**The SIFTT Method**

When exploring how a writer uses literary elements and stylistic techniques to convey meaning or theme, you might want to use the SIFT technique to practice literary analysis. This method allows you to “sift” through the parts in order to comprehend the whole.

***SIFTT Method***

**S**ymbol: examine the title and text for symbolism

**I**mages: identify images and sensory details

**F**igures of speech: analyze figurative language and other devices

**T**one: discuss how all devices reveal tone

**T**heme: discuss how all devices reveal theme

**Symbol**

The title of the story often contains symbols that hint at theme. Reexamine the title. Is there anything about the title that suggests something more significant or even a universal truth? Are there symbols used that have a wider universal meaning beyond the text?

**Imagery**

What do you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel? What effect is the author trying to convey with these images?

**Figures of Speech**

Writers form images by using figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, and personification. Find examples in the story and discuss how they help convey meaning.

* What is the significance of a figure of speech’s use?
* Why is that particular figure of speech used?
* How do the figures of speech enhance meaning?

Writers also use other devices, such as irony or allusion. Why might those devices be used? How do they enhance the meaning of the piece?

**Tone**

A close examination of word choice, imagery, and detail reveals the attitude or tone and contributes to the reader’s understanding. What do these choices reveal about the writer’s attitude or tone?

**Theme**

In order to determine a work’s theme, it might help first to summarize the story. List the subjects that emerge from your summaries, such as evil, injustice, inhumanity, social protest, corruption, poverty, tradition, individuality, and survival. Write a sentence about each subject you find based on insights gained from analyzing symbolism, imagery, figurative language, and other devices. Because all rhetorical devices lead to tone and theme, this process will help you perceive what insights about life the author is revealing about each subject and to refine the process of determining meaning in a text. What life lessons have the characters learned? What life lessons have *you* learned? Look for statements that comment on life, the world, or human nature (these often imply theme). Discuss each thematic possibility and decide which seems most probable based on the evidence from the text and from this “SIFTTing” process, keeping in mind the fact that many stories have more than one theme and there is seldom just one “right” answer.