



# THE ARCH METHOD

- **for Analyzing AP Passages**

- **Originated by Margaret Lee, Woodward Academy, GA**
- **Adapted by V. Stevenson, reprinted: 5/11/2019**
- **AP English Language and Literature**
- **Patrick Henry High School, San Diego, CA**



Read the prompt and passage once to get the gist.

Gist: “the substance or essence of a speech or text.”

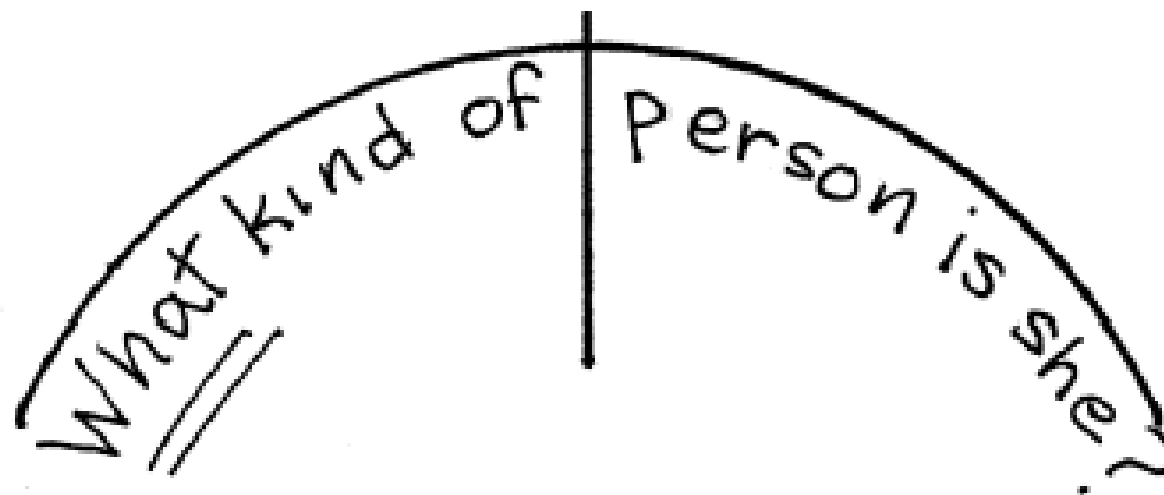
Try to hear the voice of the speaker and get a sense of the personality of the individual who wrote this piece and the circumstances under which he or she wrote it, but withhold judgment for now.

## Study the prompt closely.

What is the overarching issue you are asked to address? Does it have more than one aspect to which you must respond?

- Draw an arch. Write the issue(s) you must address below the arch.
- It is often helpful to begin this with the word “what” and form a question you will address in your thesis. You should now understand your writing task.

The passage below is from an autobiography. After reading the passage carefully, write an essay analyzing how the author uses juxtaposition of ideas, choice of details, and other aspects of style to reveal the kind of person she is.



