Character Analysis

What is a Character Analysis?
As students of literature you should be able to draw similar conclusions about the actions of characters by paying close attention to information the author of a text provides about the background, experiences, and personalities of the characters. Why does Hester re-don the symbol of her shame at the end of The Scarlet Letter even though the community says she doesn’t have to? Why does Gatsby really want Daisy—is it about money, prestige, or a dream? Why does Jim play the role of fool around Tom Sawyer but not Huck Finn? A character analysis can help to answer these questions. The purpose of a character analysis is to examine the make up of a character to better understand his or her motivations and actions. These characters exhibit complex personalities and their behaviors are influenced by many factors: age, sex, race, education, social class, current environment, place of origin—all the things that combine to shape us and our actions.

Getting Started
When you decide to write a character analysis (or have that choice made for you) you will need to do some preliminary thinking and writing. Select one character from The Things They Carried that you find interesting, one that evokes a strong response from you, either positively or negatively.

After you decide which character to analyze, go back over the text with a pen in hand. Jot down notes on another sheet of paper. Look for key descriptions or bits of dialogue that could be useful in your analysis. Do not just merely highlight passages. One, the book is not yours, Two, when it is time to put your analysis together you may have forgotten why you underlined it. A few quick notes can save you time deciding why you thought that this was an important passage.

Look at your notes and develop a dominant impression about the character—a major trait that will control the analysis. The dominant impression developed from the prewriting might look like this: Mr. Martin is a quiet, meek file clerk, an ideal employee who is driven to plot murder by an attack on the efficiency of his company and a threat to his own job. If this looks like a thesis sentence to you—then good. It should. Always work with a thesis in your mind.

Elements of a Character Analysis
1) An effective introduction—Include these elements:
   a) The title of the text—do not leave your readers guessing in what story the character resides.
   b) The name of the author—this just makes sense and it is required! Never assume the reader will know the author from the title of the story. Along with the title, the author's name should appear early in the analysis, perhaps in the essay title and in the first paragraph.
   c) A clear thesis. The thesis is the controlling argument you will defend in your analysis. This must be a provable statement and cannot be directly stated in the text itself.

2) Evidence from the story that supports your thesis—written in a clear and organized manner.

3) Important words and passages from the text appearing within quotes and page numbers in parenthesis. Make sure you embed these; quotes are like clingy girlfriends—they need the support of a real sentence (man).

4) A good conclusion that reminds the readers of the thesis and makes final observations about the story.

Requirements:
1. Three paragraphs (sentence numbers are what I consider standard): an introduction (3 sentences), a fully-developed, well-written body paragraph (10 sentences), and a conclusion (3 sentences).
2. At least three different points of support for your thesis that include specific quotations from the text
3. At least three sentences of explanation and interpretation in your body paragraph that explain how your evidence relates to your thesis.

Due at the end of the period!!