English 102
Analysis of “Refresh, Refresh,” by Benjamin Percy

Due Dates:
Sun 4/12-Mon 4/11: Thesis sentence due for Analysis #1. E-mail me your sentence by midnight, Sunday 4/10, and bring a paper copy to class to work with.
Fri 4/15: Due in writing groups. At least 2 full pages, word-processed and double-spaced. Bring 3 copies.
Mon 4/18: Revised Essay Portfolio due.

Format: Word-processed and double-spaced. The revision is in a folder which contains the following materials in this order, from top to bottom:

1. The finished, revised, wonderfully insightful and beautifully written essay.
2. The version you brought to the writing group, along with the sheet on which you recorded the writing group comments.
3. Any other notes and drafts.

Length: About 3 pages, or 750-1000 words. This is a general guideline. If your essay is very much shorter than 3 pages, your thesis might not be complex enough, or you might not have gathered enough evidence. If your essay is much longer than 3 pages, it’s likely that your sentences waste words and require editing. So yes, aim for about three pages, but beyond that, aim to discuss an interesting idea clearly and fully.

The Audience: The members of our class, including the instructor—people who are familiar with the story but might be interpreting it a different way.

The Assignment: Write an essay in which you propose an interpretation of Benjamin Percy’s story “Refresh, Refresh,” and in which you support that interpretation with evidence from and analysis of the story.

The Thesis: To develop your thesis, begin with this sentence template:

In this story about ________________, the writer shows that _____________________.

We noticed in class that we can look at the story through many different lenses, and can consider it to be about many things: It could be about boys trying to grow up; it could be about power and weakness; it could be about revenge; it could be about the effects of war on those at home; it could be about individuals seeking their place in the world, trying to learn how they fit into the larger society. The story may also be about other things that our discussion didn’t have a chance to discover.
To begin your thesis sentence, then, you’d choose which of these angles you’d like to analyze:

In this story about individuals seeking their place in the world, the writer shows ____.

It’s difficult to fill in the second part of the sentence until after you’ve had a chance to explore the story further, looking at all the places where that topic is addressed, finding many examples, and thinking what they mean. But after you’ve collected the important passages that relate to this topic, and thought about what they imply, you might be ready to finish your thesis sentence, for example:

In this story about individuals seeking their place in the world, the writer shows that a person’s ambitions might be limited by the role models that surround him.

Do you need to use this exact form for your thesis? Yes, in your early drafts. It is possible that by the time you get to your revision, the shape of the thesis will have changed.

But doesn’t this thesis give a limited view of the story? Each of our papers will travel one path through the story, looking at it according to one idea. You’ll be looking at how every single part of the story contributes to or says something about this one idea. But our whole class’s collection of essays, each one looking at the story in a different way, will add up to a very rich, full perspective.

Essay Structure

Title and Opening Paragraph: Aim for a vivid, compelling beginning. The first paragraph (perhaps in combination with the essay title) will also name the story and the author, and will point out an intriguing problem or question in the story, which will lead to your thesis sentence at the end of the paragraph.

2nd paragraph: Use PIE (Point, Illustration, Explanation): The paragraph begins with a topic sentence which is connected to an aspect of the thesis, and which says what point the paragraph wants to make. The paragraph goes on, using quotations and paraphrases from the text to illustrate the point, and explaining for the reader exactly how those illustrations relate to that point.

The paragraph should contain a balance of quotation, paraphrase, and your own thinking, and should take care to explain your reasoning. You’ll explain how you are interpreting a particular quotation or example from the text, showing how it feeds into your point or thesis. In other words, quotations do not stand alone, they need your explanations and reasoning too.

3rd and following paragraphs: These take the same pattern as paragraph 2. Make sure that the opening sentence of the paragraph connects to the idea in the previous paragraph before it introduces its new topic sentence. Write as many paragraphs as you need to explore all the aspects of the story that relate to your interpretation. Be sure also
to look at the parts of the story that don’t at first seem to relate, or that seem to contradict your thesis. How can you account for this?

**Meeting counterarguments:** It’s hard to say whether your essay will be doing this within each paragraph, as each point comes up, or all at once. However, do make sure that your essay addresses arguments with your interpretations. When we meet in groups to go over the early version, we’ll practice arguing with your paper so that you’ll have more ideas about what kinds of objections your paper should meet.

**Final Paragraph:** Closes the essay. Perhaps it concludes something about the thesis, emphasizes an idea, suggests how the idea can go further, explores implications. It may show how the thesis has evolved from its first iteration early in the essay through its explorations and perambulations throughout. You might use the ending to think about how the story relates to the larger world, or about what you might do or think differently now that you’ve studied the story. You may use the ending to tell your readers your opinion of the story, which up to this point your essay has refrained from mentioning. Whatever it does, the ending gives the reader a sense of closure, a sense that the entire essay has taken us somewhere and taught us something.

