

For our purposes though, we will be keenly focused on the author's choice of words (i.e. the author's diction) and how these words give rise to a thematic message of the text. Put another way, our focus is to see how the author's choice of words is a deliberate action to create a message within the text. Sound difficult? Don't worry at all. Like much else, analysis of text gets easier the more you do it. Here are some questions that you could ask yourself *while you read*:

- Are there any words or terms that are symbolic in nature?
- Are any words or terms repeated?
- Is any irony present (i.e. the opposite of what's being said)?
- What type of imagery is used? Why?
- What is the tone (attitude) of the passage? How do you know?
- Do you see any patterns in the language the author uses?
- Does the author use a special dialect? If so, why?
- Are there any literary devices used? (i.e. simile, metaphor, rhetorical questions, etc. . . .)
- What might be the theme or the message of the text? How do you know?

It will not be necessary for you to memorize the above questions, although they are very helpful. The more important thing is to understand that authors carefully and deliberately choose specific words (diction) to create a theme, or a message. Your job is to find these terms in order to find the message.

Our first piece of literature is an excerpt from Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask," and there is a very heavy emphasis on race relations in the piece between whites and African Americans. On the right side of the column are our thoughts about the text as we read. This process of interacting with (i.e. analyzing) the text is essential to enhance your ability to complete successfully the literary analysis essay. As you read the excerpt and our thoughts, pay attention to the ways in which we commented on the text. Ask yourself, "Why was this comment written?" and "What does the comment have to do with the thematic message of Dunbar's poem?"

Source: Fare, D. (2013). *Parcc elaf literacy assessments, grades 9-12*. New York: Research Education Association

The Second Text

In keeping in line with the theme of racism, here is another text, this time an excerpt from *The Articles of Frederick Douglass*. This second text presents some formidable challenges because it is a different genre than Dunbar's work. However, you can be assured that these two works—that of Dunbar's and that of Douglass's—will be connected thematically. As we have done throughout this book, we present a chart in which Frederick Douglass's text appears in the left column and our thought processes appear on the right. As with Dunbar's work, you can use the following questions to guide us in our analysis:

- Are there any words or terms that are symbolic in nature?
- Are any words or terms repeated?
- Is any irony present (i.e. the opposite of what's being said)?
- What type of imagery is used? Why?
- What is the tone (attitude) of the passage? How do you know?
- Do you see any patterns in the language the author uses?
- Does the author use a special dialect? If so, why?
- Are there any literary devices used? (i.e. simile, metaphor, rhetorical questions, etc. . .)
- What might be the theme or the message of the text? How do you know?

Excerpt from: Collected Articles of Frederick Douglass	Our Thought Processes
<p>My free life began on the third of September, 1838. On the morning of the fourth of that month, after an anxious and most perilous but safe journey, I found myself in the big city of New York, a FREE MAN—one more added to the mighty throng which, like the confused waves of the troubled sea, surged to and fro between the lofty walls of Broadway. Though dazzled with the wonders which met me on every hand, my thoughts could not be much withdrawn from my strange situation. For the moment, the dreams of my youth and the hopes of my manhood were completely fulfilled. The bonds that had held me to "old master" were broken. No man now had a right to call me his slave or assert mastery over me. I was in the rough and tumble of an outdoor world, to take my chance with the rest of its busy number. I have often been asked how I felt when first I found myself on free soil. There is scarcely anything in my experience about which I could not give a more satisfactory answer. A new world had opened upon me. If life is more than breath and the "quick round of blood," I lived more in that one day than in a year of my slave life. It was a time of joyous excitement which words can but tamely describe. In a letter written to a friend soon after reaching New York, I said: "I felt as one might feel upon escape from a den of hungry lions." Anguish and grief, like darkness and rain, may be depicted; but gladness and joy, like the rainbow, defy the skill of pen or pencil. During ten or fifteen years I had been, as it were, dragging a heavy chain which no strength of mine could break; I was not only a slave, but a slave for life. I might become a husband, a father, an aged man, but through all, from birth to death, from the cradle to the grave, I had felt myself doomed. All efforts I had previously made to secure my freedom had not only failed, but had seemed only to rivet my fetters the more firmly, and to render my escape more difficult. Baffled, entangled, and discouraged, I had at times asked myself the question, May</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Douglass discusses the paradox of his newfound freedom from slavery, mentioning his journey as "perilous but safe." • This journey is further explained as "strange." • The exultation of finally being free—feeling alive for the first time in his life. This one day had more significance over the rest of the days of his life.

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