

The Sun Also Rises - The Essay

Name: _____

Choose one of the following sixteen topics (or create your own topic and check it with Mr. R), and put together an intelligent essay of **3-6 pages (must be a minimum of 1200 words)**. In your essay, you will analyze the significance of one key element of the novel in order to illuminate the novel's form, impact, and meaning as fully as possible.

Requirements:

1. The goal of your analysis is to illuminate the novel's form, impact, and meaning for your reader. Everything you say about the novel—from generalizations to specific, textual details—should be clearly relevant to that goal.
2. Support all your claims and generalizations about the novel with textual evidence, including the close analysis of significant quotations from the text. Each body paragraph of your essay should be built around the solid analysis of significant textual details, including important quotations that you have incorporated smoothly.
3. There is no requirement to research outside sources, but if you do use outside sources, make sure that you properly cite the sources of any information that you incorporate through parenthetical citations and a Works Cited list.
4. The final draft of the essay is due on Monday, November 13th. Create and save your essay in your **APEngLit** folder in Google Drive.

Topics: You may choose one of these or develop your own topic.

1. "You are all a lost generation." —Gertrude Stein

Hemingway turned this statement of Stein's into the first epigraph for his novel, and one of Hemingway's original titles for the book was actually *The Lost Generation*. In what ways are specific people in the novel "lost"? Which specific characters seem particularly lost, and why? What are the causes of their being "lost"—has expatriate life itself in Paris corrupted the characters, or are their problems caused by other factors that none of them really talk about? And what about Jake? When one considers the realities of Jake's life, is Jake truly as "lost" as others in the novel, or is he actually okay?

2. "Sex explains it all": The Centrality of Sex and Gender Roles in *The Sun Also Rises*

Bill tells Jake that "Sex explains it all" (121). To what extent is Bill's statement true of the novel *The Sun Also Rises*? How are gender roles, gender relations, and traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity central to *The Sun Also Rises*? Consider all the different ways in which gender roles, sexuality, and sexual behavior contribute to the conflicts, tension, and themes that emerge in *The Sun Also Rises*. Consider the importance of Brett's behavior, her relationships with men, and the tension and thematic implications that emerge in the story from these aspects of her character. Along with Brett, consider the men who become involved with her in the course of the novel. Of course, pay special attention to Jake, his situation, and the implications of his wound on his entire life and his way of looking at the world and relationships. (With regard to Jake's conceptions of masculinity and femininity, what is Jake's attitude toward Robert Cohn, and why? Toward Pedro Romero? And what is Jake's attitude toward Georgette, and toward the gay men at the dance club early in the novel {see p.22-30}?) What about Robert Cohn's relationship with Frances Clyne—what dynamics and concerns are revealed in this relationship, and in what ways does this relationship serve as a foil for other relationships?

3. Scenes of Violence in *The Sun Also Rises*

It has been said that in great literature, no scene of violence is included for its own sake; in other words, any scene of violence in a great literary work is present because it is essential to the work's impact and meaning. What are the important scenes of violence in *The Sun Also Rises*, and how do they contribute to the impact and meaning of the novel? Consider not only the physical violence that occurs between human beings, but also the violence that occurs in the bull ring. And what about the verbal violence that occurs among human beings?

4. Speaking Directly and Honestly: The Problem of Communication in *The Sun Also Rises*

Discuss the problem of communication in the novel. Why is it so difficult for characters to speak frankly and honestly? What prevents such genuine communication and connection? In what circumstances is it possible for them to speak openly? Are there any characters who say exactly what is in their heart and on their mind? If so, how are these characters similar to each other?

5. Nature as Spiritual Center in *The Sun Also Rises*

Of the two epigraphs that Hemingway included at the beginning of the novel, the second one (from the book *Ecclesiastes* in the *Bible*) begins, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever.” How are “the earth,” “the rivers,” “the sea,” and any other aspects of nature significant elements of *The Sun Also Rises*? In which specific scenes do nature and “the earth” play important roles, and what is their significance for Jake? Consider not only Jake and Bill’s fishing trip, but also Jake’s narration of their voyage into Spain, and Jake’s narration of his time alone in San Sebastian. Is the significance of these experiences the same for other characters in the novel as it is for Jake? Why or why not?

6. Bullfighting’s Literal and Symbolic Significance in *The Sun Also Rises*

At one point, Jake tells us that he explained the action of the bullfight to Brett “so that she saw what it was all about, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less a spectacle with unexplained horrors” (171). Jake understands bullfighting in a way that most of his associates do not. Why is bullfighting of central importance to Jake and to the novel’s impact and meaning? Study the passages in which Jake incorporates details and observations about bulls, bullfighting, *aficion*, and anything related to the *matadors* Pedro Romero and Belmonte. What sort of language does Jake use? On a literal level, how do these elements play an important role in the novel? Moreover, in light of the novel’s overarching motifs and themes, what metaphorical or symbolic possibilities do these elements seem to possess? If the bullfighting passages do not advance the plot, how do they function to develop themes and motifs central to the novel? Does Hemingway present any foils for bullfighting in the novel to help us understand bullfighting’s importance more fully?

