The essay assignment:

Using both the scene on pg. 43, where Annie swims with her mother on pages, and the description of Columbus in chains on pages 76 - 78, write an essay about the theme of Annie's coming of age, or individuation. Discuss how Kincaid uses symbolism to develop the theme of coming of age.

Outline:

-Intro w thesis

-Body paragraph 1 (Swimming)

-Body paragraph 2 (Columbus)

-Body paragraph 3 (connection between the two scenes)

-Conclusion: Answer to thesis

Sample Intro using Brownie and Snake scenes

Symbols: Snake – treachery

Dark object - fear

*Annie John is coming of age; she is growing up. The novel, Annie John, captures this teenage girl’s struggle to become herself in spite of her tight bond to her mother and her difficulty accepting the world as it is. The theme of coming of age is reflected in many scenes throughout the novel. Two such scenes are when Annie’s mother tells a story of walking home with a basket on her head that contained a long black snake and when Annie falls ill and has a dream of herself as a tiny Brownie. The symbolism in these two scenes reflects the theme of coming of age as an individual separate from one’s parent.*

*Though the story of the snake is told by her mother to evoke sympathy, which it does, it also evokes Annie’s sense of her mother’s treachery. So, the snake is symbolic of an unwanted burden being carried by one generation to be retold to the next as a way of manipulating them to behave properly. When Annie’s mother finishes the story, Annie is prepared to give up the marbles, until her mother asks for them, revealing her emotional treachery and Annie’s sense of betrayal. Similarly, when she falls ill later in her coming of age, Annie reflects the fear of emotional treachery in her girl scout fever dream.*

*Annie’s description of herself as a “toy Brownie” in a dream she has during her illness uses symbolism to reflect Annie’s growth from a young girl who accepts the world as it is to a young woman who questions what she has been taught by her parents and in school. One key symbol in the passage that shows this change in her is the flag to which the Brownies salute to begin and end each meeting. The flag is an important symbol because it is the emblem of the British Empire, to which Antigua was subject. Reflective of Annie’s growing consciousness, she points out the absurdity of saluting the flag of the colonizer. In showing the girls gathered around the flag, she makes it clear that she no longer understands the rituals to which she adhered. It is as if she is reliving her life through a lens which makes everything muddy. It is fitting that she ends the passage looking down at herself as she sleeps. Using the object of the flag, like the picture of Columbus, Kincaid is able to present a symbol to subtly point out the dual nature of life for Annie growing up in Antigua. One the one hand she is subject to British traditions, like her scout troop, and on the other, she is the descendant of African slaves. This duality of the colonizer and colonized is shown throughout the novel. As Annie comes of age, she becomes conscious of the hypocrisy of the symbols she is made to salute to. Though, like the “black thing” inside her, she feels their weight.*

*In her illness, Annie John dreams that she is a tiny brownie. At the start of the dream, the “black thing” Annie describes as being inside of her breaks off into a shred of light in which she sees herself as a helpless child (114). The dark object she imagines inside herself symbolizes Annie’s breaking away from the past in order to become an individual. With this dream sequence, the black ball inside her becomes a symbol. As described earlier in the book, it was “as big as a thimble, though it weighed worlds” (86). It is the sum of all her greatest fears: that she will lose herself in trying to live up to her mother’s ideals, and that she will lose her mother in trying to develop her own ideals. Throughout the novel, this black object appears to symbolize this conflict.*

*The snake and the dark object each symbolize different parts of Annie’s struggle to grow up. It is a struggle we all have. The fear outside is the fear inside. That is, Annie’s fear of harm coming to her mother from outside and the subsequent treachery and the darkness that sits so heavily within her both contribute to her leaving her home to find one of her own. This may be the most human of all journeys. We leave one family to start another, like sea turtles headed for a new beach. We still have our baggage, but we are lighter without the strings to our parents.*

Outline for paragraph using one symbol

* Set-up of scene
* Argument about symbol
* Evidence from text

Example 2:

*In her illness, Annie John dreams that she is a tiny brownie. At the start of the dream, the “black thing” Annie describes as being inside of her breaks off into a shred of light in which she sees herself as a helpless child (114). The dark object she imagines inside herself symbolizes Annie’s breaking away from the past in order to become an individual. With this dream sequence, the black ball inside her becomes a symbol. As described earlier in the book, it was “as big as a thimble, though it weighed worlds” (86). It is the sum of all her greatest fears: that she will lose herself in trying to live up to her mother’s ideals, and that she will lose her mother in trying to develop her own ideals. Throughout the novel, this black object appears to reflect this conflict.*

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