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ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

PROMPT TO STUDENTS

1. Ambiguity and the Ending: The ending of *Passing* by Nella Larsen is intentionally ambiguous, leaving readers to interpret the events and their implications.

Write an essay analyzing how Larsen uses ambiguity in the novel's conclusion to underscore topics of trust, betrayal, and identity. How do Irene's actions and thoughts leading up to Clare's death influence your interpretation of the ending? Use specific examples from the text to support your analysis.

STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

STUDENT 1

STUDENT SUBMISSION (16495)

In *Passing* by Nella Larsen, the ambiguous ending underscores themes of trust, betrayal, and identity by leaving Clare's death open to interpretation. Irene's inner turmoil and obsessive jealousy reveal her struggle with her identity and relationships, culminating in an ending that challenges readers to question her role in Clare's fall.

Larsen uses Irene's growing distrust of Clare to explore the fragility of trust within relationships. Throughout the novel, Irene becomes increasingly paranoid about Clare's intentions, particularly regarding her husband, Brian. Irene's suspicion is evident when she thinks, "She was beginning to believe... that Clare Kendry had more than one motive for her frequent visits to their house." This doubt not only fractures Irene's trust in Clare but also highlights her insecurities and the fragility of her identity as a wife and mother. The ambiguity of Irene's intentions during Clare's fall reflects her inability to confront these insecurities directly.

The theme of betrayal is central to Irene's actions and thoughts, shaping readers' interpretation of the ending. Irene feels betrayed not only by Clare but also by Brian, whom she suspects of having an affair. Her internal conflict is evident when she imagines confronting them but chooses to suppress her emotions instead: "She had only to turn her head and look back to see the truth." Irene's failure to address this perceived betrayal openly adds tension to the ambiguous ending, suggesting her possible complicity in Clare's death as an act of desperation or rage.

Finally, Irene's complex identity as a Black woman navigating race and class plays a key role in her reaction to Clare. Clare's passing and her bold intrusion into white spaces unsettle Irene, who values stability and conformity. This conflict is epitomized in Irene's thought, "She wished to find out about this hazardous business of 'passing.'" By leaving Clare's death unresolved, Larsen forces readers to consider whether Irene's actions were driven by jealousy, fear of exposure, or a subconscious desire to eliminate Clare. This ambiguity underscores the larger societal pressures shaping Irene's identity and relationships.

Larsen's use of ambiguity in the novel's conclusion masterfully highlights the complex interplay of trust, betrayal, and identity. Through Irene's conflicted thoughts and actions, readers are left questioning the true nature of Clare's death and the deeper implications of Irene's insecurities, making the ending a powerful reflection of the novel's central themes.

FEEDBACK (16495)**## Criteria Evaluation****### Thesis Statement****#### Strengths:**

Your thesis statement clearly presents an insightful and defensible interpretation of the novel. By stating, "Irene's inner turmoil and obsessive jealousy reveal her struggle with her identity and relationships, culminating in an ending that challenges readers to question her role in Clare's fall," you effectively set the stage for analyzing how Larsen uses ambiguity to highlight themes of trust, betrayal, and identity. This thesis connects to the greater meaning of the work and effectively guides your essay.

Areas for Improvement:

Your thesis is strong and meets all the requirements. No significant improvements are needed in this area.

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ Mentioned the title and the author of the work in the introduction paragraph
- ✓ Thesis statement is the last sentence of the introduction paragraph
- ✓ Thesis clearly presents an insightful and defensible interpretation of the work
- ✓ Thesis makes a connection to the meaning of the work as a whole
- ✓ Well-written and effectively guides the essay

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: ****Meets Standard****

Body Paragraphs with Topic Sentences (with Arguable Claims), Evidence, and Analysis**#### Strengths:**

Each of your body paragraphs begins with a clear and arguable topic sentence that directly relates to your thesis. For instance, you write, "Larsen uses Irene's growing distrust of Clare to explore the fragility of trust within relationships," which effectively introduces the focus of that paragraph. Your inclusion of relevant and specific evidence, such as Irene's suspicion when she thinks, "She was beginning to believe... that Clare Kendry had more than one motive for her frequent visits to their house," strengthens your argument. Your analysis is thorough and insightful, demonstrating how the evidence supports your interpretation and connecting to the novel's larger themes.

