

## Literary Analysis Observation Chart

This chart prompts you to notice details of a literary work and collect them in one place, where you can more easily see how things fit together and build your own analysis. Here's how it works:

- Record whatever qualities and features stand out to you in left column.
- In the right column, log the effects and meanings of the details you noticed.
- You might also start with some effects you felt and trace them back to details of the text.

When you're done, step back and look for patterns, connections, and anomalies that will lead you to a new interpretations of the text.

The chart below gives broad examples of things you might notice as you read.

On the following pages, you'll find an example of a poem analysis using the chart.

On the last page, there's a blank chart for you to use in your own reading and ideation process.

| <b>Observations</b>  | <b>Effects/Meaning</b> |
|--|------------------------|
| <p><b>Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total length, line length, # of stanzas</li> <li>- Sentence, paragraph, chapter styles</li> <li>- Specific form or genre</li> <li>- Grammar, mechanics, capitalization</li> </ul> |                        |
| <p><b>Style</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Voice and tone of narration or speakers</li> <li>- Mood</li> <li>- Language choices, like diction and syntax</li> </ul>   |                        |
| <p><b>Sound</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alliteration, assonance, consonance</li> <li>- Rhyme, repetition</li> <li>- Words that sound like their feeling/<br/>feel like their meaning</li> </ul>                               |                        |
| <p><b>Imagery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scenes you can picture</li> <li>- Sensory: smells, textures, flavors,<br/>sounds, visuals</li> <li>- Emotions you take on, can relate to</li> </ul>                                 |                        |
| <p><b>Themes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connotations, feelings</li> <li>- Symbolism, metaphor</li> <li>- References, allusions</li> <li>- Recurring ideas, actions, etc.</li> </ul>  |                        |

## Literary Analysis Chart Sample

Below is a poem with the reader's annotations. The notes and highlights log their thinking as they read and re-read the text. On the next page, the reader has organized their notes into a literary analysis observation chart. Notice what new connections and ideas come from this process. Under that chart, the reader goes further, reflecting on what stands out, their new understanding of the poem, and potential thesis statements for an essay about it.

**One Art - Elizabeth Bishop**

*everything rhymes with "master" or "intent"*

**ORANGE:**  
Repeated rhyme 1

**YELLOW:**  
Repeated rhyme 2

**BLUE:**  
's' sounds (repeated)

**GREEN:**  
Repeated line

**SPEAKER EXPLAINS WHAT THE 'ART' IS** { The art of losing isn't hard to master,  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster,

**SMALL THINGS THAT DON'T REALLY MATTER** { Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master. → LOST DOOR KEYS, HOUR BADLY SPENT

**THINGS THAT ARE NOT IRREPLACEABLE** { Then practice losing farther, losing faster.  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster. → NAMES OF STUFF, IDEAS OF STUFF (WHERE IT WAS YOU MEANT TO TRAVEL)

**SENTIMENTAL THINGS** { I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master. → MOTHER'S WATCH, LOVED HOUSES

**MATERIAL  
↓  
ABSTRACT THINGS  
LOST!** { I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster. → CITIES, REALMS, RIVERS  
large, generalized concepts of places we belong in

**ACTUALLY IMPORTANT AND IRREPLACEABLE** { - Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster. → This loss definitely does end up looking like disaster after all

*coping mechanism?  
parenthesis stands out*

**- POEM PROGRESSION:**

- ↳ GETS MORE IMPORTANT WHAT IS LOST, UNTIL IT BECOMES REALLY PERSONAL THINGS
- ↳ LAST GREEN REPETITION STANDS OUT
- ↳ CONSISTENT ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN, VERY CONSTANT BLUE
- ↳ TONE CHANGES AT THE END

| Observations  | Effects/Meaning  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Villanelle form: six verse poem with two repeating lines; last verse has an extra line</li> <li>- Repetition:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “the art of losing isn’t hard to master”</li> <li>- “loss is no disaster”</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Parentheses interrupts, italics: “(Write it!)”</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repeated lines feel like the narrator trying to convince themselves/the reader.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the difficulty of writing about this “disaster” — coping with loss is difficult!</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Style</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tone is Conversational, confident at first</li> <li>- Tone turns instructional later</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tone feels very loose, suggests the topic is not serious.</li> <li>- Instructional tone = implies the narrator is experienced with loss</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Sound</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lots of slippery “s” and “l” sounds and breathy “f” sounds: losing, things seem, next to last, miss</li> <li>- Repeated words: master, disaster</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Soft hissing sounds, uncomfortable and uncontrollable, like something is slipping away.</li> <li>- Repetition, trying to hold on to the words and their meanings.</li> </ul>                      |
| <p><b>Imagery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poem describes many objects/things, each verse tackles something different:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ordinary objects (“door keys”)</li> <li>- Sentimental objects (“my mother’s watch”)</li> <li>- Abstract things (“realms”)</li> <li>- Sentimental things (“a gesture I love”)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progression of “things” equates ordinary objects with precious concepts = seems to get more and more difficult to accept as the things get more significant.</li> </ul>                           |
| <p><b>Themes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss</li> <li>- Transience</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nothing is permanent! Losing things is unavoidable.</li> <li>- Dealing with loss is most difficult and not all losses are equal.</li> </ul>   |

Possible thesis ideas:

- The rhyme structure is very strict, which contrasts with the loose tone. This makes the narrator’s voice feel forced and implies they might be trying to deceive themselves.
- Irony is created throughout the poem: Ordinary objects are not the same as loved ones. Losing something is not difficult, but coping with our feelings after is.
- Loss is a natural part of life therefore we should not get too obsessed with it. But it is just as bad to ignore or lie about how meaningful a loss is to ourselves. After all, loss can become a personal disaster.

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