Can AI Generative Tools Cripple Literary Analysis / Critical Thinking Skills? A Case Study

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Abstract

While teaching a Novel course for EFL undergraduates, the researcher observed that a student was liberally using AI generative tools to study the course. She used ChatGPT as a substitute for reading the novel. Since the exams tackled higher critical thinking skills, she opted to memorize the answers generated by AI tools and simply paste them! This paper aims at employing action research as "a form of enquiry that enables practitioners to develop their own living theories of practice." (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) This case study juxtaposes the literary critical essays written by two EFL- undergraduate students studying a Novel course. One student was too liberal in her use of AI Generative tools as a learning tool. The other student was commited to the recommended method of studying, i.e., starting with a close reading of the text to ensure well-informed analysis. The method of this study is a qualitative case study assessing all the critical essays the subjects submitted in midterm and final exams then to conduct an open-ended interview to explore their perspectives. The results illustrate the effects of overusing AI tools on critical thinking skills; They provide a overview of the effects of overusing AI on EFL students and suggest solutions.

Keywords: AI critique, critical thinking, literary analysis, misusing AI generative tools, writing, undergraduate EFL student

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Introduction

Teaching literature in general revolves around reading and summarizing certain literary texts, understanding the events and themes within these works, then fostering students attempts at original analysis. Moreover, it is a common practice to encourage students to read external articles about a literary text to analyse, prove or disprove them. Indeed, some advance literary courses for EFL undergraduate students would list in their course learning outcomes CLOs the skill of examining different articles written about the texts under study. The course at hand is such an advanced course taught in an undergraduate program of English Language and Literature. It is a Modern Novel course catered to EFL students in Saudi Arabia. The skills learning outcomes of this course include:

- Interpret specific passages, characters, themes, settings, and events of the prescribed modern novels from various critical perspectives.
- Examine different critical articles written about the modern novels at hand.
- Defend and disprove different theses and opinions about the major ideas and features introduced in the assigned fiction.

They include the following values learning outcomes:

- Show responsibility for self-learning to continue personal and academic development.
- Demonstrate ethical behavior in all personal and academic practices (for e.g., being honest, ethical testing practices, writing original assignments, and research papers...etc.).

However, the fair assessment of students was shifted after the introduction of AI generative tools for the public in November 2022. Instructors were obliged to explore the new technology for themselves and examine its effects on students' fulfillment to the required learning outcomes. In this case study the researcher observed that a student used ChatGPT as a substitute for reading the required literary text. A use that may undermine the development of her analytical skills. Since the exams tackled higher critical thinking skills, the student opted to put her trust in ChatGPT to memorize answers generated by it and simply paste them in the midterm exam! Another student was commited to the recommended method of studying, i.e., starting with a close reading of the text to ensure well-informed analysis. The two students regrettably received the same grade due to the fact the regulations for the fair use of AI were not officially implemented. This study tackles this educational issue using action research that is characterized by "combining diagnosis, action and reflection" (McNiff 2002).

Action Research: Identifying an Educational Problem, Interveining, and Reflecting With Stakeholders

The research problem presented itself while correcting the midterm papers in this course. A 22-years-old undergraduate student submitted a midterm paper that has passed all the rubrics put to assess the CLOs. From the outset the student got the full mark on her essay. It was a fairly written essay, presenting an argument in an appropriate grammar and style, corresponding to her undergraduate level; the issue was in the argument itself. The student argues that the leading character in the assigned novel (*Mrs. Dalloway*) is oppressed by society and that had she freed herself from the "oppressive" rules of society she would have chosen to be with her true love; her female friend over her husband. Her conclusion was not validated by supporting details from the text. It is not in alignment with the values she was expressing in class (participation/ in-class discussion). Starting from the observed

phennomina reported by EFL undergraduates that they occasionally rely on literary articles written by native speakers without critically reviewing their core arguments; The instructor assumed this statement was quoted, not the student's genuine opinion. The student's passive acceptance of this blatant homosexual remark without supporting details is also evident; This initial observation was highly alarming, especially for a student who demonstrated good language proficiency, thus good reading comprehension skills.

