’t put a thesis statement in your essay, your essay will die, and you will lose your audience. That’s just not good! The key to winning in the game of writing is having a well-built thesis statement.
Make it a precisely worded declarative statement.

Make sure you highlight what your paper is about (not literally...make your topic shine)

This is a roadmap for your essay to make sure it doesn’t go down a dead end.

**Examples:**

*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is a dystopian novel that shows the main character Katniss questioning who she is and ultimately discovers herself.

In the short story, *After 20 Years* by O. Henry the author’s essential message shows the reader that sometimes the right thing to do can also be the most difficult thing.

In *The Walking Dead* a central theme revolves around humanity and their fight to keep humanity alive or lose it all together.
Your Turn!

YOU HAVE 10 MINUTES TO WRITE YOUR THESIS!
Step 4: Develop and Organize Arguments

The reasons and examples that support your thesis will form the middle paragraphs of your essay. Remember you MUST provide sufficient support with details. Use quotes from the text or paraphrase a certain section.

Think outside the box!

Try to provide some answers from the questions you formulated before.

Your support must be used to ENHANCE your piece not make it confusing.
Steps 5-7: WRITE

Now with all these resources it is time to construct your essay. Be sure to keep all 6+1 traits in mind while you are writing:

- Ideas
- Word Choice
- Conventions
- Presentation
- Organization
- Sentence Fluency
- Voice