Conventions for Writing about Literature

1. Make a significant, arguable claim

2. Introduce authors & titles

3. Give full names & titles on first mention; thereafter, use last name & shortened versions of titles

4. Discuss the author & work in present tense, unless referring to historical past

5. Describe critic’s expertise before quoting from secondary sources

6. Quote when the wording is striking, you are conducting a line-by-line analysis, or you take issue with something in the text

7. Use effective signal phrases (contends, argues, explains, opines, illustrates, etc.; make the quote part of your own sentence); do not drop-quote

8. Interpret, elaborate, or explain quotations; don’t assume they speak for themselves

9. Assume an informed, educated reader, one familiar with the work & the conventions of literary writing

10. Summarize long passages when needed, but as a general rule, avoid plot summary

11. Paraphrase to demonstrate ability to synthesize, and for variety from quotation

12. Please periods & commas appropriately when quoting and using in-text citations

13. Colons & semicolons go outside quotation marks

14. Question marks & parentheses go inside if part of the quoted material; outside if they are yours; parenthetical reference and period afterward as usual

15. Include parenthetical references for all quotations, summaries, and paraphrases
Practice with Conventions

Instructions: Determine which technique (quotation, summary, or paraphrase) would be most appropriate. Provide a reason.

1. The setting A&P is very clear in a number of places. The story takes place in a local store that back-in-the-day, was popular and somewhat classy. It is the same as any other store, isles of food and such. “You know, it’s one thing to have a girl in a bathing suit down on the beach, where what with the glare nobody can look at each other much anyway, and another think in the cool of the A&P, under the fluorescent lights, against all those stacked packages, with her feet padding along naked over our checkerboard green-an-cream rubber-tile floor” (pg 16 paragraph 5) is a part of the story that shows an extreme amount of setting about the story.

Answer: _____________________________________________________________

Reason: ____________________________________________________________

2. “Talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bored you, and at the end of your first season you will have the reputation of possessing the most perfect social tact” (Wilde) In this short story written by John Updike “A & P” we are shown how the younger generation views and bases its feelings on socialization, appearance, and gender. Sammy being one of the main characters is a young man who works at a grocery store dealing with everyday society; therefore based on the discrimination brought upon women Updike uses this main character to bring about the message of how women are portrayed. Sammy is a nineteen year old boy working as a cashier at the grocery store.

Answer: _____________________________________________________________

Reason: ____________________________________________________________
Instructions: Identify the convention(s) being violated.

3. O’Brien also introduces a sense of total irony. “Happeningness is irrelevant. A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth” (625).

4. In the last line of this story as Sammy is leaving the store Updike writes that “my stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me here-after” (19). Sammy then realized that he was going to be dealing with the consequences of the sudden decision he had made.

5. The Poem of “The Fish” was written by Elizabeth Bishop. The Poem talks about how the person caught a fish and then let it free because how they felt after finally catching the magnificent fish. There is such an amazing picture that is painted into the readers mind that there could not possibly be a single question to arise from it. The poem is mostly made up of a story instead of a deep thinking poem with a lot of details, symbolism, and irony.

6. Elizabeth Bishop provided necessary and exquisite details on an adventure between the catching of the fish and the fish itself in the view of a person. When she placed the line “was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!” Elizabeth expresses to readers something that they would be familiar with as to compare the sight of a rainbow to the excitement of catching such a glorious fish.