The instructor assumed this passive acceptance of the remark implied a degree of analytical illiteracy. If so, a special study of this case is needed. It may also be an endorsement of this inclination, which will lead to terminating the study because then she is expressing her original opinion. Navigating this situation was tricky. First the student was contacted to inquire about how she prepared for the midterm, and if there are specific articles that she drew her conclusions from. She replied that she used ChatGPT. She also confirmed that she was not able to read the whole novel; she reported she only read 20 pages from the ebook. Her consent was obtained to study her essay as a case study to understand the educational challenges of using AI generative tools in literary courses.

The Intervention

To study this case thoroughly the student who replaced reading with using AI tools (Student A) was instructed to watch the film adaptation of the novel to ensure that she understand the literary text it is based on, and to reflect on her answers in the midterm. Student A only received the intervention of watching the film adaptation as a supporting educational tool. The decision to use it as an educational tool is informed by a recent study about the effectiveness of incorporating film adaptations in EFL literature courses. That study concluded that "incorporating film adaptation as a tool in teaching literature courses enhances EFL students' understanding of the assigned literary texts" (Azhar, 2024). Another student (Student B) is added to the case study. Student B has the full experience of the novel. Her answers are informed by a close reading of the novel. This case study, therefore, opted to explore two cases to gain depth. The research used open-ended questions and interviews.

Research Gap and Mythodology

Most recent papers on this topic (Almanea, 2024; Werdiningsih et al., 2024) explore using ChatGPT by employing students' subjective feedback (perspective) as a primary tool. They do not examine student's performance objectively to juxtapose it with their self-reported observations. In their paper "Revolutionizing EFL writing: unveiling the strategic use of ChatGPT by Indonesian master's students" the authors have established students' positive reception of ChatGPT. It states that master students utilize a range of strategies in their interactions with ChatGPT, including critical evaluation, peer consultation, and the use of primary research sources, which demonstrates its adaptability as an educational resource. The research honestly "acknowledges limitations, including the potential biases of self-reported data" (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). They recommend addressing these limitations in future research through "[…] mixed-methods approach that includes real-time interaction tracking, [that] would offer a clearer view of ChatGPT's role in EFL learning contexts and its influence on academic writing capabilities" (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). The case study on the effects of using AI generative tools in literary courses took the following consecutive steps: (1) analyzing the original essays written by the students, (from now on will be called subject A and B, (2) properly familiarizing student A with the literary text through directing her to watch the film adaptation. (3) giving both subject a written form with open-ended questions,

(4) a face-to-face interviews are held to discuss the subjects' answers to the written questions, and the essays.

Research Questions

This study explores the following research questions:

- Q1: Does ChatGPT arrest the subject's critical thinking skills when used without reading the text?
- Q2: How is critical thinking affected by reading the novel only?

Analysis

Student A (overused AI tools)

Midterm Analysis

In this essay the contrast between the relatively well-phrased sentences and the misspelling of many words has drawn the researcher's attention to discrepancies between the form and the content of the essay. They indicate that the writing is not an original analysis by the student. The style of writing seems to be elevated, yet the mechanics of writing are not as elevated. The misplaced apostrophe for the plural possessive is one example (See Appendix A for the full transcript). Moreover, the essay is deprived of textual evidence. It glosses over details and generalises rather than elaborate to prove a point. This is one of the observable characteristics of texts generated by AI and ChatGPT especially. "Some indicators of AI-generated content include an impersonal tone and a lack of valid sources and citations" (Almanea, 2024). The essay is too short to illustrate its main idea. It lacks emotional engagement with the characters. For instance, she puts on equal footing the internal struggles of a privileged woman like Clarissa Dalloway with the intense turmoil of a shellshocked war veteran like Septimus Smith. She attributes their struggle to "society failure to understand those who *do not fit it's norms*" which is arguably not applicable to Mrs. Dalloway who is not stigmatised or mistreated by society in the typical sense. Student A is not aware that her statement could be contested and needs further explanation and textual evidence to prove it.

