

# Gulliver's Travels

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

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

### TOPIC #1

Swift was known as an ironist. Show how Swift uses irony in the book to strengthen the points he is making.

#### *Outline*

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *In the book, Swift uses irony to strengthen the points he is making.*
- II. **The point that politics is corrupt**
  - A. Statesman as acrobats in Lilliput
  - B. The King of Brobdingnag's disgust at Gulliver's description of England
  - C. The ghosts in Luggnag
  - D. The dapple-gray's disgust at Gulliver's description of England
- III. **The point that human beings are vain**
  - A. The jealousy that causes Gulliver's fall in Lilliput
  - B. The jealousy of the dwarfs in Brobdingnag
  - C. The vanity of the empty ideas of the scientists in Laputa
  - D. Gulliver's own vanity in thinking he understands everything about human beings and about reason after living among the Houyhnhnms
  - E. Gulliver's criticisms of colonization in the last chapter
- IV. **Conclusion:** Gulliver uses a variety of occasions and techniques to make his points through the use of irony.

### TOPIC #2

Who is the hero, in the sense of most sympathetic character, in *Gulliver's Travels*? Is it Gulliver, the Houyhnhnms, or the King of Brobdingnag?

#### *Outline*

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *There are sympathetic characters in Gulliver's Travels, but most have flaws; the King of Brobdingnag has the fewest flaws.*
- II. **Gulliver has the flaws of naiveté and vanity**
  - A. His naive cooperation in all cases
  - B. His oversimplified ideas that all humans are equally bad and all Houyhnhnms are equally good

1. Humans:
  - a. Feels little gratitude to Mendez
  - b. Is disgusted by his own family
2. Houyhnhms:
  - a. The dapple-gray and the sorrel are more sympathetic to him
  - b. The council is very unsympathetic; Gulliver does not really realize the differences
- C. His excessive eagerness to leave his family and go on more voyages even after they turn out disastrously

### III. The Houyhnhms are coldly logical and inhuman

- A. They think themselves flawless and perfect
- B. Their inhuman attitude to the family
- C. Their inhuman attitude to death

### IV. The King of Brobdingnag is the most sympathetic character

- A. His interest in and sympathy to Gulliver
- B. His disgust at European institutions and inventions such as firearms
- C. His society is flawed but human, unlike that of the Houyhnhms
- D. However, he does laugh when Gulliver just escapes from mortal danger

- V. **Conclusion:** The King of Brobdingnag is the most sympathetic character in *Gulliver's Travels*, although Gulliver thinks otherwise

## TOPIC #3

Swift is famous for his use of linguistic devices, such as the sound of words and the use of lists, to strengthen the atmosphere of parts of his book and to make points. Write an essay discussing the use of these techniques in *Gulliver's Travels*.

### Outline

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *In the book, Swift uses the sounds of words to strengthen his atmospheric effects and tone. He also uses lists, to make polemical points and to increase the effectiveness of ideas he is expressing.*
- II. **The sounds of words to establish atmospheric effects**
  - A. Soft-sounding words, using many vowels, to indicate smallness or abstractedness
    1. Smallness: Lilliput, Blefuscu, Nardac
    2. Delicacy and abstractedness: Laputa, Balnibarbi
      - a. The Language of Laputa, says Gulliver, sounds like Italian
  - B. Words using many consonants placed together to indicate largeness
    1. Brobdingnag, Glumdalclitch
  - C. Words sound like the neighing of horses to indicate “rational horses”
    1. Houyhnhm, Yahoo
- III. **The use of lists to establish argumentative points and to increase the effectiveness of Swift's ideas**
  - A. Lists to indicate the clash between cultures
    1. The list of Gulliver's belongings made by the Lilliputians
    2. The list of Gulliver's duties in the agreement with the Lilliputians providing for his freedom

- B. Lists to indicate political corruption and human frailty
  - 1. The list of human customs spoken by the King of Brobdingnag
  - 2. The list of English institutions made by Gulliver to the King of Brobdingnag
  - 3. The list of medicines prescribed to cure politicians in the Academy of Laputa
  - 4. Numerous lists indicating human frailty and political corruption in Gulliver's account of his own society to the Houyhnhms
    - a. The list of bad habits of sailors
    - b. The list of military weapons and of acts of war
    - c. The list of medicines, of a disgusting nature
  - 5. The list of characteristics of the Yahoos

**IV. Conclusion:** Swift effectively uses sounds and lists to strengthen his atmospheric effects and expressions of ideas.

#### TOPIC #4

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift satirizes such literary *genres* as the travel book and the Utopian work. These satirical techniques increase the effectiveness of *Gulliver's Travels*.

#### Outline

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *The effectiveness of Gulliver's Travels is increased, and Swift's points strengthened, through satire of the travel book and the Utopian work.*
- II. **Satire of the travel book, a popular genre in Swift's time**
  - 1. The original title (*Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*)
  - 2. The general structure of the book is that of a travel book: there are four voyages
  - 3. The framework of each voyage: arrival and departure
  - 4. The descriptions of the cities (if any) and customs of each country visited
  - 5. The statement about colonization in the last chapter
- III. **Satire of the Utopian work (description of an ideal society)**
  - 1. Description of the customs of the Lilliputians (but no longer observed)
  - 2. The King of Brobdingnag: good king of a less-than-ideal society
  - 3. Laputa and Lagado: rational societies, but too abstracted from reality, with the Academy of Lagado working on potentially good but impracticable inventions
  - 4. The Houyhnhms: a simple uncorrupted, rational society, as in Plato's *Republic*, but inhuman and lacking (mostly) in feeling
- IV. **Conclusion:** The structure of Swift's book is that of a travel book, strengthening Swift's satiric points, many of which appear as travelers' tales. Satire of ideal societies to describe less-than-ideal societies strengthens Swift's ironic emphasis on human imperfection and frailty.