

who goes to the Royal Ontario Museum to investigate ancient fox masks. What he finds instead is an exotic community that “speaks” logically to his isolation more than anything else in his empty, reclusive life.

Each of the four stories explores what it means to be an outsider and isolated from society. Their protagonists experience loneliness, alienation, and even discrimination. But all these characters also gain self-knowledge, new insights, and epiphanies about the range of human experience.

Katherine Mansfield

Miss Brill

PRE-READING

1. Which aspects of your personality do you share with others, or even allow others to see? In a written paragraph, describe yourself—the part of you that is made visible to others. Write the description from the perspective of one of your more casual acquaintances.
2. “All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances.”

The above is a passage from William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Paraphrase the passage. Do you agree with the thinking behind the words? Explain.

Although it was so brilliantly fine—the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques—Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting—from nowhere, from the sky. Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes. “What has been happening to me?” said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see them snap at her again from the red eiderdown! ... But the nose, which was of some black composition, wasn’t at all firm. It must have had a knock, somehow. Never mind—a little dab of black sealing-wax when the time came—when it was absolutely necessary.... Little rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear. She could have taken it off and laid it on her lap and stroked it. She felt a tingling in her hands and arms, but that came from walking, she

supposed. And when she breathed, something light and sad—no, not sad, exactly—something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.

There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday. And the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like some one playing with only the family to listen; it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing a new coat, too? She was sure it was new. He scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow, and the bandsmen sitting in the green rotunda blew out their cheeks and glared at the music. Now there came a little "flutey" bit—very pretty!—a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled.

Only two people shared her "special" seat: a fine old man in a velvet coat, his hands clasped over a huge carved walking-stick, and a big old woman, sitting upright, with a roll of knitting on her embroidered apron. They did not speak. This was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had become really quite expert, she thought, at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her.

She glanced, sideways, at the old couple. Perhaps they would go soon. Last Sunday, too, hadn't been as interesting as usual. An Englishman and his wife, he wearing a dreadful Panama hat and she button boots. And she'd gone on the whole time about how she ought to wear spectacles; she knew she needed them; but that it was no good getting any; they'd be sure to break and they'd never keep on. And he'd been so patient. He'd suggested everything—gold rims, the kind that curved round your ears, little pads inside the bridge. No, nothing would please her. "They'll always be sliding down my nose!" Miss Brill had wanted to shake her.

The old people sat on the bench, still as statues. Never mind, there was always the crowd to watch. To and fro, in front of the flower beds and the band rotunda, the couples and groups paraded, stopped to talk, to greet, to buy a handful of flowers from the old beggar who had his tray fixed to the railings. Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing; little boys with big white silk bows under their

chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. And sometimes a tiny staggerer came suddenly rocking into the open from under the trees, stopped, stared, as suddenly sat down "flop," until its small high-stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and—Miss Brill had often noticed—there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even—even cupboards!

Behind the rotunda the slender trees with yellow leaves down drooping, and through them just a line of sea, and beyond the blue sky with gold-veined clouds.

Tum-tum-tum tiddle-um! tiddle-um! tum tiddley-um tum ta! blew the band.

Two young girls in red came by and two young soldiers in blue met them, and they laughed and paired and went off arm-in-arm. Two peasant women with funny straw hats passed, gravely, leading beautiful smoke-colored donkeys. A cold, pale nun hurried by. A beautiful woman came along and dropped her bunch of violets, and a little boy ran after to hand them to her, and she took them and threw them away as if they'd been poisoned. Dear me! Miss Brill didn't know whether to admire that or not! And now an ermine toque and a gentleman in gray met just in front of her. He was tall, still, dignified, and she was wearing the ermine toque she'd bought when her hair was yellow. Now everything, her hair, her face, even her eyes, was the same color as the shabby ermine, and her hand, in its cleaned glove, lifted to dab her lips, was a tiny yellowish paw. Oh, she was so pleased to see him—delighted! She rather thought they were going to meet that afternoon. She described where she'd been—everywhere, here, there, along by the sea. The day was so charming—didn't he agree? And wouldn't he, perhaps? ... But he shook his head, lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face, and, even while she was still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on. The ermine toque was alone; she smiled more brightly than ever. But even the band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drum beat, "The Brute! The Brute!" over and over. What

