

“Birthday Party”
by Katharine Brush

Objective:

Students will read and analyze “Birthday Party” by Katharine Brush, identify key literary elements, and use textual evidence to support an analytical essay.

Suggested Lesson Procedure
Total instructional time: ~160 minutes

1. Read the Short Story (5 minutes)

Students should read the story silently and independently. Encourage students to annotate or underline moments they find important, confusing, or emotionally significant as they read.

2. Vocabulary Practice (10 Minutes)

After reading, students will define the provided vocabulary words from the story. Students should use context clues from the text to determine each word’s meaning and write a brief definition in their own words. Review correct definitions.

3. Reading Comprehension Questions (15 Minutes)

Students will answer the reading questions independently in complete sentences.

4. Class Review (15 Minutes)

Once students have completed the questions, review all correct answers as a class. Encourage discussion and allow students to explain their reasoning using evidence from the text.

5. Literary Analysis Chart (25 Minutes)

Place students into pairs or allow them to choose a partner. Students will work together to complete the literary analysis chart using direct quotations or paraphrased evidence from the story.

6. Analytical Essay Writing (~90 Minutes, depending on how long you give your students class time to write an essay)

Using their completed chart, students will write a five-paragraph literary analysis essay. They should use their completed charts to build their essay, choosing three of the literary elements to expand on in order to explain the author’s purpose.

Name:

Date:

“Birthday Party” By Katharine Brush
March 9, 1946

They were a couple in their late thirties, and they looked unmistakably married. They sat on the banquettes opposite us in a little narrow restaurant, having dinner. The man had a round, self-satisfied face, with glasses on it; the woman was fadingly pretty, in a big hat. There was nothing **conspicuous** about them, nothing particularly noticeable, until the end of their meal, when it suddenly became obvious that this was an Occasion—in fact, the husband’s birthday, and the wife had planned a little surprise for him.

It arrived, in the form of a small but glossy birthday cake, with one pink candle burning in the center. The headwaiter brought it in and placed it before the husband, and meanwhile the violin-and-piano orchestra played “Happy Birthday to You,” and the wife **beamed** with shy pride over her little surprise, and such few people as there were in the restaurant tried to help out with a **pattering** of applause. It became clear at once that help was needed, because the husband was not pleased. Instead, he was **hotly** embarrassed, and **indignant** at his wife for embarrassing him.

You looked at him and you saw this and you thought, “Oh, now, don’t be like that!” But he was like that, and as soon as the little cake had been deposited on the table, and the orchestra had finished the birthday piece, and the general attention had shifted from the man and the woman, I saw him say something to her under his breath—some punishing thing, quick and **curt** and unkind.

I couldn’t bear to look at the woman then, so I stared at my plate and waited for quite a long time. Not long enough, though. She was still crying when I finally glanced over there again. Crying quietly and heartbrokenly and hopelessly, all to herself, under the gay big brim of her best hat.



“Birthday Party” Vocabulary

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
conspicuous	adj	
beamed	v	
pattering	adj	
hotly	adv	
indignant	adj	
curt	adj	

Name:

Date:

**“Birthday Party”
Reading Questions**

1. What information do you learn about the couple from the first passage?



2. Why is the word “occasion” capitalized in the story?

3. What grand gesture does the wife plan?

4. How does the husband respond?

5. How does the narrator respond?

6. What is the author's purpose or message?

PREVIEW

7. What is significant about the wife's clothing?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

8. What does the title indicate, if anything?

PREVIEW

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9. How did this story make you feel? How do you think most readers feel after reading it?

PREVIEW

10. What if the man or woman were telling the story? How would the story be different?

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11. What are the chances the narrator is misjudging the situation? Explain.

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Name:

Date:

Literary Analysis Chart

For each provided literary element or device, record a specific example or quotation from the text and explain the effect the author intends it to have on the reader.

Element/Device	Example/Textual Evidence	Author's Desired Effect
Point of View		
Imagery		
Tone		
Symbolism		
Theme		
Diction (choice of words)		
Juxtaposition (Placing two things side by side with contrasting effect)		
Syntax (the arrangement of words, phrases, and sentences)		

Literary Analysis Essay: Birthday Party

In the short story “Birthday Party” by Katharine Brush, the author presents an ordinary public moment that reveals deeper emotional conflict. Brush carefully selects literary elements to shape the reader’s response and convey her message.

PROMPT: Analyze how the author uses literary elements to create an overall effect. In your response, explain how specific elements contribute to the author’s purpose and message. Support your analysis with specific evidence from the text and clear explanations of how that evidence proves your claims.

Essay Requirements:

- Introduce the full title of the story and author’s name in the introduction
- Include a clear thesis statement that addresses how literary elements contribute to the author’s purpose
- Analyze at least 3 literary elements
- Support all claims with specific evidence from the text (quoted or paraphrased)
- Explain how the evidence supports your ideas
- Organize your essay with a clear introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion
- Use formal, academic language and maintain a consistent tone
- Meet the assigned length requirement (as specified by your teacher)



Literary Analysis Response Rubric

Category	Description	Points Possible
Thesis	Presents a clear, insightful thesis that addresses the author’s purpose and demonstrates strong understanding of the text.	10
Use of Literary Elements	Effectively analyzes multiple literary elements and accurately explains how they shape meaning.	10
Evidence and Commentary	Uses well-chosen, relevant quotes or details from the text that strongly support analysis. Clearly explains how the evidence supports the thesis and connects to the author’s purpose.	10
Grammar & Conventions	The response follows standard writing conventions, including correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure, so errors do not interfere with meaning or clarity.	10
Format & Organization	Response is well organized with a clear introduction, logical progression of ideas, and a strong conclusion. Writing follows standard paragraph structure, uses complete sentences, and includes properly integrated quotations.	10

Total Points: 50