Reviewing Literature

Learning the Skill

When critics read books, they write reviews of them for newspapers and magazines. You may be asked to write a review, or response, to a piece of literature. Before doing so, read the work several times to gather details to use as you present your opinion of the piece.

A well-written review should include the following:

• A summary of the story. Familiarize readers with the work by highlighting main events, characters, or ideas.

• Your opinion about major elements. Organize your thoughts around several clear ideas, such as:
  √ Theme—the story’s lesson or moral message about life. Some examples include “Coming of Age” and “Friendship.”
  √ Author technique and style, or how well the author’s words paint a picture in the reader’s mind.
  √ Comparisons to other works that are similar in theme, subject matter, or genre.
  √ Relevance—how the work reflects real life.

• Supporting evidence and examples. Support your opinion by including details or quotes from the work.

Practicing the Skill

Directions: Anton Chekhov was one of the great Russian writers of the 1800s, and he wrote hundreds of short stories. Read the opening of his story “Boys.” Then prepare to write your response by writing details in the chart that follows.

from “Boys” by Anton Chekhov

“VOLODYA’S come!” someone shouted in the yard.

“Master Volodya’s here!” bawled Natalya the cook, running into the dining-room. “Oh, my goodness!”

The whole Korolyov family, who had been expecting their Volodya from hour to hour, rushed to the windows. At the front door stood a wide sledge [sled], with three white horses in a cloud of steam. The sledge was empty, for Volodya was already in the hall, untying his hood with red and chilly fingers. His school overcoat, his cap, his snowboots, and the hair on his temples were all white with frost, and his whole figure from head to foot diffused such a pleasant, fresh smell of the snow that the very sight of him made one want to shiver and say “brrr!”

His mother and aunt ran to kiss and hug him. Natalya plumped down at his feet and began pulling off his snowboots, his sisters shrieked with delight, the doors creaked and banged, and Volodya’s father . . . cried out in alarm:
"We were expecting you all yesterday? Did you come all right? Had a good journey? Mercy on us! you might let him say 'how do you do' to his father! I am his father after all!"

"Bow-wow!" barked the huge black dog, Milord, in a deep bass, tapping with his tail on the walls and furniture.

For two minutes there was nothing but a general hubbub of joy. After the first outburst of delight was over the Korolyovs noticed that there was, besides their Volodya, another small person in the hall, wrapped up in scarves and shawls and white with frost. He was standing perfectly still in a corner, in the shadow of a big fox-lined overcoat.

"Volodya darling, who is it?" asked his mother, in a whisper.

"Oh!" cried Volodya. "This is—let me introduce my friend Lentilov, a schoolfellow in the second class... I have brought him to stay with us."


Response Planner

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinion about theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion about author style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion about relevance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence/Examples to highlight</td>
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</tbody>
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Assessment Checklist

Assess your review using the checklist below:
- Summarized key elements
- Presented clear opinions
- Justified my opinions with details and evidence
- Included an introduction, a body, and a conclusion

Directions: On another sheet of paper, use the details you gathered in the Response Planner to write a review of the excerpt from “Boys.” The following prompts may also help you write your review.
- Did this beginning make you want to read more? Why or why not?
- Is this story topic still relevant today? Explain.
- What is the effect of the author’s style? Does the style contribute to the content of the story?
- Is the writing unique in some way? Would you want to read other works by Chekhov?
- Which story elements (setting, character, plot, dialogue, theme) does this introduction feature? Which is most interesting to you?