**MLA Documentation and Sources:**
This essay uses MLA parenthetical citations and correct formatting of quotations and paraphrases. It is based on one text, the story “Refresh, Refresh,” and you’ll include a Works Cited page with the citation for this story, which we’ll develop in class. Write the citation as if you got the story from the original book, a short-story collection by Benjamin Percy called *Refresh, Refresh*, which was published in 2007.

**Can you use other sources?** Yes, but be careful. It is possible your essay will refer to other sources: For example, if your essay refers to a specific fact or news item about the time period of the story, you’ll need to include a parenthetical citation when you mention that fact, and a Works Cited page for that source. But it is not necessary to use more than one source, and padding your essay with information from other sources is likely to hurt your grade and detract from your analysis.

**How many quotations should you use?** Every paragraph is very likely to include a quotation or a paraphrase to help illustrate your point. However, avoid making your essay just a string of quotes. The bulk of your essay will be your own reflection and analysis of meaning. Be especially careful not to use too many long quotes (longer than three types lines of text): for a short essay such as this, there is room for no more than one, or possibly none. Use just the portions of quotation that you need to make your point, and practice integrating these clearly and gracefully into your sentences.

**Can the essay include your opinion?** That depends on what you mean by “opinion.” The entire essay is *your* exploration of a particular way of looking at the story. Your analysis will develop as you look at the details of the story and think about them. In that way, your analysis can be said to be your opinion: You’ve examined something, thought about it, presented examples, and come to some conclusions.
However, this analysis should not evaluate the story or give your opinion about whether the story is good or bad or whether it achieves its goal poorly or well. Avoid using phrases like “The author effectively makes his point by…”; the word “effectively” is an evaluative word. Similarly, don’t say “The author does a great job showing that…”; this essay is more concerned with how a point is made and what the point is.

Also, avoid saying “In my opinion, the author was trying to show…,” or “I believe this means that…”: If you cross out the “In my opinion” and the “I believe,” you’ll have much stronger sentences. Because you are the author of the essay, we will know that everything in it is the product of your thought processes.

Think twice before including the following in your essay:

**Biographical information:** Many writers are tempted to make their essays longer by including biographical information about the author. Though it is usually very helpful for your brainstorming and early drafting stages to find out something about the author, this information is not necessarily relevant to the specific ideas in your finished paper. Include only that information which provides specific insight into the poem’s meaning.

**Dictionary definitions:** Literature sometimes uses words differently from ordinary daily language: All the meanings of a word are brought into play. Denotation, connotation, and all the meanings the word has had over time—the writer uses all of these to evoke feelings and ideas. As you develop your ideas, you might be looking up many words to see what insight you can However, just because you looked it up does not mean that the definition belongs in your essay. Include dictionary definitions *only* when they contribute to your thesis, and when they *add* to what is commonly known about the word, presenting an unusual meaning or an idea about the word’s history and past usage that is relevant.

**Tips for Writing about Literature:**
1. Make sure that the work’s title and author are mentioned in the first paragraph.
2. After the first mention, refer to the author by last name.
3. Write in the present tense:
   Benjamin Percy *suggests* that these young men do not have much hope that their lives could be better than their fathers’ lives.

**Grading:** 100 points total

1. **Thesis** (16 points): The essay has a clear and meaningful thesis, complex enough to require discussion, to which everything in the essay pertains.
2. **Example and evidence** (16 points): The thesis is illustrated with vivid and plentiful illustration and evidence, and there’s plenty of explanation and analysis
to show how the writer is interpreting the evidence and connecting it to the thesis. The essay brings in counterarguments and discusses them meaningfully.

3. **Organization** (16 points): The essay follows the assigned structure. The opening is immediate, the paragraphs are organized (PIE) so that each develops the point made in its topic sentence. Each paragraph develops an aspect of the thesis. The paragraphs within the essay all relate to the whole, and follow logically from one to another. The conclusion is meaningful, and avoids repeating the beginning.

4. **Style and Voice** (16 points): The writing should be clear and fluid. Verbs should be strong and active. Word choice should be accurate and specific, and the words should be used correctly. Clutter and wordiness have been eliminated.

5. **MLA documentation and mechanics of quotation** (16 points): The essay correctly uses the MLA system, including in-text citations and a works cited page, and all quotation, paraphrase, and summary from sources is formatted correctly.

6. **Grammar and proofreading** (20 points): Grammar and spelling should be standard and correct.