Areas for Improvement:

To deepen your analysis further, consider exploring how Irene's struggle with her identity reflects the broader societal pressures of race and class during the Harlem Renaissance. Expanding on how these external factors influence her actions could provide additional depth to your interpretation.

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ Each body paragraph begins with a clear and arguable topic sentence that directly relates to the thesis statement
- ✓ Each paragraph includes relevant and specific evidence from the text
- ✓ Each paragraph includes thorough and insightful analysis that shows how the evidence supports the interpretation
- ✓ The response addresses the interpretation of the selected work as a whole (connects to some greater meaning of the work, a theme, etc.)

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: **Meets Standard**

Proofread Essay (Made Corrections to Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar)

Strengths:

Your essay is well-proofread, with minimal errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The clarity and precision of your writing enhance the effectiveness of your analysis.

Areas for Improvement:

You mention the reader in your essay, as seen in phrases like "challenges readers to question her role in Clare's fall" and "readers are left questioning the true nature of Clare's death." In formal literary analysis, it's advisable to avoid directly referencing the reader. Instead, focus on the text itself. You might rephrase these points by saying, "This challenges the interpretation of Irene's role in Clare's fall," or "The ambiguity leaves the true nature of Clare's death open to interpretation."

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ 1-2 uncorrected errors
- ✓ Did not use personal pronouns "I" or "we"
- ✗ Avoided mentioning the reader (Note: While this is noted, it does not affect your rating; just be mindful in future essays.)

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: **Meets Standard**

Passing Sample Essay Run

ELA

Grade 12th

Overall Rating:

Rating: **Meets Standard**

STUDENT 2

STUDENT SUBMISSION (16496)

The ending of *Passing* by Nella Larsen uses ambiguity to show how themes of trust, betrayal, and identity are important in Irene's relationship with Clare and how they affect her actions at the end.

Trust is a major issue in Irene's relationship with Clare. Irene grows increasingly suspicious of Clare's motives, especially regarding her interactions with Brian. For example, Irene thinks, "What if Clare should, after all, marry Brian?" Although this thought is more of a worry than a fact, it shows that Irene's trust in Clare is breaking down. The ending makes readers wonder if Irene acted out of this mistrust when Clare fell to her death.

Betrayal is another important theme in the novel. Irene feels betrayed by Clare, whom she suspects of having an affair with Brian. This feeling makes Irene question everything about Clare's intentions, even though she has no proof. At one point, Irene thinks about whether Clare might be intentionally trying to hurt her. This makes the ending unclear because Irene's feelings of betrayal might have influenced her actions.

The theme of identity is also shown in Irene's reactions to Clare. Clare's decision to pass for white makes Irene uncomfortable because it is very different from how she sees herself. Irene wonders about Clare's choices and whether they are dangerous for her family. The ambiguity at the end leaves it unclear whether Irene's feelings about Clare's identity played a role in what happened.

The ending of *Passing* is ambiguous because it leaves questions about Irene's actions unanswered. This shows how themes like trust, betrayal, and identity are connected to Irene's relationship with Clare and how they affect the story's conclusion.

FEEDBACK (16496)**## Criteria Evaluation****### Thesis Statement****#### Strengths:**

Your thesis statement effectively introduces the novel and the author: **"The ending of *Passing* by Nella Larsen uses ambiguity to show how themes of trust, betrayal, and identity are important in Irene's relationship with Clare and how they affect her actions at the end."** This presents a clear focus for your essay and demonstrates your understanding of key themes in the novel.

