

Part 3

Example

Text-Analysis Response

Your Task: Closely read the text provided on pages 20 and 21 and write a well-developed, text-based response of two to three paragraphs. In your response, identify a central idea in the text and analyze how the author's use of *one* writing strategy (literary element or literary technique or rhetorical device) develops this central idea. Use strong and thorough evidence from the text to support your analysis. Do *not* simply summarize the text. You may use the margins to take notes as you read and scrap paper to plan your response. Write your response in the spaces provided on pages 7 through 9 of your essay booklet.

Guidelines:

Be sure to:

- Identify a central idea in the text
- Analyze how the author's use of *one* writing strategy (literary element or literary technique or rhetorical device) develops this central idea. Examples include: characterization, conflict, denotation/connotation, metaphor, simile, irony, language use, point-of-view, setting, structure, symbolism, theme, tone, etc.
- Use strong and thorough evidence from the text to support your analysis
- Organize your ideas in a cohesive and coherent manner
- Maintain a formal style of writing
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

Text

The following excerpt is from the diary kept by Admiral Richard Byrd when he was alone in a hut at Bolling Advance Weather Base in Antarctica for five months in 1934, with outside temperatures reaching -83° !

5 ...As I saw the situation, the necessities were these: To survive I must continue to husband my strength, doing whatever had to be done in the simplest manner possible and without strain. I must sleep and eat and build up strength. To avoid further poisoning from the fumes, I must use the stove sparingly and the gasoline pressure lantern not at all. Giving
10 up the lantern meant surrendering its bright light, which was one of my few luxuries; but I could do without luxuries for a while. As to the stove, the choice there lay between freezing and inevitable poisoning. Cold I could feel, but carbon monoxide was invisible and tasteless. So I chose the cold, knowing that the sleeping bag provided a retreat. From now on, I decided, I would make a strict rule of doing without the fire for two or three hours every afternoon.

15 So much for the practical procedure. If I depended on this alone, I should go mad from the hourly reminders of my own futility. Something more—the will and desire to endure these hardships—was necessary. They must come from deep inside me. But how? By taking control of my thought. By extirpating¹ all lugubrious² ideas the instant they appeared and dwelling only on those conceptions which would make for peace. A discordant mind, black with confusion and despair, would finish me off as thoroughly as the cold. Discipline of this sort is not easy. Even in April's and May's serenity I had failed to master it entirely.

20 That evening I made a desperate effort to make these conclusions work for me. Although my stomach was rebellious, I forced down a big bowl of thin soup, plus some vegetables and milk. Then I put the fire out; afterwards, propped up in the sleeping bag, I tried to play Canfield. But the games, I remember, went against me; and this made me profoundly irritable. I tried to read Ben Ames Williams' *All the Brothers Were Valiant*; but, after a page or two, the letters became indistinct; and my eyes ached—in fact, they had
25 never stopped aching. I cursed inwardly, telling myself that the way the cards fell and the state of my eyes were typical of my wretched luck. The truth is that the dim light from the lantern was beginning to get on my nerves. In spite of my earlier resolve to dispense with it, I would have lighted the pressure lantern, except that I wasn't able to pump up the pressure. Only when you've been through something like that do you begin to appreciate how utterly precious light is.

30 Something persuaded me to take down the shaving mirror from its nail near the shelf. The face that looked back at me was that of an old and feeble man. The cheeks were sunken and scabrous³ from frostbite, and the bloodshot eyes were those of a man who has been on a prolonged debauch.⁴ Something broke inside me then. What was to be gained by
35 struggling? No matter what happened, if I survived at all, I should always be a physical wreck, a burden upon my family. It was a dreadful business. All the fine conceptions of the afternoon dissolved in black despair.

The dark side of a man's mind seems to be a sort of antenna tuned to catch gloomy thoughts from all directions. I found it so with mine. That was an evil night. It was as if all the world's vindictiveness⁵ were concentrated upon me as upon a personal enemy. I sank to

¹extirpating — completely removing

²lugubrious — melancholy; sad

³scabrous — harsh or rough

⁴debauch — path of corruption

⁵vindictiveness — revengefulness

40 depths of disillusionment which I had not believed possible. It would be tedious to discuss
them. Misery, after all, is the tritest⁶ of emotions. All that need be said is that eventually my
faith began to make itself felt; and by concentrating on it and reaffirming the truth about
the universe as I saw it, I was able again to fill my mind with the fine and comforting things
45 of the world that had seemed irretrievably lost. I surrounded myself with my family and my
friends; I projected myself into the sunlight, into the midst of green, growing things. I
thought of all the things I would do when I got home; and a thousand matters which had
never been more than casual now became surpassingly attractive and important. But time
after time I slipped back into despond.⁷ Concentration was difficult, and only by the utmost
50 persistence could I bring myself out of it. But ultimately the disorder left my mind; and,
when I blew out the candles and the lantern, I was living in the world of the imagination—
a simple, uncomplicated world made up of people who wished each other well, who were
peaceful and easy-going and kindly.

The aches and pains had not subsided; and it took me several hours to fall asleep; but
that night I slept better than on any night since May 31st [several days earlier]; and in the
morning was better in mind and body both.

—Richard E. Byrd
excerpted and adapted from *Alone*, 1938
G.P. Putnam's Sons

⁶tritest — most overused

⁷despond — state of hopelessness

A central idea contained in the text by Richard Byrd is inner strength. Byrd was stuck in a weather base in Antarctica for five months and he faced many challenges while there. In order to get through the challenges, he needed to use all of his inner strength. When talking about the stove in his hut, he said “the choice there lay between freezing and inevitable poisoning” (lines 6 – 7). Byrd needed the stove to stay warm in a place where the temperatures could reach -83 degrees, but he knew if he used his stove, the fumes that it gave off might actually kill him. He had to balance his need for warmth with his need for fresh air and, as a result, spent much of his time in frigid, uncomfortable temperatures. He had to use his inner strength to get through this difficulty. Another way Byrd’s strength was challenged was through facing boredom. At one point, he attempted to read a book in order to give him something to do, but he said “the letters became indistinct; and my eyes ached” (line 22). He lacked an appropriate level of light with which to read and had to abandon one of his simple distractions from the situation. Feeling cold and lacking entertainment were both challenges he had to overcome through the use of his strength.

The author develops the central idea of inner strength through the use of metaphors. Because of the terrible conditions he had to endure, Byrd had many negative thoughts. In lines 37 – 38, he stated, “The dark side of a man’s mind seems to be a sort of antenna tuned to catch gloomy thoughts from all directions.” Here Byrd points out that his own mind could work against him. If he let his mind continue to think about all the negativities of the situation, it would be like an antenna that picks up more and more radio waves of sadness and negativity. In order to stay sane, he needed to stay strong and not focus on the negatives. Byrd also stated about that night that “It was as if all the world’s vindictiveness were concentrated upon me as a personal enemy” (lines 38 – 39). He metaphorically refers to himself as an enemy of all the negativity in the world. He felt as though he was being attacked by the world and would go crazy if he let the vindictiveness of the world get to him. In order to get through it, he tapped his inner strength and remained positive. He focused on positive thoughts and pulled through.