7. Contrasting Cultures: France and Spain in *The Sun Also Rises*

Many plays and novels use contrasting places (for example, two countries, two cities or towns, or the land and the sea) to represent opposed forces or ideas that are central to the meaning of the work. The action of *The Sun Also Rises* moves from France to Spain. What are the most meaningful ways in which these two countries and cultures contrast each other, and what conflicts or tensions are created in the novel by these contrasting places and cultures? What does Jake think are the most important differences between being in France and being in Spain? Is there anything Jake understands about either culture—or about both cultures—that his friends appear not to understand? Does Jake “belong” more in one place than in the other place, or not? Why?

8. War, Wounds, and Scars: The Presence and Effects of World War I in *The Sun Also Rises*

World War I is barely mentioned in the novel, but it remains an important presence for key characters. This fact perfectly fits Hemingway’s “Iceberg Theory” of writing. Analyze the importance of World War I in the novel. How does the experience of war shape certain characters and influence their state of mind and their behavior? Examine the differences between the veterans, such as Jake, Bill, and Harris; and the nonveterans, such as Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero. Are any other characters affected by the war even if they did not actively “fight” in it? And what might be important about the Count, who claims, “I have been in seven wars and four revolutions” (66)? Did he fight in World War I, or not?

9. Churches, Monasteries, and Prayers: The Importance of Religion and Its Absence in *The Sun Also Rises*

Direct and indirect references to religion abound in *The Sun Also Rises*, but most of the characters we get to know well in the story do not seem to adhere to any organized religion. Consider the idea of what religion provides for human beings who find it important. Why is religion important in *The Sun Also Rises*, and in what different ways does this element of the novel develop important motifs and themes and contribute to the novel’s impact and meaning? Consider not only the places where religion, prayer, and church are portrayed or discussed in the story; but also any places where we see unexpected parallels to traditional religion or even polar opposites to traditional religion.

10. The Role of Alcohol

Alcohol plays an important role throughout the novel. What are the thematic implications of alcohol and the role it plays in characters’ lives in the story? Consider the different characters, their attitudes toward alcohol, and their drinking behaviors—including apparently minor scenes such as that with the Count and his champagne early in the novel (66), and Jake’s having a bottle of wine in San Sebastian “for company” (226) toward the novel’s end. Is Jake’s relationship with alcohol the same as Brett’s or Mike’s relationship with alcohol? Or is Jake’s relationship with alcohol more complex and nuanced than Brett’s and Mike’s? Additionally, the word “blind” is used repeatedly in context of drinking. Comment on some implications of the word “blind” (61, 105, 141) in the text. When exactly does Jake get “blind” drunk, and can we tell why he does so? Is the Count a foil for anyone when it comes to this topic? If so, a foil for whom?

11. *Pathos* and Hemingway's Characterization of Jake's Inner Life

Hemingway became famous for his "Iceberg Theory" of characterization, in which he tries to achieve *pathos* (i.e., tries to make the reader experience his characters' emotions) through frequently indirect means; readers must often infer a character's emotional state from hints and carefully-chosen details meant to imply the character's state-of-mind and the emotional concerns. Of course, Hemingway also allows certain characters to reveal themselves through occasional interior monologues and through descriptive passages about key settings and actions. In *The Sun Also Rises*, how does Hemingway reveal Jake's inner life and achieve pathos when it comes to Jake—i.e., how does Hemingway help readers connect with Jake on an emotional level and recognize both the "good" in Jake's life (what Jake truly enjoys, admires, or finds beautiful, meaningful, and important), as well as the "bad" or painful in Jake's life (what Jake struggles with or what causes him emotional suffering or even despair)? Where and how does Hemingway reveal these aspects of Jake to us, and how do these specific passages contribute to our understanding of Jake and to our understanding of the novel as a whole?

