

## More Help with the Second Summer Reading Assignment

In order to help you with the essay, I wanted to revisit the Tsushima assignment because it is so similar. I am going to do this by looking at some student sample paragraphs. None of these made As, but there are things you can learn from all of them.

Here's a good example of a solid paragraph with a solid structure (this is only a portion of his assignment):

First, the narrator says that she feels extreme anxiety about the loss of her children, but this is only shown outwardly toward her son. To illustrate, she allows her daughter to “[walk] casually ahead of [her]” while she “clutched the hand of [her] second-grade son more tightly than necessary” (Tsushima 8) and she even loses sight of her daughter (Tsushima 9), but never her son. Perhaps this shows that the narrator cares more about her son than her daughter. This could be because of Japanese culture, where males are more valuable than females; or it could be because there is something not right within the narrator, where she desires a relationship with her son and not her daughter. This lines-up with Freud's theory of the “Super-Ego” (Freud 74-77), where idealistic relationships are rationalized and enforced, and the narrator would feel the need to have the ideal relationship with her son specifically. This is clearly stated when Freud says, “The super ego applies the strictest moral standard to the helpless ego which is at its mercy” (Freud 76). Knowing that the narrator is not completely in touch with reality, it would make sense that if something did interfere with the narrator's relationship with her son, she would become completely detached.

The writer starts with a good topic sentence, proceeds to use the story to prove that it is true, then transitions to the Freudian explanation, then returns back to Tsushima to connect the story to the Freud lecture as a sort of conclusion. However, the transition is awkward and colloquial (“this lines-up with”), and the explanation is not as developed as it should be. Note, for example, that the writer merely assumes “that the narrator is not completely in touch with reality” without really establishing it, and the claim that the narrator “would become completely detached” exists more as a claim than a warrant.

All told, though, it's a reasonable answer and the writing has a reasonable flow. It's also free of any major misunderstandings or mistakes. It received a B: solid work that met expectations (remember, this was only part of the assignment).

Here's a paragraph that is significantly less successful:

The first time in which the story drifts from reality is in the very beginning with the murder scene. It is clear that this scene is not from reality because of how the situation is handled by the crowd of witnesses, they simply ignore the scene and brush it off as something the police will take care of later. In the real world no one is going to actually brush off a crime like this, it would be highly inhumane to have no qualms with ignoring this scene. Evidence supporting this would be Freud's theory of a super-ego, which is a part of one's mind that judges them based on their actions compared to what is expected

of society, so for someone to ignore this scene with no remorse it goes against all expectations when following Freud's Theory of the super-ego.

Note that the topic sentence is focused on events in the story, not ideas. This isn't necessarily a problem, but as a reader I can already tell this writer is more focused on the literal rather than on conceptual ideas. You'll also notice how unpersuasive it is without text evidence. The writer is engaging the text only in generalities, and it's not surprising that his explanations have difficulty getting off the ground. For example, the writer's claim that "it would be highly inhumane to have no qualms with ignoring this scene" has more to do with his opinion than anything in the story, nor does he consider the alternative explanation (that the narrator may simply be inhumane). The transition to the Freud portion of the paragraph is also problematic ("evidence supporting this would be"), as it is formulaic and draws attention to the fact that it is a school assignment with specific requirements (rather than working as an argument in its own right). Finally, the conclusion ("for someone to ignore this scene with no remorse it goes against all expectations when following Freud's Theory of the super-ego") isn't an explanation of why the characters behave as they do (which was the task), and it does little to explain *why* it does not match expectations anyway (it just takes it for granted that you understand the link without the benefit of explanation).

It can get worse, though. Witness:

The protagonist feels very anxious about the death of child. She knows she is not to blame but yet something tells her that she's missing something. Her ego is telling her that she didn't do anything wrong but her super-ego is punishing her making her feels like she is like she's left a vital part out. All three sides are torturing her. Her Id is telling to accept the fact that she is not responsible while her ego is trying to justify that she is not responsible by asking the reader who is suppose to be the witness what they've said to the police in order to not see her as a suspect. Her super-ego on the other hand is punishing her for letting her child die even if she had nothing to do with the accident for she was the mother and she was suppose to protect the child. Her super-ego causes he to doubt that she is not a suspect. These three conflicting forces are causing anxiety as Frued states. She does not know if there is something missing and frantically asks and writes countless letters asking a question that is destroying her mind. Was she responsible for the death of her child? Is it ok not to know and to just let it go? This anxiety that she starts to build up effects her every memory she has every thoughts that comes to mind ends up revolving around her child's death either directly or indirectly.

The problems here are multi-fold. It does not have a strong central argument. There is no text evidence from either the story or the Freud lecture. It is rambling and disorganized. It tries to substitute rhetorical questions for real analysis and hopes you'll mentally supply the explanation yourself. It explains none of Freud's ideas coherently (taking for granted you know them already). It makes a ton of claims without providing evidence or explanation for most of them. On top of it all, it was obviously not proofread or spell-checked. Not to put too fine a point on it: this paragraphs sucks.