Areas for Improvement:

While your thesis is clear and presents a defensible interpretation, connecting it to the greater meaning of the work would strengthen your argument. To elevate your thesis to meet the highest standard, consider how these themes reflect broader societal issues of race and identity that Larsen addresses. For example, you might revise your thesis to: **"In *Passing*, Nella Larsen employs an ambiguous ending to highlight how trust, betrayal, and identity not only affect Irene and Clare's relationship but also critique the complex dynamics of racial passing and its impact on personal and societal identity."** This ties your analysis to the novel's exploration of racial identity and societal expectations.

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ Mentions the title and the author of the work in the introduction paragraph
- ✓ Presents a defensible interpretation
- ✗ Makes a connection to the meaning of the work as a whole
- ✓ Is clear and adequately guides the essay

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: **Approaching Standard**

Body Paragraphs with Topic Sentences (with Arguable Claims), Evidence, and Analysis**#### Strengths:**

You've structured your essay well, with each paragraph beginning with a topic sentence that relates to a theme. For instance, **"Trust is a major issue in Irene's relationship with Clare."** You include specific evidence, such as Irene's thought: **"What if Clare should, after all, marry Brian?"** Your analysis connects this evidence to Irene's mistrust, showing how it influences her perceptions.

Areas for Improvement:

To fully meet the standard, your topic sentences should make arguable claims that not only relate to

your thesis but also reflect on the broader themes of the work. Deepening your analysis will enhance your essay. For example, when discussing betrayal, you might explore how Irene's suspicions of Clare and Brian's relationship underscore the internalized anxieties caused by rigid societal norms and racial constructs. Instead of saying, **"This feeling makes Irene question everything about Clare's intentions, even though she has no proof,"** you could expand: **"Irene's sense of betrayal illuminates the psychological toll of living within oppressive social structures, where trust is undermined by the pressures of racial identity and societal expectations."** This adds depth by connecting personal experiences to larger societal themes.

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ Most body paragraphs begin with clear topic sentences that relate to the thesis
- ✓ Includes relevant and specific evidence from the text
- ✗ Topic sentences make arguable claims that directly relate to the thesis and connect to greater meaning of the work
- ✗ Analysis thoroughly and insightfully shows how the evidence supports the interpretation and connects to the greater meaning of the work

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: ****Approaching Standard****

Proofread Essay (Made Corrections to Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar)

Strengths:

Your essay is well-written, with minimal grammatical or spelling errors. The clarity of your writing helps convey your ideas effectively.

Areas for Improvement:

There are a few minor issues to address. In your second paragraph, you mention, **"Although this thought is more of a worry than a fact, it shows that Irene's trust in Clare is breaking down."** Consider rephrasing for clarity: **"Although unfounded, this thought reveals the erosion of Irene's trust in Clare."** Also, be mindful of not mentioning the reader directly in academic essays. For example, instead of **"The ending makes readers wonder if Irene acted out of this mistrust when Clare fell to her death,"** you could rephrase it to maintain a formal tone: **"The ambiguous ending raises questions about whether Irene acted out of mistrust when Clare fell to her death."**

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ Contains 1-2 uncorrected errors
- ✓ Does not mention the reader or use personal pronouns

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: ****Meets Standard****

Overall Rating:

Rating: **Approaching Standard**

STUDENT 3

STUDENT SUBMISSION (16497)

The ending of *Passing* by Nella Larsen is unclear, but it shows that trust, betrayal, and identity are important themes in the novel.

Irene has trouble trusting Clare, which is shown in the book. Irene thinks Clare might want to ruin her life, which is why they don't get along. For example, Irene feels worried when Clare talks to Brian a lot. This shows how trust is a theme in the story.

Betrayal is another theme in the story. Irene thinks Clare betrayed her by being too close to Brian. This makes Irene feel bad. When Clare dies at the end, it is possible Irene acted out of anger, but the author doesn't say for sure.