12. Knowing How to Live: Jake's Values and Philosophy

To use a poker metaphor, Jake has been dealt a really bad hand in life. However, Jake deals with it and keeps on living—even in the face of all the hidden emotional pain that it causes him. Early in the story, the Count tells Jake, "You see, Mr. Barnes, it is because I have lived very much that now I can enjoy everything so well.... That is the secret. You must get to know the values" (67). Later, in Ch. XIV, Jake recounts his experiences and thoughts when he goes to bed, reads a book, and tries to fall asleep. As Jake considers the circumstances and relationships of his life, he tries to formulate a philosophy to help him make sense of the world and his life, and he makes a rather cynical observation about his ability gain a better understanding of his life: "It seemed like a fine philosophy. In five years, I thought, it will seem just as silly as all the other fine philosophies I've had" (152). However, Jake then questions his own cynicism and reveals one of his fundamental concerns: "Perhaps as you went along you did learn something. I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about" (152). To what degree does Jake actually know how to live in the world, or understand what is truly of value in the world? How can we tell? Throughout the novel, what seem to be Jake's important values, as well as Jake's philosophy regarding how to live his life? Moreover, does Jake remain true to his values, or does he betray his values in any ways? Since this motif is introduced by Jake's conversation with the Count, consider in what ways the Count might be a foil for Jake, and what the two men's juxtaposition reveals to us about Jake.

13. Robert Cohn - The Alienated Outsider

Writers often highlight the values of a culture or society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Why is Robert Cohn treated as such an "outsider" in the novel, and what does an understanding of his character, his motivations, his behavior, and the way he is treated contribute to the novel's impact and meaning? Why do you think Cohn is verbally abused so often in the novel? Why does Frances verbally abuse Cohn (55)? Why does Harvey Stone give Cohn such a hard time? Why does Bill say such unkind things about Cohn? Why does Mike attack Cohn but not Jake, whom Brett actually loves? And why does Cohn accept so much abuse—and then finally lash out (194-99)? To what degree are Cohn's alienation and his "outsider" status simply the result of racism? (See pp. 101-02, 104, 145-48, 181.) To what degree are Cohn's alienation and his "outsider" status the result of his idealism, his immaturity, or his Romantic view of life? And to what degree are Cohn's alienation and his "outsider" status the result of his failure to understand the values and realities of the people and the world around him?

14. Tradition and Continuity vs. Change and Revolution: Modern Anxieties about a New Era

Do you remember the lecture on Modernism from 1st semester? *The Sun Also Rises* is considered one of the quintessential Modernist novels, and one important theme in the novel centers on the many changes human beings faced during the dawn of the Modern era. In what ways is this theme important in *The Sun Also Rises*, and in what different ways does this element of the novel develop important conflicts and motifs and contribute to the novel's impact and meaning? Consider not only the places where aspects of tradition and continuity are portrayed or discussed in the story, but consider also any places where we see social changes and the tensions brought about by them. How do these elements illuminate our understanding of the key characters for us and contribute to our appreciation of the novel's impact and meaning?

15. Lady Brett Ashley

In what ways does Hemingway portray Lady Brett Ashley in a sympathetic light, and in what ways does Hemingway portray her in an unsympathetic light? Do you think she is a positive female role model in any sense? In what ways is her treatment of her male friends justified or unjustified? Does she possess a “moral compass,” a sense of right and wrong, or not? What do you think Jake means when he says “the woman pays and pays and pays” (152)? Ultimately, what should we make of Brett’s decisions regarding Pedro Romero—both her decision to become involved with him, and her decision to leave him? Is Brett a dynamic character who grows and changes by the novel’s end?

16. Invent your own topic, which can be any variation of “the importance of ___ in *The Sun Also Rises*.”

- **A Major Character** - Key Traits and the Character’s Importance
- **A Minor Character** - Key Traits and the Character’s Importance
For example, why is Harvey Stone—or any other character who appears just once—significant?
- **Dualities to Compare & Contrast** - *The Sun Also Rises* is a novel involving many dualities—many different forms of twins, doubles, pairs, parallels, and even polar opposites that play an important, thought-provoking role in the story. You can choose any interesting duality or dualities to compare and contrast in order to show the novel’s theme.

A Pair of Foil Characters - Discuss two characters whom the novel encourages us to compare and contrast. Identify the meaningful similarities and differences that we should recognize between them, and discuss what can we learn by understanding their key similarities and differences.

A Pair of Related Images, Events, Relationships, or Symbols - Discuss a pair of related images, a pair of parallel events, a pair of relationships, or even a pair of symbols in the novel that seem related. Identify the meaningful similarities and differences we should recognize between these two elements, and discuss what can we learn by understanding these key similarities and differences.

- **A Motif** - A motif is the patterned repetition of an image, word, action, detail, or idea that points to some sort of meaning. (Any detail that appears at least two times can be called a motif.) A motif can consist of parallel or recurring images, words, actions, details, or ideas that help communicate meaning in the novel. **Do you notice a set of parallel or recurring images, words, actions, details, or ideas in the novel? If so, what meaningful effects are created by the repetition of this image, word, action, detail, or idea; how does the emergence and recurrence of this motif point toward meaning or theme?**
- Choose any other specific aspect of the novel OR a unique angle of vision into the novel to help us understand it better. (This topic could be Hemingway’s characterization of a particular character, a specific motif, a pair of character foils, an apparently small detail of the story that illuminates the story’s impact and meaning, etc.)