Close Reading

Task: Analyze a writer’s use of literary devices in a novel’s closing passage to convey theme and tone.

Example using Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*:

1. Carefully read the prompt below.

Prompt: Reread the closing scene of *The Great Gatsby*. Explain how Fitzgerald conveys the novel’s theme and tone through the use of literary devices.

1. Ask: What is the task? How do I translate the prompt into a thesis statement that covers each prong of the prompt?
2. Write a preliminary thesis statement:

In the closing scene of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald conveys his novel’s theme and tone through the use of \_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and\_\_\_.

1. As you read the passage and consider the novel as a whole, remember the theme is found in the author’s answering of questions like those that follow:

-- What happened to the central character and why?

-- Was what happened the character’s own fault or due to forces

beyond his/her control?

-- Are people portrayed as basically evil or good, selfish or unselfish,

kind or cruel?

--Do the characters find happiness? If not, why not? If so, why?

How?

-- Does the work make any statement about religious, economic,

ethical, social, or political matters?

-- Does the work provide any insight into psychological problems

about sex, love, death, guilt, alienation, etc.?

--What worldviews are endorsed or challenged by the novel’s ending?

5. Also remember the following devices convey the author’s attitude (tone) toward characters and theme. Annotate the passage using the key below. \*Note: For sake of this sample printed in black-and-white, I bolded/used italics in passage below, but students should practice with key above or formulate their own systems with colored markers in formative stages.

Diction –circle connotations and figurative language noting what each example reveals about tone (author’s attitude characters and theme)

Images—draw a box around each image, noting what it reveals “ “ “

Details—underline (What details does the author choose to include and why? What does the author choose to exclude and why?)

Language—write adjectives in margin that describe the body of words in the text (figurative and literal) Use language adjectives from Style/Tone handout.

Syntax—bracket sentences, clauses, phrases where style conveys meaning

Symbols—star above

Allusions—note in margin beside examples

1. Look at the evidence you have marked/collected. Which 3 or 4 literary devices best convey theme and tone? What exactly is the theme? What adjective(s) best describe the prevalent tone?
2. Write your final, specific thesis.

Sample Final Thesis: In the closing scene of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses diction, juxtaposed images, and the symbol of the green light to portray the American Dream as a deceptive and elusive promise marred and doomed to fail.

1. List under the thesis the major points which will become topic sentences of the essay. Use the order outlined in the thesis statement (ex) diction, juxtaposed images, symbol
2. Write essay from outline, Quoting your coded examples of diction, images, and symbol in the essay to support each topic sentence.

Samples of annotations/words/details marked to reach your thesis statement:

**Diction:** Tom described negatively: walking in an *alert, aggressive way, his hands out a little from his body as if to fight off interference*, *frowning, restless* eyes, *defiantly*

*Orgastic*

*Incoherent, careless*

**Imagery:** *those gleaming, dazzling parties…laughter, music, cars and crowds* VS *darkness, silence, emptiness*

**Details:** Nick is empathetic though disgusted by Tom and Daisy (and all the *careless people* which is why in opening scene he said he wanted the world to stand “at moral attention” after returning to the Midwest). Nick realizes Tom told Wilson Gatsby owned the car because he thought Gatsby killed Myrtle. Daisy didn’t tell him the truth. Wilson had a gun that could have hurt Tom’s family. Nick realizes Tom is *like a child* , *I couldn’t forgive him or like him but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified.*

**Symbols/Figurative Language:** *the party was over—*literally and figuratively ; *Huge, incoherent, failure of a house ; old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world…had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of I thought of Gatsby’s wonder green light at the end of Daisy’s dock.*

*blue lawn*

**Theme/Tone**

*It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made….*

*…his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. IRONY--TONE*

*Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future (KINESTHETIC IMAGERY) that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther…. And one fine morning——* Fatalism/Futility/Best made plans of mice and men/Naturalism

*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (Stephen Crane)*

Depression, American Dream Deferred for Gatsby—then denied

**Closing Passage:**

One afternoon late in October I saw Tom Buchanan. He was walking ahead of me along Fifth Avenue in his **alert, aggressive way, his hands out a little from his body as if to fight off interference, his head moving sharply here and there, adapting itself to his restless eyes.** Just as I slowed up to avoid overtaking him he stopped and began **frowning** into the windows of a jewelry store. Suddenly he saw me and walked back holding out his hand.

‘What’s the matter, Nick? Do you object to shaking hands with me?’

‘Yes. You know what I think of you.’

‘You’re crazy, Nick,’ he said quickly. ‘Crazy as hell. I don’t know what’s the matter with you.’

‘Tom,’ I inquired, ‘what did you say to Wilson that afternoon?’

He stared at me without a word **and I knew I had guessed right about those missing hours**. I started to turn away but he took a step after me and grabbed my arm.

‘I told him the truth,’ he said. ‘He came to the door while we were getting ready to leave and when I sent down word that we weren’t in he tried to force his way upstairs. He was crazy enough to kill me if I hadn’t told him who owned the car. **His hand was on a revolver in his pocket every minute he was in the house**——’ He broke off **defiantly**. ‘What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy’s but he was a tough one. He ran over Myrtle like you’d run over a dog and never even stopped his car.’

**There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable fact that it wasn’t true.**

‘And if you think I didn’t have my share of suffering—look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful——‘

***I couldn’t forgive him or like him but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made….***

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly **as though I were talking to a child**. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace—or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons—rid of **my provincial squeamishness** forever.

Gatsby’s house was still empty when I left—the grass on his lawn had grown as long as mine. One of the taxi drivers in the village never took a fare past the entrance gate without stopping for a minute and pointing inside; perhaps it was he who drove Daisy and Gatsby over to East Egg the night of the accident and perhaps he had made a story about it all his own. I didn’t want to hear it and I avoided him when I got off the train.

I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those **gleaming, dazzling parties** of his were with me so vividly **that I could still hear the music and the laughter faint and incessant from his garden and the cars going up and down his drive.** One night I did hear a material car there and saw its lights stop at his front steps. But I didn’t investigate.

Probably it was some final guest who had been away at the ends of the earth and ***didn’t know that the party was over.*** On the last night, with my trunk packed and my car soldto the grocer, I went over and looked at **that huge incoherentfailure of a house** once more. On the white steps **an obsceneword,** scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, **stood outclearly in the moonlight** and I erased it, drawing my shoeraspingly along the stone. Then I wandered down to thebeach and sprawled out on the sand.

**Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound**. And as the moon rose higher **the inessential** houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the **old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world.** Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once **pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.**

And as I sat there **brooding on the old, unknown world**, I thought of ***Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light*** at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to **this blue lawn** and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. ***He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. (He never had a chance.)***

***Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future(peak/culmination of all our dreams finally coming true) that year by year recedes before us.* *It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther…. And one fine morning——***

***So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.* *(Futility/Naturalism)***