would she do? What was going to happen now? But as Miss Brill wondered, the ermine toque turned, raised her hand as though she'd seen some one else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away. And the band changed again and played more quickly, more gayly than ever, and the old couple on Miss Brill's seat got up and marched away, and such a funny old man with long whiskers hobbled along in time to the music and was nearly knocked over by four girls walking abreast.

Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play. Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted? But it wasn't till a little brown dog trotted on solemn and then slowly trotted off, like a little "theater" dog, a little dog that had been drugged, that Miss Brill discovered what it was that made it so exciting. They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all. How strange she'd never thought of it like that before! And yet it explained why she made such a point of starting from home at just the same time each week—so as not to be late for the performance—and it also explained why she had quite a queer, shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons. No wonder! Miss Brill nearly laughed out loud. She was on the stage. She thought of the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden. She had got quite used to the frail head on the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded. But suddenly he knew he was having the paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress—are ye?" And Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently: "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time."

The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill—a something, what was it?—not sadness—no, not sadness—a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light

shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing. The young ones, the laughing ones who were moving together, they would begin, and the men's voices, very resolute and brave, would join them. And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches—they would come in with a kind of accompaniment—something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful—moving.... And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought—though what they understood she didn't know.

Just at that moment a boy and a girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all—who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting."

"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chère—"

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not yet."

On her way home she usually bought a slice of honeycake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present—a surprise—something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.

But today she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room—her room like a cupboard—and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

Kate Fullbrook On "Miss Brill"

If Katherine Mansfield's stories about women psychologically alone in the smart sets of London and New Zealand are painful, those written about women left outside the protective screens of men, money and class are often devastating in their emotional impact. Along with her contemporary, Jean Rhys, Katherine Mansfield has a reputation for her stories of the *femme seule*, and many of her late stories fit into this category. This sub-genre is in many ways a continuation of the nineteenth-century "governess" novel—we are close to the conventions of *Jane Eyre* here—with the change that there is no hope for a happy ending, no matter how qualified, no chance that the excluded woman will be fitted back, on any terms, into the relationships that are meant to define and enclose her life.

Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill," written in 1920, is probably her most famous sketch of a woman alone. As she explained in a letter, she worked to put the story together in terms of "a musical composition—trying to get it nearer and nearer to the expression of Miss Brill—until it fitted her." Once again, Katherine Mansfield's mature narrative method operates in the story as the writing strives to convey the experience of Miss Brill through the presentation of events in the vocabulary and cadences of her mind.

"Miss Brill" is the loneliest of all of Katherine Mansfield's stories about lonely women. It is sometimes compared with James Joyce's "Clay," but is different in tone, in its ultimate significance, and in its impression of participation in the miseries of the woman's consciousness which is portrayed. Like Joyce's little laundress, so extravagantly willing to be pleased by a world that gives her little but hard knocks, Miss Brill is eager to be part of a scene that ruthlessly excludes her. But whereas in the *Dubliners* story we are asked to pity Maria, and we are not sure of the extent to which she absorbs the humiliation we so painfully see, in "Miss Brill" the reader is more closely implicated,

both with the character and with the world, as we are made to watch the character take the full force of the transformation of her consciousness of herself from participant to exile. It is a cruel process, and Katherine Mansfield refuses to temper any detail of its typicality.

