Analyzing a Key Passage

**Directions:** The following key passage is excerpted from Book the First, Chapter 4 “The Preparation,” pages 25-6. Read the passage. After you read, return to annotate the passage and share your analysis. Use the hints on the back of this sheet to help you find ways of finding meaning in this key passage.

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<tr>
<th>Key Passage</th>
<th>Annotations</th>
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<td>The gentleman from Tellson’s had nothing left for it but to empty his glass with an air of stolid desperation, settle his odd little flaxen wig at the ears, and follow the waiter to Miss Manette’s apartment. It was a large, dark room, furnished in a funereal manner with black horsehair, and loaded with heavy dark tables. These had been oiled and oiled, until the two tall candles on the table in the middle of the room were gloomily reflected on every leaf; as if they were buried, in deep graves of black mahogany, and no light to speak of could be expected from them until they were dug out.</td>
<td>Mr. Lorry downs his alcohol because he is nervous to meet with Miss Manette. Setting/imagery – Miss Manette’s room is dark, furnished in black furniture polished so much that the light from the two candlesticks shines off of every surface. Simile – They figuratively are meeting in a crypt or grave. The news Mr. Lorry has must be serious, heavy, and secretive. Will revealing this news dig them both out? It is so dark in the room that Lorry cannot see Miss Manette at first. Motif of darkness vs. light repeated.</td>
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<td>The obscurity was so difficult to penetrate that Mr. Lorry, picking his way over the well-worn Turkey carpet, supposed Miss Manette to be, for the moment, in some adjacent room, until, having got past the two tall candles, he saw standing to receive him by the table between them and the fire, a young lady of not more than seventeen, in a riding-cloak, and still holding her straw travelling-hat by its ribbon in her hand. As his eyes rested on a short, slight, pretty figure, a quantity of golden hair, a pair of blue eyes that met his own with an inquiring look, and a forehead with a singular capacity (remembering how young and smooth it was), of rifting and knitting itself into an expression that was not quite one of perplexity, or wonder, or alarm, or merely of a bright fixed attention, though it included all the four expressions – as his eyes rested on these things, a sudden vivid likeness passed before him, of a child whom he had held in his arms on the passage across that very Channel, one cold time, when the hail drifted heavily and the sea ran high. The likeness passed away, like a breath along the surface of the gaunt pier-glass behind her, on the frame of which, a hospital procession of Negro cupids, several headless and all cripples, were offering black baskets of Dead Sea fruit to black divinities of the feminine gender – and he made his formal bow to Miss Manette.</td>
<td>Characterization – Miss Manette is 17, young, and has just arrived at the inn. She is small and beautiful. She has golden hair and blue eyes = angelic in appearance. Symbolism – Miss Manette is a light in the darkness. Her face is expressive = she is one who is genuine in her emotions and feels deeply. Relationship – This is a reunion! Lorry brought Miss Manette from France to England when she was a baby. It was stormy when this happened = dramatic event brought them together (then and now). Symbolism – She is standing in front of a mirror, and little black angels are carved in the ornate wooden frame around it. The fruit is a gift, an important one. The Dead Sea is in the Holy Land. It is as if the crippled angels are showering Miss Manette with gifts in hopes she will pity and heal. There is a purity and goodness about her. Again, reinforcement of the angelic concept. Purity, innocence.</td>
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*Tone – Grave, but there is a release of this heaviness when Miss Manette appears, as if she drives darkness away.*
Imagery and Setting
Oftentimes, the language that paints vivid pictures and triggers our senses goes beyond mere aesthetic pleasure. Consider:

- What location is the author describing? What aspects of the location does the author focus on most? Why might the author emphasize these aspects?
- Where is this passage set? What activities usually occur in this setting? Is this setting appropriate for the event that is occurring in this passage? Why did the author choose this setting?

Symbolism
Authors choose specific objects or colors with meaning that goes beyond the literal. Consider:

- What color does the author emphasize? Why did the author choose this specific color? What emotional qualities are associated with it?

Motif
When an author chooses to repeatedly mention an image, word, phrase, concept, or action, there is significance behind the repetition. Consider:

- What is being repeated in this passage? What deeper meaning might this repeated subject hold?
- Types of motifs: light and dark, violence, a specific color, seasons, life and death, flowers, resurrection, change and tradition, etc.

Theme
Authors focus their work around a major idea that impacts the reader’s view of people, life, and the world in general. Consider:

- What is the main idea of this passage? Is this idea more than an idea; is it a universal truth or a significant statement about society, human nature, or the human condition? Can the main idea of this passage be applied to the rest of the work as a whole? If so, how?

Mood and Tone
A piece of writing may be intended to trigger a specific emotional response in the reader. Always, writing reflects the feelings a writer has toward a specific topic. Consider:

- What emotion does this passage make the reader feel? Why does the author want the reader to feel this emotion from this passage?
- What attitude does the author have toward the topic discussed in this passage? Why does the author feel this way about the topic he or she is discussing?

Diction
The author’s choice of specific words has a powerful impact on the reader’s understanding of a piece of literature. Consider:

- What specific, detailed adjectives does the author use to describe a character, setting, object, or idea in this passage? What specific, detailed adverbs does the author use to depict an action or further emphasize an adjective? How does this word choice communicate tone or inspire mood?

Figurative Language
Creative expressions that go beyond the literal and into the figurative communicate larger ideas. Consider:

- What kind of figurative language is used in this passage – alliteration, hyperbole, idiom, onomatopoeia, personification, metaphor, or simile? What connection is the author trying to make?