

Great Expectations

Sample Analytical Paper Topics

The following paper topics are designed to test your understanding of the novel as a whole and to analyze important themes and literary devices. Following each question is a sample outline to help you get started.

TOPIC #1

Pip's life is influenced by several characters in Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Some of these influences affected Pip in a positive way; others were negative. Write an essay analyzing the characters who played an important role in Pip's life both in a positive and negative way.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *The role of Pip in Great Expectations is developed through the positive and negative influences of Joe, Abel Magwitch, and Miss Havisham.*

II. Influences of Joe

- A. Positive influence
 - 1. Exhibits honesty
 - 2. Gives Pip's early life stability
 - 3. Gives Pip unconditional love
 - 4. Possesses a forgiving nature
 - 5. Exemplifies the goodness of hard work
- B. Negative influence
 - 1. Represents the lower class
 - 2. Is a source of embarrassment to Pip

III. Influences of Abel Magwitch

- A. Positive influences
 - 1. Forces Pip to recognize what is really important in his life
 - 2. Provides the means for Pip to become a gentleman
 - 3. Loves him unconditionally
- B. Negative influences
 - 1. Tries to mold Pip into a caricature of the upper class
 - 2. Represents the lower class and criminal element
 - 3. Provides the money which will result in Pip's downfall

IV. Influences of Miss Havisham

- A. Positive influences
 - 1. Helps Herbert at the request of Pip
 - 2. Enables Pip to see that wealth does not bring happiness

B. Negative influences

1. Manipulates people
2. Tries to mold Estella who ultimately hurts Pip
3. Makes Pip unhappy with his station in life

V. **Conclusion:** Joe, Miss Havisham, and Abel Magwitch are three major characters in Dickens' novel who have influenced and developed the role of Pip.

TOPIC #2

Great Expectations is a portrait gallery of many characters. These characters are interwoven throughout the novel in a masterful way. Write an essay illustrating how suspense and coincidence help tie these characters together and create an exciting novel for the reader.

Outline

I. **Thesis Statement:** *The use of suspense and coincidence helps Dickens create not only a spellbinding novel to read, but an array of characters whose lives are interwoven one with another.*

II. Coincidence

A. Enables characters to be tied together

1. Magwitch knew and was associated with Miss Havisham's fiancée
2. Molly is Estella's mother
3. Magwitch is Estella's father and Pip's benefactor
4. Pip loves Estella and she is Magwitch's daughter
5. Mr. Jaggers is Miss Havisham's and Abel Magwitch's lawyer

B. Promotes the plot

1. Pip finds Magwitch in the cemetery and helps him
2. Pip meets and falls in love with Magwitch's daughter at Miss Havisham's house
3. Pip receives his fortunes after his many visits with Miss Havisham
4. Pip accidentally drops the note from Orlick

III. Suspense

A. Creates interest for the readers

1. Pip does not really know the identity of his benefactor until the end of the second stage
2. Convicts seem to be a part of Pip's life from the beginning of the novel

B. Supplies information in bits and pieces

1. The convicts at the beginning of the novel do not have names
2. A mysterious stranger stirs his drink with Joe's file
3. Pip passes an unidentified gentleman on Miss Havisham's stairs
4. Pip stumbles over someone on his stairs at the Temple on a stormy night
5. The pale young gentleman at Miss Havisham's house is Herbert
6. The past of Magwitch, Miss Havisham, and Estella is revealed by key characters

IV. **Conclusion:** The novel is made more interesting to read because of its vast number of characters tied together through the art of suspense and coincidence.

TOPIC #3

Humor is used in a novel for many reasons. Write an essay showing how humor is used in *Great Expectations* to entertain and to relieve the tension brought about by frightening or intense actions in the novel.

Outline

- I. Thesis Statement:** *In the novel, Dickens uses humor to relieve the tension built by intense moments and to provide entertainment for the reader.*
- II. Relieves the tension built by intense moments in the novel**
 - A. Pip's encounter with the first convict in the cemetery
 - B. Mrs. Joe's funeral
 - C. Mr. Wopsle's career as an actor
- III. Provides entertainment for the reader**
 - A. Joe's visit to Pip in London
 - B. Wemmick's home life with the Aged Parent
 - C. Wemmick's wedding
 - D. Wemmick's courtship of Miss Skiffins
 - E. Trabb's boy's ridicule of Pip when he returns to the village
 - F. The Christmas dinner when Pip was young
 - G. Pip's fight with the pale young gentleman
- IV. Conclusion:** Tension is relieved and entertainment is provided for the reader through Dickens' use of humor throughout his novel.

TOPIC #4

Pip's life can be divided into three phases or stages. Write an essay explaining the three stages of Pip's development.

Outline

- I. Thesis Statement:** *Pip's development can be divided into a stage of innocence, a stage of sin, and a stage of redemption.*
- II. The stage of innocence**
 - A. Pip's life with Joe at the forge
 - B. Pip's encounter with the convict on the marshes
 - C. Pip's introduction to Miss Havisham and Estella
 - D. Pip's relationship with Biddy
- III. The stage of sin**
 - A. Pip's life in London
 1. Pip's desire for material possessions and signs of wealth
 2. Pip's social snobbery
 - B. Pip's relationship with Joe and his past
- IV. The stage of redemption**
 - A. Pip's relationship with Magwitch
 - B. Pip helps set Herbert up in business
 - C. Regards Joe and the marshes more favorably
 - D. Pip's new relationship with Miss Havisham and Estella
- V. Conclusion:** The three stages in Pip's life helped to mold his character and to help him develop into maturity.