Identity is also important in the novel. Clare passes for white, which makes Irene uncomfortable. Irene thinks Clare's choices are wrong and dangerous. This is another reason Irene might feel angry at Clare.

The ending of *Passing* is not clear, but it shows themes like trust, betrayal, and identity. The book doesn't say exactly what happened, so readers have to figure it out themselves.

FEEDBACK (16497)**## Criteria Evaluation****### Criterion 1: Thesis Statement****#### Strengths:**

You mention both the title and the author in your introduction: "The ending of *Passing* by Nella Larsen is unclear, but it shows that trust, betrayal, and identity are important themes in the novel." Your thesis presents a defensible interpretation by highlighting key themes.

Areas for Improvement:

While you've identified important themes, your thesis could be more insightful and make a stronger connection to the overall meaning of the work. Currently, it states that the ending is unclear and mentions themes but doesn't delve into how the ambiguity underscores those themes or the implications for the characters.

Consider refining your thesis to present a more specific and arguable claim that connects Irene's actions and thoughts to the ambiguous ending. For example:

"In *Passing*, Nella Larsen employs an ambiguous conclusion to highlight how Irene's mounting mistrust and perception of betrayal intensify her internal identity struggles, ultimately reflecting the complexities of racial and personal identity in the face of societal pressures."

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

- ✓ Mentioned the title and the author of the work in the introduction paragraph.
- X The thesis statement clearly presents an insightful and defensible interpretation of the work.
- X The thesis makes a connection to the meaning of the work as a whole.
- X It is well-written and effectively guides the essay.

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: ****Approaching Standard****

Criterion 2: Body Paragraphs with Topic Sentences, Evidence, and Analysis**#### Strengths:**

You've addressed key themes and provided relevant examples, such as:

- "Irene feels worried when Clare talks to Brian a lot."
- "Irene thinks Clare betrayed her by being too close to Brian."

These demonstrate your understanding of the text and its significant moments relating to trust and betrayal.

Areas for Improvement:

Your topic sentences are statements of themes rather than arguable claims directly tied to your thesis. For instance, "Betrayal is another theme in the story." To strengthen them, try framing each topic sentence as an arguable point that advances your thesis. For example:

"Irene's perception of Clare's betrayal intensifies her internal conflict, contributing to the novel's ambiguous ending."

Additionally, while you've provided evidence, the analysis could be more thorough. Instead of stating, "This makes Irene feel bad," delve deeper into how this feeling influences her actions and contributes to the themes. Connect the evidence back to the ambiguity of the ending and the broader implications for the characters' identities.

For example:

"When Irene observes Clare's closeness with Brian, her escalating jealousy and fear of betrayal not only strain their relationship but also blur the lines between reality and her suspicions, underscoring the novel's exploration of identity and trust."

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

X Each body paragraph begins with a clear and arguable topic sentence that directly relates to the thesis statement.

✓ Each paragraph includes relevant and specific evidence from the text.

X Followed by thorough and insightful analysis that shows how the evidence supports the interpretation.

X The response addresses the interpretation of the selected work as a whole (must connect to some greater meaning of the work, a theme, etc.).

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: **Below Standard**

Criterion 3: Proofread Essay (Made Corrections to Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar)

Strengths:

Your essay is generally free of spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors, indicating careful proofreading.

Areas for Improvement:

At the end, you mention the reader: "The book doesn't say exactly what happened, so readers have to figure it out themselves." In formal academic writing, it's best to avoid addressing the reader directly. Consider rephrasing it to maintain an objective tone:

"The book doesn't specify exactly what happened, leaving the interpretation open to analysis."

Rubric Requirements Checklist:

✓ 1-2 uncorrected errors.

Criteria Scoring:

Rating: ****Meets Standard****

Overall Rating:

Rating: ****Approaching Standard****