

## Writing a Paragraph about Literature, Using a Secondary Source

HCC ENG102 – Greg Bryant

1. assignment description and rubric
2. my primary source (Maugham’s story) and my notes on the theme and support
3. working draft of my paragraph, using only the primary source
4. a secondary source (another version of the same story for comparison) and my notes
5. my completed paragraph, final draft

This assignment is just one paragraph, not an essay. An essay would make several points, one or more paragraphs for each point. An essay would also introduce and conclude the discussion. Here, pretend you’re making just one point: identifying the theme and explaining what in the story contributes to that theme. You will use two sources: the primary is the story you’re discussing, and the secondary is an outside source that comments on or compares with the primary source. It is important that you develop your own perfectly good ideas about the story before you consult a secondary source. You control your paragraph, not some outside “expert.” Your response is just as good and just as important as anyone else’s.

Your topic sentence identifies the story and author, states the theme, and briefly points to at least three elements in the story that you will connect to that theme. The rest of the paragraph identifies those elements and discusses how they create the meaning. Somewhere, it also brings a point from an outside source to enrich the discussion.

### Here are the things I’ll be looking for in the final draft:

- MLA page format – see MLA Quick Start
- a TOPIC SENTENCE (or two) that identifies title, author, and the theme or effect of the writing, and briefly points to the support you will discuss (the SCOPE of your paragraph)
- two SUPPORTing ideas from the story, cited by paragraph number(s), plus DISCUSSION of their contribution to the theme
- one idea from an outside source brought into the discussion, properly cited
- Works Cited, listing both sources (story and outside commentary) in proper MLA format and in alphabetical order

### Things to make your paragraph better:

- Refer closely to the text. Use quotations or careful descriptions of events or ideas in the work.
- Cite support by page (Smith 114), paragraph (par. 4), or line number (Jones lines 4-6).
- Be thorough. Don’t only give the minimum support. Give plenty.
- Format the document correctly. Show pride in the first impression you make.
- Polish and proofread your writing.

### Grading rubric (*All points are in the “Daily Work” category*):

(3 points) clear, assertive topic sentence: title and author, theme, scope

(3 points) two specific supports from the story, properly cited

(3 points) one specific thought from another source, properly cited

(3 points) discussion that explains how all points relate to the theme

(3 points) MLA style page format (margins, spacing, font, header, first-page information, title

(5 points) Correctly formatted MLA style in-text citations and alphabetized Works Cited list

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20 points total

**Primary source** (sorry, you can't use this story!)

**“The Appointment in Samarra” by W. Somerset Maugham**

*Death speaks:* There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the marketplace and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra. (Maugham)

Works Cited

Maugham, W. Somerset. “An Appointment in Samarra.” From *Sheppy*. New York: Doubleday, 1933. Print.

Planning my paragraph:

**Topic sentence information:**

- “An Appointment in Samarra” by W. Somerset Maugham
- Theme: You may try to avoid or postpone your fate, but you are not really in control of it and it will surprise you.
- Support:
  - o playing tricks with narrative point of view
  - o surprising the reader like Death surprises the servant

**Topic sentence:**

In the very short story “An Appointment in Samarra,” W. Somerset Maugham plays tricks with narrative point of view to surprise the reader and illustrate his theme that death is always a surprise; no matter how you try to postpone or avoid your fate, you are really not in control.

**Support:**

- The first two words, “*Death Speaks*” (Maugham par. 1) make the rest of the story a first-person narrative, but the next words persuade the reader to forget Death and assume a third-person narrator: “There was a merchant in Bagdad...” (Maugham par. 1). References to Death as “woman” (line 3) and “She” (line 4) preserve this illusion because we expect Death to be a man.
- With “me” (line 8) the narrator shifts to clear first person and becomes a character. Her identity hits us with a slight shock.

**Discussion:**

- trace the reader’s response to POV throughout the story
- emphasize the moment of recognition and shock in line 8
- we always put Death out of mind and are surprised to find it was there all along
- skillful use of a storytelling method like point of view to reinforce the meaning