Lastly, her ideas contain an implicit endorsement of homosexuality that are not compatible with what is already expressed in class. Initially the researcher proposed the hypothesis that the student does not have the level of advanced linguistic competency to detect the queer tone to the sentence: "Woolf reveals her internal dissatisfaction, especially when reflecting *on her past love* for Sally Seton. This tension shows the limitation placed on women in *patriarchal* society." The hypothesis changed after conducting the intervention which aimed at enabling student A to engage with the literary text. The most efficient and scientifically packed route was advising her to watch the film adaptation of *Mrs. Dalloway*. After watching the film, an open-ended interview with guided questions was conducted. These have revealed that before the midterm exam she was not able to critically evaluate the text generated by Open AI because she has used it as a substitute for reading the novel itself. Moreover, she stated that she was practically taught by previous Literature professors to not express subjective views about a specific text even if the analysis is based on textual evidence and an authentic engagement with the literary text. This reveals another layer to this multilayered problem; teachers who teach literary works to EFL students are not keen on promoting critical thinking skills but rather teach students the criticism already put forward by well-established literary

critics. Such a hidden curriculum impedes the development of critical thinking skills and encourages reiterating critics' opinions without much challenge.

Not Fulfilling the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

The determining factor in this study is achieving the course's learning outcomes. The learning outcomes of this course (CLOs) state critical thinking to be one of the central skill outcomes. Student A's failure to provide an original essay is a clear defect that should be reflected in her overall grade. The CLOs also state: "Demonstrate ethical behavior in all personal and academic practices (for e.g., being honest, ethical testing practices, writing original assignments, and research papers...etc.)" These outcomes are not achieved in the case of student A because the official guidelines for ethical use of AI are not explicitly announced; they are not yet part of the course specification or the course syllabus. A fair official measurement to address misusing AI is not yet devised. This means that in all fairness her mark cannot be cut without changing the rubrics used for evaluating students' fulfilment of the CLOs. Teachers are prone to continue using written articles and research papers as the ultimate proof of achieving the learning outcomes. Written exams are regrettably becoming a false witness in the age of AI. Active discussions, presentations, and debates are more reliable; they need to be allocated more marks. Students are susceptible to over relying on AI generated texts instead of developing their own essays in exams. But as many studies suggested some measures are recommended to deter potential ChatGPT misuse such as incorporating personal elements into assignments that AI cannot replicate (Almanea, 2024).

The student also stated that she used ChatGPT in the process of reading summaries about the novel, in brainstorming ideas, and in editing the essay to study from it. This means that she used it to do all the major writing steps: reading, arriving at an informed opinion, and editing. This made her essay a thorough AI product that does not contain authentic cultural point of view (which is one of the essential reasons for reading foreign literary works).

The final exam for student A was conducted after the intervention and the interview, yet it does not show an improvement. The researcher speculates that she developed a mistrust of ChatGPT knowing that its liberal use is discouraged. She was not able to finish reading the whole novel and was deprived of her secret weapon. All these factors resulted in an essay that was evidently less convincing than her midterm paper.

Student B (read the novel only)

Midterm Analysis

Although the student's essay contains many spelling mistakes and errors in mechanics, it is evident that it is original. (1) There is a clear point of view and a central argument backed by textual evidence. For instance, she writes: "Her happy place is her bedroom, when wher [*sic*] she can lie in bed and read her books." Providing supporting details from the text to prove Clarissa's isolation. The central argument can be seen in her thesis statement: "In this essay, I will be discussing the theme of oppression in terms of Clarissa, an upper class middle aged woman who struggles to conform, and septimus smith who suffer from shell shock due to the war" [*sic*]. She is careful to show that even though both characters suffer from oppression, Smith's suffering comes from participating in war. The thesis is elaborated on in the body paragraphs; She writes: in body paragraph 1: "Her struggle torments her to the point she is

loosing sense of self completely in order to keep up with the patriarchal society she is living in" [*sic*].

