

“The Washwoman” by Isaac Bashevis Singer
Literary Analysis: Narrative Essay

A **narrative essay** is a short piece of nonfiction in which the author tells a story about a real person or event. In a narrative essay, the author chooses to include **significant details** that help move the story forward or that help to make his or her point about the subject. For example, if Singer were writing a narrative essay about his own childhood, he would include the significant detail that his father was a Hasidic rabbi who presided over a rabbinic court. In the same essay about his childhood, however, he would not mention the fact that Anjelica Huston starred in the 1989 movie *Enemies, a Love Story*, which is based on one of Singer’s novels. That would not be a significant detail for an essay about his childhood. As you read, notice how the author’s choice of significant details influences your impressions of the people and events he or she describes.

DIRECTIONS: *Follow the directions to answer each numbered item.*

1. In no more than two or three sentences, summarize the essay’s narrative, or story.

2. Now, look back over the essay. Find two significant details that Singer includes about (a) the washwoman’s appearance, (b) what she says, and (c) what she does. Write the details exactly as Singer expresses them, enclosing the words and phrases in quotation marks.

(a) Her appearance_____

(b) What she says_____

(c) What she does_____

3. Think about why Singer wrote this essay. What main point about the washwoman do you think he makes in this essay?
