

## Literature and the Writing Process: Summary & Description vs. Analysis & Argument

**Summary:** tells what is happening; summarizes plot; basically paraphrases the poem in plain (nonpoetic) language

**Ex:** The speaker in “The Flea” compares having sex to the blood-mingling bite of a flea, in order to convince his beloved that sex would not be a big deal.

**Description:** may take note of particular poetic devices, but makes no argumentative comment on those devices

**Ex:** Donne creates an extended metaphor by comparing the mingling of bodies in sex to the mingling of blood in a flea bite. He also uses religious imagery by comparing the flea to a “temple” in which the speaker and the beloved are “cloistered.”

*What is missing? --any ANALYSIS of HOW these poetic devices function in the poem and so of WHY the author might have chosen to use them*

**Analysis:** asks and answers how poetic devices function in the poem, what they signify or mean

**Ex:** By creating an extended metaphor in which the bite of a flea represents the act of sex, the speaker suggests to his beloved that sex is as insignificant, harmless, and sinless as the tiny flea bite. He also suggests that the holiness of their physical union is already contained in the flea, for he refers to it as a “temple” in which they are “cloistered.”

**Argument:** uses analytical points to make an arguable claim about the poem as a whole

**Ex:** In John Donne’s “The Flea,” the speaker tries to convince his beloved to have sex with him by comparing the act of sex to the insignificant, sinless bite of a flea. But the speaker tries to have it both ways: at the same time that he uses the flea as a symbol of sinless insignificance, he also tries to convince his beloved that their union would be as grand and holy as the flea, which he compares to a

“temple.”