(2) The essay itself was written spontaneously not memorized before the exam; This is evident in its misspelling of words that are spelled correctly in other lines; perhaps due to exam stress. The passages contain crossed words sometimes multiple times showing that the student is thinking while writing. See the picture below:

Figure 1
The Essay Written by Student B Shows Crossed Words (thinking while writing the)
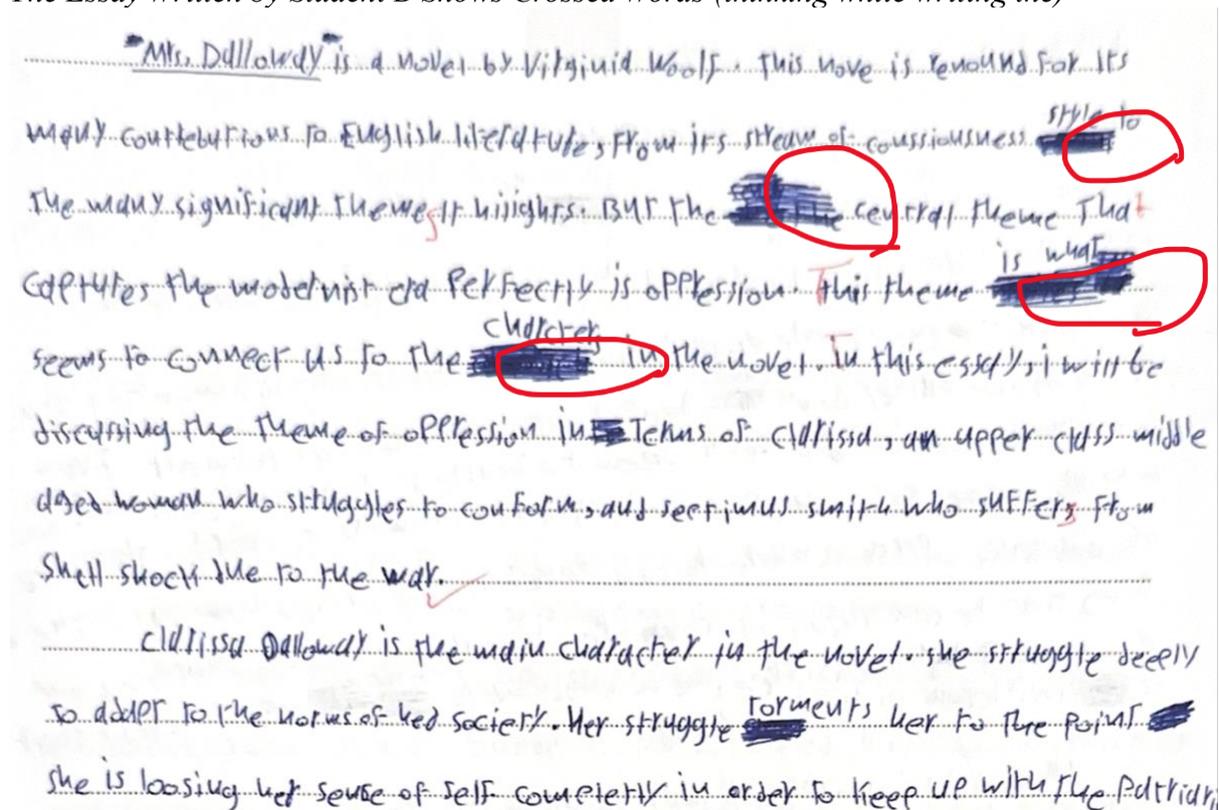
The essay organization and length are appropriate. The ideas are expressed not in a constraint generalise/ borrowed way but in a detailed original way. For instance, the student is careful to point out the paradoxical nature of Clarissa's plight: "But this very desire of wanting others approval is also the reason she loses her desire to express herself as an individual."