Finally, here's one that's deeply flawed, but salvageable with some focused revision:

The protagonist is looking for something she can't seem to find. She's not actually sure what she is searching for but she knows she has to find it. In the story it is shown that the mother does not feel guilty for her son's death, she understands how obscured it would be for her to feel guilty over something she did not do. In Fried's lecture he states, "seeks discharge of desires" (Fried 90-93) this goes hand and hand with what is going on with the mother in the story. It goes on to show what possibly the mother might actually be looking for. In the passage written by Tsushima, the mother explains that a feeling of not knowing, or not being told something is haunting her. She says that when she finds her answer she will no longer feel this haunting and be able to move on. This shows why the mother is so content on finding her answer she feels she can't go on until she gets rid of this feeling that is holding her down. Her problem is that she has no idea where to start in looking for this answer, she always blames herself for the incident, which is preventing her from moving forward, and possibly coping with what happened. Seen through this example is that the mother is constantly questioning herself and she is continuously on a search for an answer she will never be able to find. This leaves her with a bundle of guilt, stress, and depression that she carries around all day, most likely for the rest of her life.

There are a number of problems with this paragraph, but before I start fixing them I want to highlight a couple of issues that were widely shared problems.

Look at the first transition: "In Fried's lecture he states." Note he has not established which lecture, so the quote intro would make no sense to someone who didn't know the assignment. Second, the quote intro and quote must form a grammatical sentence. "*In Fried's lecture he states, 'seeks discharge of desires'*" does not accomplish this. What does "seeks discharge of ideas" mean, anyway? I have no clue. Even if his explanation is good, without understanding the context of the quote and (especially) to what the quote is referring, the argument is incoherent.

As it happens, the explanation is not terribly good either. Saying "this goes hand and hand with what is going on in the story" is not the same thing as explaining the connection. There are no short-cuts here; you have to establish the link, and though this writer has some good ideas, he is not terribly good at communicating them in a logical, sequential fashion,

Now, I'm going to take this paragraph through a series of revisions to address some of these issues.

First, I'm going to fix minor grammatical mistakes, remove contractions (to create a more formal tone that is appropriate to the assignment), and add punctuation where it was missing. I'm also going to slightly clean up some awkward language choices. I will boldface these changes.

The protagonist is looking for something she **cannot** seem to find. **She is** not actually sure **for** what **it is that** she is searching, but she knows **that** she has to find it. In the story it is shown that the mother does not feel guilty for her son's death, **as** she understands how obscure it would be for her to feel guilty over something she did not do. In Fried's lecture he states, **the id** "seeks discharge of desires" (Fried 90-93), **and** this goes hand and hand with what is going on with the mother in the story. It also ~~goes on to~~

shows for what ~~possibly~~ the mother might ~~possibly~~ ~~actually~~ be looking for. In **Tsushima's story** ~~the passage written by Tsushima~~, the mother explains that a feeling of not knowing, or not being told something, is haunting her. She says that when she finds her answer she will no longer feel this ~~haunting~~ way and be able to move on. This shows why the mother is so ~~content~~ **focused** on finding her answer, **since** she feels she **cannot** go on until she gets rid of this feeling that is holding her down. Her problem is that she has no idea where to start in looking for this answer. ~~She always~~ blames herself for the incident, which is preventing her from ~~moving forward~~, and ~~possibly~~ coping with what happened. Seen through this example is that the mother is constantly questioning herself, and she is continuously on a search for an answer **that** she will never be able to find. This leaves her with a bundle of guilt, stress, and depression that she carries around all day, ~~most likely~~ **possibly** for the rest of her life.

Second, I'm going to fix the evidence. I've already explained how the quote intro to Freud is terrible. More worrisome, however, is that it is not a direct quote at all, but a "quotation" from my PowerPoint presentation. Paraphrase was fine for the non-fiction portion of this assignment; pretending that he had found a direct quote when he hadn't, however, was simply dishonest. I'm also going to add a transition sentence to the Freud portion of the paragraph, and I will replace some inexact paraphrase with actual quotation (which was required in the first place). I will boldface these changes.