Miss Brill lives alone in France, patching together an income from scraps of English teaching and from reading the newspaper to an invalid. She keeps herself going by reining her expectations in tightly with a chirpy inconsequentiality of mind and with her conformity to a tattered notion of gentility. Her surroundings smack of the deprivation of a lone woman—a dark little room, her meagre treat of a honey-cake which she looks forward to each week as her only self-indulgence. She most significantly identifies herself with her fur-piece, a decayed thing she keeps in a box under her bed, and which represents to her all the luxury and adventure in life that she convinces herself she shares. She values, too, the sensuality and flirtatiousness of the fur, itself an emblem of the traditional man-fascinating ways out of poverty for a woman that she still obliquely believes apply to herself. But the fur, her only friend, is not what it used to be; even Miss Brill can see that.

Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes.... But the nose, which was of some black composition, wasn't at all firm.... Little rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear. (page 57)

The lonely woman feels herself as roguish as her fur as she slips out to the public concert which is her Sunday entertainment. For her, the afternoon in the park is concert and theatre combined, for she feels herself part of a complex drama as she watches the other concert-goers from her bench. She prides herself on her understanding of life and her ability to interpret strangers' affairs from a distance. But her keenest pleasure is in eavesdropping, and at first she is disappointed, as a woman starved for words, with the silent old couple sharing the bench. When a pair of young lovers replaces them she is delighted; she loves lovers, they are an unexpected treat. She sees them as the hero and heroine in a thrilling drama she directs and in which she participates. Smiling, she listens to their conversation:

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy.

"Why does she come here at all—who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting." (page 61)

Miss Brill drags herself back to "her room like a cupboard" and, without looking, puts the fur into its box. "But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying" (page 61). The extraordinary pathos of the story and of Miss Brill herself derives from the depth of the central character's courage and self-control which is nevertheless expended in acquiescence to a view of a woman's function that is bound to abase her. The story portrays a consciousness distancing itself from its own suffering isolation with a tremendous degree of pain and yet with a dignity that is in itself a kind of virtue. Miss Brill is written off as a horror by a code that condemns her on the grounds of sex, age, beauty, poverty and singleness, the same code that Miss Brill herself uses to explain her disappointment with the old couple on the bench and which now comes full circle to indict her as less than human. This is a portrait of a woman caught by the contradictions of social preconceptions that she herself has internalised. What Miss Brill stuffs into the box under the lonely bed of the *femme seule* is, according to the logic of the image, herself.

Connie Gault The Man Who Followed His Hand

PRE-READING

1. Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you felt completely disconnected from those around you? Do you remember what caused those feelings? What, if anything, did you do to actively overcome those feelings?
2. What is it that makes a story realistic? Is it the setting? The conflict? The characters? The characters' motivations? Or is it something else entirely? Give your own definition of what makes a story realistic.

About the time the guests were saying it was the nicest part of the evening, the last hour of light, the man arrived at Sandra's back yard. The guests were sitting in a circle of chairs on the lawn. The man stepped into the shade at the corner of the house and waited. Children were playing. He listened to them calling to one another as if great distances separated them. He saw their freckles and flushed cheeks and the sunburnt rims of their ears. He thought: on a summer evening when the last light runs like a river through the suburbs, the voices of children sound lonely. The children stopped their game when they saw him. The adults gradually noticed the quiet and looked up. Just then Sandra walked out of the house onto the deck.

The man knew nothing about her. He didn't know her name. She was simply a woman he'd followed home the day before, an easy enough accomplishment though she'd been in her car and he'd been on foot. She'd had to drive slowly through the neighbourhood because of the children playing on the streets. A couple of times she'd stopped while they'd pulled their goalie nets aside or wobbled ahead of her on their bikes. He'd seen her eyes through the windshield while she waited at a stop sign longer than she needed to wait. She had watched him walk down the sidewalk. He always knew when people were watching. She turned and looked again when she passed him.