She uses simple style of writing that is admittedly ineloquent. Yet, it reflects her undergraduate level contributing to the overall assessment that this essay is a raw spontaneous product of an undergraduate student illustrating her blooming critical thinking skills. It shows human engagement with fictional characters. For instance, she states: "Even saying his struggles outloud [*sic*] doesn't seem to matter to his wife, or his doctor […]. this feeling […] where he can never escape drives him into the only thing that he can think of to free him and ends up jumping out of a window where is free [*sic*], he no longer has to conform with a society that is indifferent to his suffering." The analysis shows deep empathy with Septimus Smith, it describes his state of mind that sought solace in suicide due to the immense pressure he had endured.

Her final exam essay (see Appendix B) is very insightful, she displays a good background in psychology that may not be backed very well by an eloquent language and diverse vocabulary. A very illustrative line is her line: "He represents the good. A man that risked his life for his country and leaving his wife and his comfortable [*sic*] life behind to Fight for his country. His biggest worry isn't a party that he can choose not to thow [*sic*] it's his desire to leave his troubles behind" This line shows a perspective that reflects a cultural Arabian/ Muslim believe that defending your country is the highest form of honor. This perspective is a genuine interaction between a 24 years-old student from Saudi Arabia with a character who may be viewed as a victim in the English culture that is charged by the cultural impact of WWII. There are no Western echoes in her analysis, the known position of War Poetry that attacks the ideal of dying for your own country as a lie. She is thinking independently from the English view in memorable poems like: "*Dolce Et Decorum Est.*" AI Generative tools may have edited this statement that express the culturally different view about how honourable to participate in war for your country due to ChatGPT established cultural bias towards "white, Western" perspective (Almanea, 2024). The affectation that only a human can have and the literary view that is informed by her own values may have been obliterated had she decided to proofread the essay using Open AI in preparation for the exam.

In her line: "the novel is critisized for having no story, but how can someone overlooks this brilliance only because there is no 'action'." The use of quotation marks is conspicuously reflecting her age and emotional engagement with the critical output about the novel fulfilling one of the CLOs in skills. It reflects her fluency accurately making written essays a valid assessment method for her case. Students' emotional engagement is a valuable attribute that can resist the misuse of AI tools. Thus, it is feasible to relax the rules about informal expressions in undergraduate academic writing in this age of AI tools because these informal expressions are genuine and cannot be forged yet by AI tools.

Insights From Students' Reflections

Student A

Q: What if the work endorses approves and accepts slavery adultery infidelity sexual exploitation of children should we accept these ideas without commenting on their unethical nature when writing?
Answer: "I think we need to comment on them and linking them to our culture but some doctors don't like to do that and want us to write only about the ideas."
"my first novel yes. [The teacher] didn't ask us to write about our opinion so I stick on that with you."

Q: What was special about watching the movie?
Answer: "My person I don't like to read. I like to see things and the picture of the characters so it's really good option to see the movie first then.The movie so when I read the novel, I can picture the characters"

Q: Do you think that group reading in class would encourage students to speak their opinion more?
Answer: "Yes, they would understand that their opinion is valued because it's not an exam and t's not graded with grades. So we can speak more."

Q: Do you think that Clarissa is harboring (hiding) homosexual feelings for Sally?
Answer: "I think when she was young yes, but when she grow up and saw her in the party she over come her feelins."

Student B

Q: Some students say that watching the film adaptation is going to help them if they are audiovisual. Comment please.
Answer: "Personally when I read books, I love that I can imagine instead of seeing. So to me, I imagine characters look a certain way […] If I'm struggling with the book I listen to it. I don't have to watch."

