

Exercises for

Tutorial 25. Writing About Literature: Correct Verb Tense

Principle I: Use present tense when you are writing about fictional events; describing and analyzing literary elements such as character, setting or theme; or reporting your interpretations or the interpretations of other sources.

Exercise 1

Instructions: Using Principle I, write one sentence that describes something that happens in a literary work you have recently read. Then, write another sentence that says what you think the theme of that work is. Make sure you use the correct verb tense in each sentence. *Type or write in the answer boxes.*

Principle II: Use past tense when writing about historical events, the author's life, and events that occurred *before* the beginning of the story, poem or play.

Exercise 2

Instructions: Using Principle II, write one sentence that describes something that happened *before* the beginning of a literary work that you have recently read. Then write a sentence about the author's life. Make sure you use the correct verb tense in each sentence. *Type or write in the answer boxes.*

Principle III: Use present perfect when writing about an event that occurred or might have occurred *in the text* before the event you are currently describing.

Exercise 3

Instructions: Using a literary work you have recently read, write a sentence that illustrates Principle III: use present perfect when writing about an event that occurred or might have occurred *in the text* before the event you are currently describing. *Type or write in the answer boxes.*

Exercise 4

Instructions: Using Principles I, II, and III, write the correct verb before the verb in the parentheses. The first one is done for you. *Type or write in the answer spaces.*

1. *Lighthead*, Terrance Hayes' fourth volume of poetry, **won** (to win) the National Book Award. All the poems in this volume _____ (to shake) and _____ (to jive) with a loose associative whimsy. But Hayes was not simply jive-talking. The battle between darkness and light—and all their metaphorical associations— _____ (to give) the brisk, alliterative sounds a depth that makes readers want to read them twice. "A Plate of Bones," a poem about the complicated inheritance of a relative's racism, begins "My slick black muscular back- / talking uncle drawing me and a school / of fish corpses to church." As the poem _____ (to continue), and the speaker's uncle _____ (to rage) about his cousin's date with a white man, readers come across the surprising line: "I let him feed me / the anger I knew was a birthright, / a plate of bones thin enough to puncture / a lung."
2. Although Flannery O'Connor, who _____ (to die) in 1964, _____ (to be) not a member of the working class, the majority of her characters _____ (to be) rural, working-class people. In her novels and short stories, working-class people _____ (to be) happier in their station in life and also _____ (to experience) less loneliness than upper-class people.

3. In *Sula*, readers find out about several events that _____ (**to happen**) even before the beginning of the novel. For example, after her husband Boy Boy _____ (**to abandon**) their family, Eva Peace _____ (**to have**) no money and no possibility of a job. She _____ (**to leave**) her three small children with a neighbor and _____ (**to insure**) her leg for a large sum of money. She _____ (**to place**) her leg on a railroad track as a train _____ (**to approach**), to make sure that she _____ (**to have**) enough money for her children to survive. During the novel, Eva _____ (**to do**) not understand why her daughter Hannah _____ (**to need**) to be told that Eva _____ (**to love**) her. To Eva, the sacrifice of her leg shows her love for Hannah.
4. At the end of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Caraway _____ (**to reflect**) on the events that _____ (**to happen**) earlier in the novel. At this point, he _____ (**to realize**) that Tom, Daisy and Jordan are careless people.