

Timed-Writing Prompt Analysis

The first step is selecting a prompt and figuring out what it's actually asking:

3. "In many novels a character has a misconception of **himself or his world**. Destroying or perpetuating this **illusion** contributes to a central theme of the text." Choose a **character** from your choice novel and write an essay in which you consider the following:

- (1) **What** the character's **illusion is** and how it **differs from reality** as presented in the novel.
- (2) How the **destruction or perpetuation** of the illusion **develops** a theme of the novel.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

So, if I read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, I might choose Harry as my character, and his sense of self/identity as his illusion that changes over the course of the novel.

From there, once I figure out what I'm writing about (generally speaking), I figure out **how** I'm going to talk about it. Your essay could be organized around:

- Characters (how each character reflect this theme)
- Symbols (which symbols represent the theme)
- Scenes (one symbol from the beginning, middle, and end of the novel; one pivotal scene; which scene(s) are most important for a character or symbol)
- Figurative Language (one section on syntax, one on diction, one on metaphor etc.)

I suggest selecting **no more** than three scenes/symbols/elements to discuss, especially if you want to have time for any real analysis. **The narrower your focus, the better your essay.**

From there, start compiling evidence. For my essay, I selected two symbols that relate to illusion/perception:

Invisibility cloak

"It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material... Harry looked down at his feet, but they were gone. He dashed to the mirror. Sure enough, his reflection looked back at him, just his head suspended in midair, his body completely invisible. He pulled the cloak over his head and his reflection vanished completely... Written in narrow, loopy writing he had never seen before were the following words: Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.... He felt very strange. Who had sent the cloak? Had it really belonged to his father?... Harry stuffed the cloak quickly out of sight. He didn't feel like sharing it with anyone else yet." (201--202)

Handwritten notes: *relies on outside confirmation/validation*, *no sense of self mind*, *body*, *literally loses self in father's legacy*, *family leads to isolation possibility & mystery in quest for nature/identity*, *physical v. emotional feeling*, *Loss of visibility = agency*, *reality*, *syntax = increasing fragmentation*, *absence of sight & sound*, *others = restrictions*

"His father's...this had been his father's. He let the material flow over his hands, smoother than silk, light as air. Use it well, the note had said... Looking down at his legs, he saw only moonlight and shadows. It was a funny feeling. Use it well. Suddenly, Harry felt wide-awake. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him in this cloak. Excitement flooded through him as he stood there in the dark and silence. He could go anywhere in this, anywhere...Something held him back [from waking Ron] this father's cloak he felt that this time the first time he wanted to use it alone...Where should he go? ...The Restricted Section in the library. He'd be able to read as long as he liked, as long as it took to find out who Flamel was." (205)

Mirror of Erised

"It looked like an unused classroom. The dark shapes of desks and chairs were piled against the walls, and there was an upturned wastepaper basket--but propped against the wall facing him was something that didn't look as if it belonged there, something that looked as if someone had just put it there to keep it out of the way." (207)

Handwritten notes: *quest for (forbidden) identity/knowledge*, *trash/"secrets" exposed*, *Mirror = metaphor for Harry → feels lost/displaced*

All simile: family doesn't replace just give's appearance

beginning of loss of control over self

NO IDENTITY WHEN ALONE

desire for identity

...Harry moved nearer to the mirror, wanting to look at himself but seeing no reflection again. He stepped in front of it. He had to clap his hands to his mouth to stop himself from screaming. He whirled around. His heart was pounding far more furiously than when the book had screamed—for he had seen not only himself in the mirror, but a whole crowd of people standing right behind him.

more corpse-like than dead relatives

But the room was empty. Breathing very fast, he turned slowly back to the mirror.

There he was, reflected in it, white and scared-looking, and there, reflected behind him, were at least ten others. And slowly, Harry looked into the faces of the other people in the mirror, and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses like his, even a little old man who looked as though he had Harry's knobby knees—Harry was looking at his family, for the first time in his life.

desire to make feeling real

The Potters smiled and waved at Harry as he stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness.

loss of time

How long he stood there, he didn't know. The reflections did not fade and he looked and looked until a distant noise brought him back to his senses. He couldn't stay here, he had to find his way back to bed. He tore his eyes away from his mother's face, whispered, 'I'll come back,' and hurried from the room." (208-09)

emotional hunger replaced physical hunger

emotion overrides physical

"Harry couldn't eat. He had seen his parents and would be seeing them again tonight. He had almost forgotten about Flamel. It didn't seem very important anymore. Who cared what the three-headed dog was guarding? What did it matter if Snape stole it, really?"

present irrelevant

present quest for identity forgotten

from feeling to looking odd -> physical manifestation of emotion

"Harry dropped the cloak from around his shoulders and ran to the mirror.

past > present

There they were. His mother and father beamed at the sight of him.

Feels visible (found identity) in front of family

'See?' Harry whispered.

'I can't see anything.'

'Look! Look at them all...there are loads of them...'

Assuming Harry's p.o.v. means seeing others, not him

'I can only see you.'

'Look in it properly, go on, stand where I am.' (210)

"A sudden noise outside in the corridor put an end to their discussion. They hadn't realized how loudly they had been talking." (211)

Loss of awareness

"He was walking so fast he knew he was making more noise than was wise, but he didn't meet anyone....Harry must have walked straight past him, so desperate to get to the mirror he hadn't noticed him. 'I-I didn't see you, sir.'

sight of others = loss of sight of self

unsure of self

'Strange how nearsighted being invisible can make you,' said Dumbledore, and Harry was relieved to see that he smiling...Harry thought. Then he said slowly, 'It shows us what we want...whatever we want...'

'Yes and no,' said Dumbledore quietly. 'It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts...However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that...'"(213-14)

"dwell" = to delay; to inhabit -> passive v. active living (dreams) emotionally

"It was only when he was back in bed that it struck Harry that Dumbledore might not have been quite truthful. But then, he thought, as he shoved Scabbers off his pillow, it had been quite a personal question." (214)

truth -> personal & solitary questions perhaps not meant to be answered