Q: Why are many students arguing for opinions that can be refuted with textual evidences?
Answer: "I think most of the students decided not to finish the novel. It was really hard for me, the stream of consciousness was so confusing. It took me so long to finish it so maybe I think that's why I think not reading enough means that they didn't get to know the character […] I really think that you have to read to be able to understand."

Findings

The two students received the same grade, even though one has evidently read the novel and engaged with it in the optimal manner while the other used ChatGPT as a shortcut undermining the development of her critical thinking skills. Further discussion with student A and B validated this conclusion. Student A's written answer shows that the film demistified some aspects about the AI generated answer she used in the exam. Now she is able to see that AI tools were giving her feeble arguments not solid provable facts. The open discussion with the student further proved this point. She also pointed out she is a visual learner which makes her value the added benefit of watching the film adaptation of the novel. This suggests that watching the film adaptation as a replacement of reading the work does not affect critical thinking skills the way using AI tools as a subsitute does. It may also suggest that students whose learning style is auditory have the advantage of listening to audiobooks and hence can finish reading the whole novel. This is later confirmed by Student B's reflections.

Moreover, this study found that writing skills (which require critical thinking) for EFL undergraduate students are clearly undermined by the overuse of AI tools such as ChatGPT because it bypasses the typical 5 step writing process: Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. It enables students to simply take a topic and then generate an essay about it without the need to get thoroughly acquainted with the topic. See figure 2 below:

Figure 2
Writing Process (misusing AI tools)

With AI generative tools students are able to bypass all the writing steps in the figure above. They start with the topic suggested by the instructor and with few prompts they produce a

paragraph/ essay that they do not properly understand. Such a practice undermine the validity of written assignments, exams either in-class or at home. The suggested writing process steps after the introduction of AI tools is as follows:

Figure 3
Suggested Writing Process if AI Generative Tools Are Used

Needed Revision of Assessment Methods

The current pedagogy implemented now focusses on knowledge & understanding (K), and skills (S) far more than its focus on values (V). The introduction of AI tools evidently shifted the evaluation of (K) & (S) but values (V) are original to students and cannot be forged by AI tools. These are a complex net of cultural, religious, and disciplinary values that AI tools are not advanced enough to mimic. This study proposes changing the marks allocation to include more tasks that engage CLOs in (V) such as in-class debates on undisclosed topics which will show the true critical competence of the students. Oral presentations during the trimester under study were very important to show students' values, genuine thoughts and reflections about the text. Student A answers in the midterm were not compatible with what is expressed in class which made it possible to detect the effects of using AI on critical thinking skills. Unlike skills, values in the CLOs are not easily emulated by NLP software.

The rapid breakthrough in technology that is happening nowadays entices undergraduates to over-rely on AI tools. Academic institutions and educators are advised to train students on the fair use of AI tools. A healthy dose of scepticism of AI tools output is needed. Students can overcome these issues by inspecting AI generated output for machine errors and compatibility with their own cultural, religious, and political views (to avoid obliterating them). Finally, the study suggests that EFL learners who are not fluent are more susceptible to supressing critical thinking skills while using AI tools. If they lack confidence in their own grasp of the content generated by AI tools, they are prone to accept the generated content without discerning errors. Teachers are advised to instruct them against using AI tools in the brainstorming phase.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The duration of the case study is short. A longitudnal research that studies EFL undergraduates critical thinking in the age of AI is needed.