The protagonist is looking for something she cannot seem to find. She is not actually sure for what it is that she is searching, but she knows that she has to find it. In the story it is shown that the mother does not feel guilty for her son's death, as she understands how obscure it would be for her to feel guilty over something she did not do. **This, however, is her conscious mind at work; the repressed guilt in the unconscious id is not so easy to dismiss. Freud, for example, writes of the id as an entity that seeks discharge of desires and disagreeable ideas that one does not wish to acknowledge** (90-93), and this goes hand and hand with what is going on with the mother in the story. It also shows for what the mother might possibly be looking. ~~In Tsushima's story, the mother explains that a feeling of not knowing, or not being told something, is haunting her.~~ **The narrator says, for instance, that "I can't help feeling that something is missing, and [...] I've wondered what that could be." Similarly,** she says that when she finds her answer she will no longer feel this way and be able to move on, **since she is "haunted by the feeling that there's something I haven't been told" (14) concerning the circumstances surrounding the death of her son.** This shows why the mother is so focused on finding her answer, since she feels she cannot go on until she gets rid of this feeling that is holding her down. Her problem is that she has no idea where to start in looking for this answer. She blames herself for the incident, which is preventing her from coping with what happened. Seen through this example is that the mother is constantly questioning herself, and she is continuously on a search for an answer that she will never be able to find. This leaves her with a bundle of guilt, stress, and depression that she carries around all day, possibly for the rest of her life.

Third, I'm going to fix some explanations, removing portions that don't make sense, remove redundancies, and tighten up the links to the evidence. Notice, for example, I completely re-

wrote the second sentence so that it made sense. Re-read the first version. Although one understands the point (though I wouldn't have been able to understand it if I hadn't read the story), it is just a jumble of words that doesn't advance a clear idea. Read your work aloud when you're done. If you don't understand what you were saying, I can guarantee that nobody else will either. I will boldface these changes.

The protagonist is looking for something she cannot seem to find. She is not actually sure for what it is that she is searching, but she knows that she has to find it. ~~In the story it is shown that the mother does not feel guilty for her son's death, as she understands how obscure it would be for her to feel guilty over something she did not do.~~ **Near the end of the story, the narrator acknowledges that it would be irrational to feel guilt over the drowning death of her son, as it was a tragic accident.** This, however, is her conscious mind at work; the repressed guilt in the unconscious id is not so easy to dismiss. Freud, for example, writes of the id as an entity that seeks discharge of desires and disagreeable ideas that one does not wish to acknowledge (90-93), and this ~~goes hand and hand with what is going on with the mother in the story. It also shows~~ **might** helps to explain for what the mother might ~~possibly~~ be looking. The narrator says, for instance, that "I can't help feeling that something is missing, and [...] I've wondered what that could be." Similarly, she says that when she finds her answer she will no longer feel this way and be able to move on, since she is "haunted by the feeling that there's something I haven't been told" (14) concerning the circumstances surrounding the death of her son. **What she cannot face, then, is not the death of her son (which she knows is not literally her fault), but the possibility that she was complicit in his death by failing to prevent it. A mother is supposed to protect her children, and she failed to do this-- an idea her unconscious mind will not let her dismiss, as it is too painful to face openly.** This ~~shows~~ is why the mother is so focused on finding her answer, since she feels she cannot go on until she gets rid of this feeling that is holding her down. ~~Her problem is that she has no idea where to start in looking for this answer.~~ She blames herself for the incident, **however irrational that might be, which and this** is preventing her from coping with what happened. ~~Seen through this example is that the mother~~ **This is why she is** constantly questioning herself, and **why** she is continuously on a search for an answer that she will never be able to find, **since there is nothing that could reassure hers that she had faithfully discharged her duties as mother.** This leaves her with a bundle of guilt, stress, and depression that she carries around all day, possibly for the rest of her life.

Without the cross-outs it reads like this:

The protagonist is looking for something she cannot seem to find. She is not actually sure for what it is that she is searching, but she knows that she has to find it. Near the end of the story, the narrator acknowledges that it would be irrational to feel guilt over the drowning death of her son, as it was a tragic accident. This, however, is her conscious mind at work; the repressed guilt in the unconscious id is not so easy to dismiss. Freud, for example, writes of the id as an entity that seeks discharge of desires and disagreeable ideas that one does not wish to acknowledge (90-93), and this helps to explain for what the mother might be looking. The narrator says, for instance, that "I can't help feeling that something is missing, and [...] I've wondered what that could be."

Similarly, she says that when she finds her answer she will no longer feel this way and be able to move on, since she is “haunted by the feeling that there’s something I haven’t been told” (14) concerning the circumstances surrounding the death of her son. What she cannot face, then, is not the death of her son (which she knows is not literally her fault), but the possibility that she was complicit in his death by failing to prevent it. A mother is supposed to protect her children, and she failed to do this-- an idea her unconscious mind will not let her dismiss, as it is too painful to face openly. This is why the mother is so focused on finding her answer, since she feels she cannot go on until she gets rid of this feeling that is holding her down. She blames herself for the incident, however irrational that might be, and this is preventing her from coping with what happened. This is why she is constantly questioning herself, and why she is continuously on a search for an answer that she will never be able to find, since there is nothing that could reassure her that she had faithfully discharged her duties as mother. This leaves her with a bundle of guilt, stress, and depression that she carries around all day, possibly for the rest of her life.

I didn’t change it into anything brilliant, but I would be lying if I didn’t admit I would be very pleased if everyone were turning in at least this quality of work.