Sample Essay 1 Topics

Here are some ideas from class on Tuesday, April 17, 2012, showing how you might combine formal analysis with thematic analysis in your essay.

**Example 1**

**Formal element:** Piano (symbol)

**Content:** Relationship to history (theme)

Discuss how the piano is used throughout the play to bring out aspects of this theme.

**Example 2**

**Formal element:** Music (motif)

**Content:** Social class

Discuss how music is used throughout the play to bring out aspects of social class. For example, desires and higher aspirations that are expressed through music reveal the class standing of the characters.

**Example 3**

**Formal element:** Character (Boy Willie, possibly one or two others)

**Theme:** The spiritual/supernatural

Discuss how Boy Willie (perhaps 1-2 others) is used to bring out the theme throughout the story. For example, he is originally skeptical about the ghost but ends up wrestling with it. Wilson creates him this way to make a contrast with Berniece and her views of the supernatural.

**Example 4**

**Formal element:** Narrative structure—the abrupt ending of the play

**Theme:** Ownership

How does the abrupt ending relate to the theme of ownership? It might suggest that ownership is no longer an issue (perhaps never has been—it was just a misconception on the part of the characters). It also could imply that Berniece’s claim on the piano depends on her use of it.

**Example 5**

**Formal element:** Narrative structure—division into acts and scenes (2 acts, 2 scenes in Act One, 5 scenes in Act Two).

**Theme:** Self-worth

How does each scene and/or each act bring out a different perspective on the theme of self-worth?