Conclusion

Firstly, overusing and misusing AI tools in EFL undergraduate Literary courses can hamper the development of students' critical thinking skills. Student A initially reported positive reception of ChatGPT as an educational tool yet when a reliable educational tools such as using film adaptation was implemented, the student perspective has shifted. She was able to critically evaluate the AI generated content and find its faults. The study, hence, indicates that watching the film adaptation as a replacement of reading the work does not affect critical thinking skills the way using AI tools as a subsitute does. Secondly, writing skills are

undermined by the overuse of AI tools such as ChatGPT because it bypasses the typical 5 step writing process that also requires critical thinking: Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Such a practice undermine the validity of written assignments, exams either in-class or at home. Written essays, once the trusted assessment method is becoming a false witness due to overusing AI generative tools. The suggested writing process steps after the introduction of AI tools is as follows: Human knowledge, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

Finally, Learning style plays a role in some non-performative literary forms like novel; auditory students can finish reading the text by listening to audiobooks which they find a very helpful educational tool, while visual or kinesthetic learners may not.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Midterm transcript of a student A:

In Mrs. Dalloway's Virginia Woolf explores the theme of oppression through her characters' struggles with societal and personal constraints. The novel shows how gender roles, societal expectations, and mental health issues, limit personal freedom and happiness.

Clarrissa Dalloway, for instance, faces gender passed oppression. As an upper class woman, she is expected to fulfil her values as a wife and hostess. Although she appears to emrace these roles, Woolf reveals her internal dissatisfaction, especially when reflecting on her past love for Sally Seton. This tension shows the limitation placed on women in patriarchal society.

Siptimus Warren Smith, A war veteran, represent another form of oppression society disregard for mental illness. His doctor dismis his trauma and force him to conform, leading to his tragic suicide. Woolf critiques society failure to understand those who do not fit it's norms, highlighting the harsh impact of such indifference.

Overall, Mrs. Dalloway shows how societal and internal pressures Oppress individuals, calling for greater empathy and understanding to improve both personal and social wellbeing.

Final transcript of subject A:

In Mrs. Dalloway Virginia Woolf avoids the traditional story telling and uses the modern techniques in writing. In the novel, the plot doesn't follow a straight forward story telling, instead it's unrganized plot.

The plot in the novel doesn't follow a straightforward storytelling. Instead it's moving back and forth between past and present. The Novel is about one dayin mrs. Dalloway life. The plot shows the inner struggles of the characters. For example, clarissa thinking about her past and the choices she has made, She is stuck in her past, rather than focusing on her present. Woolf uses this plot to critique the society and its expectations. Also, how personal conflicts can be harsh on individuals.

Overall, Woolf uses modernplot instead of traditional one to show the inner struggles of the characters. The novel starts with Mrs. Dalloway preparing for her party, and end with her party. The plot move back and forth between past and present to reflect the personal conflicts of the characters.

Appendix B

Midterm transcript of a student B:

Mrs. Dalloway is a novel by Virginia Woolf. This novel is renound for its many courteburious to English Literature, from its stream of conssiousness style to the many significant theme it hilights. By the central theme tha captures the modernist era perfectly is oppression. this theme is what seems to connect us to the characters in the novel. In this essay, i will be discussing the theme of oppression in terms of Clarissa, an upper class middle aged woman who struggles to conform, and septimus smith who suffer from shell shock due to the war.

Clarissa Dalloway is the main character in the novel. she struggle deeply to adapt to the norms of her society. Her struggle torments her to the point she is loosing sense of self completely in order to keep up with the patriarchal society she is living in. Her happy place is her bedroom, when wher she can lie in bed and read her books. this isolated style is the result of her trying to keep up her appearance as a lady and a hostess. But this very desire of wanting others approval is also the reason she loses her desire to express herself as an individual. She is both the opressed in the opressor of some sorts, after all the novel is about her throwing a party. she is also guilty of septimus's death by accepting the norms her society set for her. that is how the theme comes in full circle.

septimus smith is a solider who suffers from shell shock after world war I. despite being with the woman he loves and being at home he feels as though he is stuck in this hellish reality. With everyone around him dismissing his struggles, he is driven more and more into this tortured confienment. His doctor, sir bradshaw is treating his condition as though it is a simple matter, by recomending that he only needs to be mor open and pich up a sport. He is pushing him towards the same invioroment that caused him to be this way. His wife is unwilling to accept his struggle and isolates herself out of helplessness. the people around him are aggravating his mental state and pushing him further down and deeper into this mental torment. Even saying his struggles outloud doesn't seem to matter to his wife, or his doctor who are suposed to be the people who give him the most comfort. this feeling of ommence oppression where he can never escape drives him into the only thing that he can think of to free him and ends up jumping out of a window where is free, he no longer has to conform with a society that is indifferent to his suffering.