Example:

Character – Miss Brill – lives in a fantasy world –
imagines she lives a glamorous life, and important part
of the lives of others

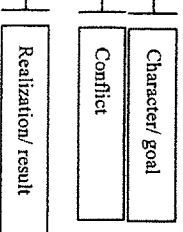
Goal – contentment, escape from isolation of her real life

Conflict/obstacle – mocked by a young couple

Realization/Resolution – sees herself as others see her,
realizes the loneliness and emptiness of her life and is
devastated.

Themes – reality vs. illusion, desire for
companionship/struggle to belong

Thesis Statement – Miss Brill lives in an imaginary
world where she experiences a sense of contentment as
she imagines herself an important part of other people's
lives. She is eventually forced to face the gloomy reality
of the life she truly lives, and her feelings of contentment
and self worth are destroyed. Controlling idea stated explicitly – allowing imagination
to blur one's reality can lead to both positive and
negative consequences



2. Create an introductory paragraph

If you have difficulty with writing an introduction, here is a simple first-paragraph template that you might find helpful.

- Write a sentence that introduces the topic and text(s) you will be using.
- Write several sentences that explain the topic and present your thesis statement, including the order of the evidence you will be supporting.

Example: Introductory Paragraph

In the short story "Miss Brill," Katherine Mansfield depicts an elderly woman who lives within a fantasy world created by her imagination. She resorts to this to escape from the isolation and loneliness of her real world, and, by so doing, her life becomes more interesting and fulfilling. In her fantasy world, she experiences a sense of contentment as she imagines herself as an important part of other people's lives and as possessing a life better than those around her. Unfortunately, her fragile world is shattered, forcing her to face the gloomy reality of the life she truly lives. Her feelings of contentment and self-worth are destroyed once she realizes the emptiness and loneliness of her real world.

Introduces the topic, imagination, and the text selected

Thesis statement - opinion with the three supports identified as:
1. She experiences a sense of contentment
2. She imagines herself an important part of others' lives.
3. Her fragile world is shattered.

✎ Explore alternative beginnings to find the one that works best for the idea that you are developing. The *first sentence* is an important sentence because it introduces the mood and tone of your writing.

3. Create your developing paragraphs

The *first support* for the thesis is the main idea of **Body Paragraph A**, the *second support* for the main idea of **Body Paragraph B** and the third support is the main idea of **Body Paragraph C**. Both follow the same pattern as **Body Paragraph A**.

Each developing paragraph contains the following elements:

- An effective introductory and topic sentence that focuses on the aspect of support for the thesis that you will be developing in this paragraph.
- Development of your supporting idea by explaining it in a few sentences. To bring power to your position, you must include concrete *evidence* from the text(s). Direct quotations are only useful if they precisely support your idea. Direct reference to events, character traits, literary symbols etc. are all considered useful evidence.
- *Explain* your interpretation of the evidence in detail. The markers will be looking for evidence of your thinking. You need to demonstrate your intellect, your thinking, and your ability to interpret literature to the marker.
- *Elaborate* by specifically, and overtly *connecting the information* in this paragraph to your *thesis*.
- A *transition sentence* must be considered. Transitions are necessary between paragraphs. They can happen at the end of paragraphs or in the introduction to a new paragraph.

Example: Developing paragraph A

Miss Brill is content and happy to live within her fantasy world; a world wonderful within her own mind. This world affords her delightful routines which, on most occasions, brings her to the Jardins Publiques where she enjoys the surroundings of nature, music, and people. On one particular Sunday afternoon, she dresses up for her outing, completing her ensemble with her fox fur piece; a piece she has had for a long time and which she is proud of. From her position on a park bench, she watches and internally comments on what she sees. Miss Brill is a keen observer of the people around her and she weaves what she sees and hears into imaginative, glamorous events. She notices an elderly gentleman in a velvet coat, and a woman with knitting in her lap. She is disappointed that they are not speaking as she had become quite expert "at listening to people's conversations, as though she wasn't listening." She turns her attention to other people and their activities around her. As she sits, she does not ponder her own solitary life as she is happy to enjoy the splendor of the day.