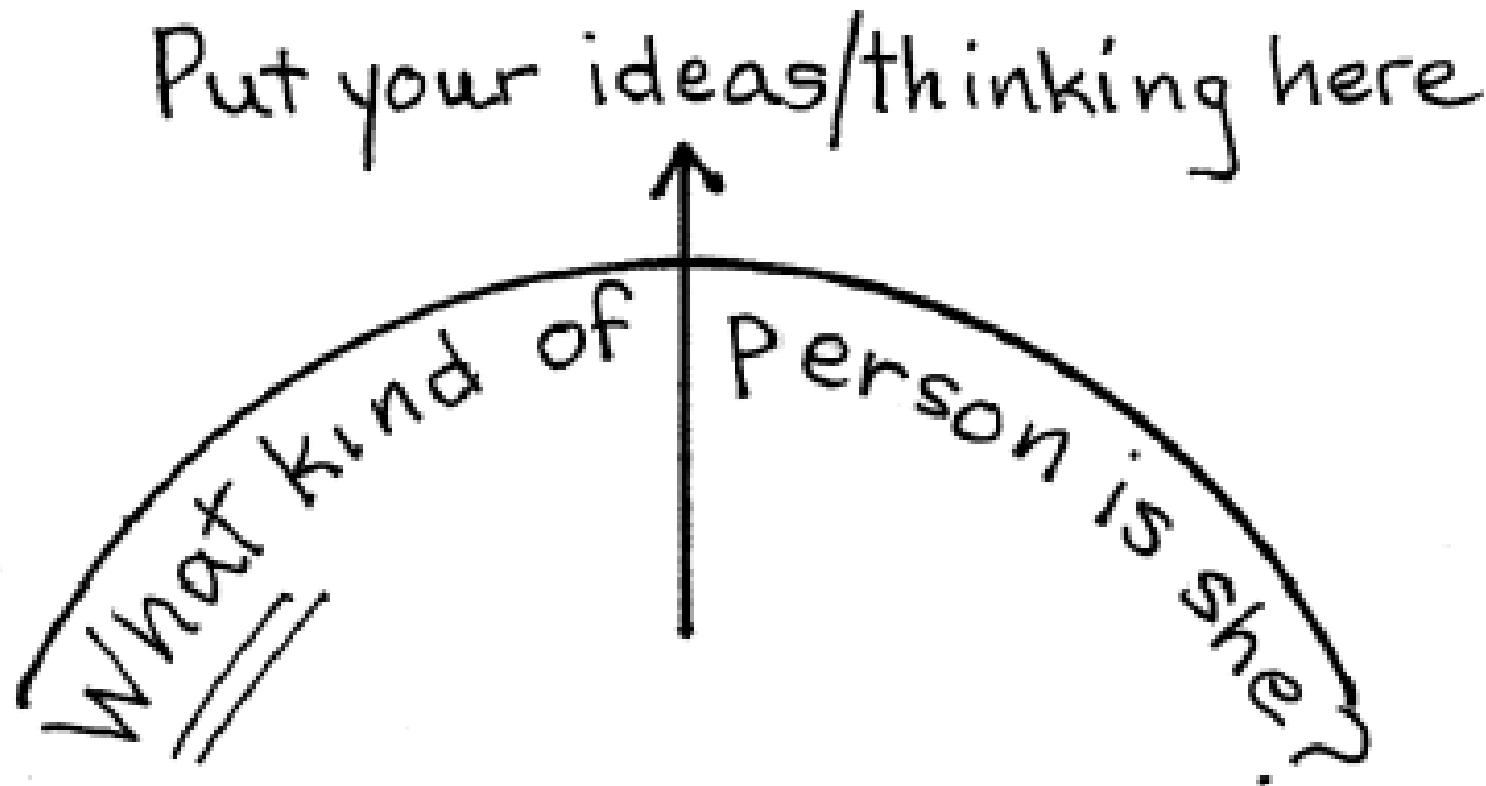



Read the  
passage again.

- As you move through the passage, **mark it and make notes** in the margins about both the specific uses of rhetorical strategies and style devices (the “how”) while continuing to keep the overarching issue (the “what”) in mind. It is not a rule or a requirement, but a reasonable goal to aim for is to make at least three observations about the overarching issue and identify at least five strategies or devices. More is better.



Write your original response to the overarching issue above the arch.  
This step will require critical thinking on your part. There is never just one right way to do this.



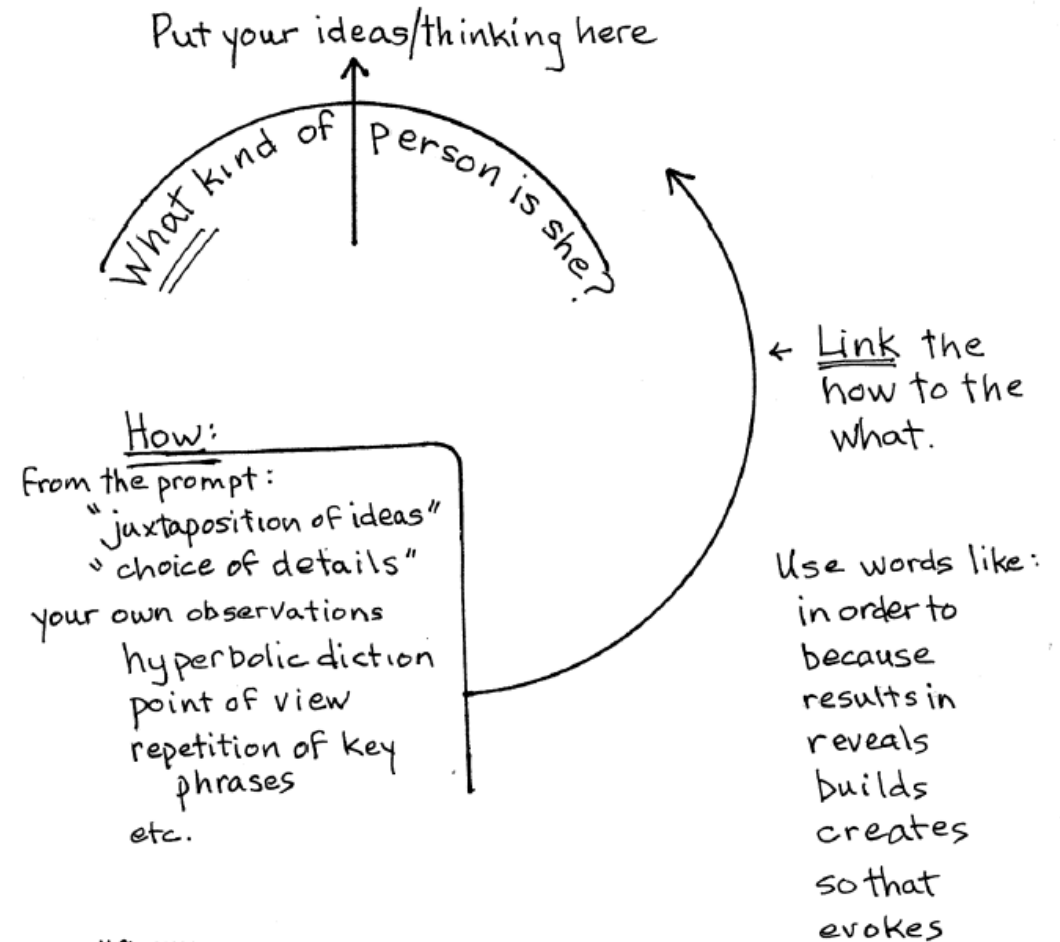


**Craft a bold 2 to 3-  
sentence introduction in  
which you answer the over-  
arching question.**

Do this in such a way that lets the reader know that your essay is well focused on the task at hand. Draft the introduction on the prompt or scratch paper, fine-tune it, and then rewrite it as the beginning of your essay.

Move through the piece chronologically as you discuss the specific strategies and devices that support your original response to the overarching issue (your thesis).

This is often referred to as an “organic” organization. Always be sure you are linking your observations and identifications of strategies and devices to your thesis. Do not write a perfunctory five-paragraph essay.





# End your paper on a strong final note.

Think “closure” not “conclusion.” Do not summarize or restate what you have already said in a formulaic way that repeats the opening. You might re-assert a main point if you add something new to it.

**SPECIAL TIP:** Commenting on the way a passage ends (its final sentences or paragraph) can often bring your own paper to a natural close.