In conclusion, Mrs. Dalloway delves in the theme of oppression in ways that are relatable to many. by showing us the struggle that are very much realistic to the entire world, no matter your gender you will find yourself lost in this masterpiece. By Bringing the modernist era back to life we can feel the struggle of her characters. the theme of oppression was the soul of the novel from the main character, down to the smaller ones. Whether we see it in Clarissa's efforts to please her society or in septimus and his desire to leave this world where his troubles are, the theme of oppression is indeed the guiding theme in the novel.

Final transcription Student B:

Mrs. Dalloway is a novel by Virginia Wolfe. It's about Clarissa Dalloway, hence the title of the novel. She is a woman living in a post-war society who struggles with her identity and role. Although the novel is renouned for its tecnique it has gained alot of crtisis being one of the greatest novels ever written. Critics argue that there is no actual story in the novel and that it has no plot. In this essay I will be arguing that theplot of the novel doesn't rvolve around the action, but around what the character represent and the wassclge you get through them.

First, you have life and death. This complex theme is center of the novel. at first glance you might wonder what septimus's character mean to the the plot, since the story is about

clarissa. As clarissa walks through London, we are taken with her to memories of her life. And some might argue that she is longing for freedom. From her memories with her friend Sally as she admits her unconventional and wild personality and how she chose a different life than the one they imagined together. As she talks to her friend peter, he is offended by the description of her as a trophy wife, for she want her life to be moremeaningful. But when clarissa hears about septmus's death at the party she is torn between her envy and her greatfullness. This is where septimus ties in the story. throgh him we can see clarissa clearly for the First time. part of her want to do what he did, and another part thinks he is a fool who threw away his life, leaving the rest of them living. Meaning she also finally sees that life is worth living and pushes her to go enjoy The party with her Friends.

Secondly, we have the idea of good and evil. clarissa, the main character represents evil. As a woman living as an upper class lady, she is blind to her privildge and The possibilities she has. The novel is about her planing a party afterall. She feels sad as she remembers parts of her life because she wonder if she had made the right decisions in her life. Even thog she is living a comfortable life, she choses this life style and encourages it, not only causing her own sadness but also the sadness of others. This brings us to septimus. A veteran who doesn't have many luxuries in life and who is suffering From the terrible Effects of the war. He represents the good. A man that risked his life for his country and leaving his wife and his comfortable life behind to Fight for his country. His biggest worry isn't a party that he can choose not to thow it's his desire to leave his troubles behind. A man so depressed that he Finds death easier than living.
A man who suffers from the expectations of society. The same society that is affected by the people in it. People like clarissa who are blind to what they encourage. He has no say in his fate wants to leave, but has to deal with what they caused.

In conclusion, the novel is critisized for having no story, but how can someone overlooks this brilliance only because there is no "action". The novel is experimental afterall, you have to read it expecting to see the unusual. Althogh the story has little to no action, you are left with so many emotions after reading it, why? Because even thogh it has no clear plot or stor, that is not the purpose of it, it does not strive to satisfy the traditional norms of story telling. Virginia Woolf wants to leave you with a masterpiece. The way she does that is by writing a novel that does not center around aa story, but around The layers of meaning that someone can be fortunate enogh to understand. which is life as we know it. sometimes, you have to take a second to look at the details to see what really matters, not just in art but in life.