Topic sentence clearly identifies the first support: she experiences a sense of contentment.

Specific details from the story to demonstrate her contentment

Concluding sentence

Example: Developing Paragraph B

Ironically, as Miss Brill observes the other people— especially those occupying benches and chair—she fails to see the parallel between herself and them. She notes that Sunday after Sunday, the same people are drawn to the park and something is “funny” about all of them.

Transition and topic sentence that clearly identifies the second support: imagining herself as superior to others, and an important part of their lives

They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared, they looked as though they'd come from dark little rooms or even cupboards. She perceives these people as being different; as being “less” than what she is. As well, she does not see herself as being rejected like the violets the young woman throws away or like the woman in the ermine toque is being carelessly cast aside by the man in the suit. Even more sad is that Miss Brill, wearing her own fur piece, cannot see her own image mirrored in the woman who appears to be as shabby as the ermine toque she wears. Miss Brill, rather, imagines herself as being superior to these people; an intricate part of the stage performance that is re-enacted in the park each week. She fantasizes that her absence would be noticed if she were not present, so integral is her role. She takes delight in this fantasy and envisions telling the old gentleman to whom she reads that she is not a mere English teacher, but an actress. She is enthralled by this fantasy and feels as though she is one with all the members of the company. Her imaginary world is, indeed, fulfilling.

Support, including symbols of her rejection but she ironically does not perceive

Concluding sentence

Example: Sample Paragraph C

Despite her excitement with her imaginary world, Miss Brill overhears a conversation which completely shatters her illusions and alters her life. A boy and girl, in love, sit near her, and Miss Brill prepares to listen. The boy wishes to kiss the girl but she insists that she cannot let him because of that stupid old thing at the end there. The girl then begins to giggle at the poor soul wearing the fur that looks like a fried whiting (fish). Miss Brill is shattered when she realizes that the young couple are mocking her. She leaves the park, not bothering to stop for her ritualistic slice of honey cake, and hurries home. Once inside, she realizes how dark her room is, like a cupboard. Her world is no longer bright and splendid, but depressing and stark in reality. This reality is even more bleak when compared to the imaginary world of her fantasies. Her fur piece symbolizes the shabbiness of her life, and as she replaces it in the box, she imagines she hears something crying. Although she seeks loneliness of her life is devastating.

Transition and topic sentence that clearly identifies the third support: her fragile world is shattered.

Support, including symbolism of her dark room and fur piece.

Concluding sentence

4. Create a Concluding Paragraph

- Generalize your thesis beyond the text(s) to explicitly connect your controlling idea to the assignment topic
- *Summarize* your major points
- End with a strong sense of closure.

Example: Concluding Paragraph

In “Miss Brill,” Mansfield emphasizes both the positive and negative effects of the imagination, and what results when imagination is allowed to blur one’s view of

reality. | Initially, Miss Brill is content living within the parameters of her fantasy world. Feelings of fulfillment

Topic sentence explicitly states the controlling idea as a generalization beyond the text and connects to assignment topic.

are deepened as she perceives herself as being integral to

the “performance” and the people around her; she views her own life as being “more” than what it truly is. | When

Summary of report and significance of support.

her illusion is shattered, however, the harshness of the reality she is compelled to face is devastating. |

Thoughtful observation connected to resolution/effect on character

Alternate Way of Writing a Critical/Analytical Response

There are many ways of creating an effective critical/analytical response. The sample presented below contains the elements necessary for organizing an effective response (introduction, controlling idea, developing paragraphs, topic sentences, concluding sentences, supporting evidence and concluding paragraph) but uses a different method of development. It was written in response to the following topic:

Consider how the **pursuit of self-fulfillment** has been reflected and developed in a literary text or texts you have studied. Discuss the idea(s) developed by the text creator(s) about an **individual’s attempt to secure the satisfaction of self-fulfillment**