If you are having trouble with your literary essay, follow this outline. It will provide you with a solid structure for your paper. If you feel you have the basics of the essay under control, go on to the qualities of an excellent literary essay.

I. First Paragraph—Introduction
   A. A broad statement introducing the subject in a general way in one or more sentences (this may be a statement of theme)
   B. A specific reference to the title and author
   C. Thesis statement presenting the main idea of the paper in one sentence (should reveal a plan for the paper and a “so what”)

II. Second Paragraph—Body (suggestion: follow the quotation sandwich paragraph model)
   A. 1st point from the thesis statement — a generalization; make a claim
   B. Discussion
   C. An example or quotation to support your generalization
   D. Analysis and interpretation of the supporting evidence to show how it supports the generalization in your topic sentence
      1. Literary element
         a. Example from your quotation
         b. Another example from your quotation
      2. Another literary element
      3. Another element of style
   E. Concluding sentence which ties this paragraph to your thesis
   F. Transition statement

III. Third Paragraph—Body (suggestion: follow the quotation sandwich paragraph model)
   A. 2nd point from the thesis statement — a generalization; make a claim
   B. An example or quotation to support your generalization
   C. Analysis and interpretation of the supporting evidence to show how it supports the generalization in your topic sentence
   D. Discussion of the writer’s choices
   E. Concluding sentence which ties this paragraph to your thesis
   F. Transition into next part
IV. Fourth Paragraph—Body (suggestion: follow the quotation sandwich paragraph model)
   A. 3rd point from the thesis statement — a generalization; make a claim
   B. An example or quotation to support your generalization
   C. Analysis and interpretation of the supporting evidence to show how it supports
      the generalization in your topic sentence
   D. Another example or quotation to support your generalization
      Analysis and discussion of supporting evidence with a connection to the prior
      example
   E. Another example or quotation to support your generalization
   F. Concluding sentence which ties this paragraph to your thesis
   G. Transition into conclusion

Fifth Paragraph—Conclusion
   A. Thoughtful explanation of the significance of your thesis (answers the "so what?"
      question)
   B. Formulate and synthesize connections between ideas
   C. Connect to the book as a whole/self/world

*number of body paragraphs may vary based on assignment and length of paper.
Qualities of an Excellent Literary Paper

Title
• brief yet illuminating
• relevant and connected to topic
• tone in keeping with the rest of the paper
• clear and not too wordy

Introduction
• identifies topic
• states thesis
• to the point
• includes a direct reference to title and author
• invites reading
• appropriate tone to purpose

Thesis
• significant
• clearly stated and precise
• limited
• debatable
• contains a plan for discussion, all connected to a statement about the topic
• reasoned and not arbitrary (words like because, as a result, etc. suggest you’re on the right track)

Body Paragraphs
• main points clearly stated
• smooth and logical transitions between and within paragraphs
• general point made specific through reference to text
• quotations smoothly incorporated and thoroughly analyzed, showing relevance to and support for main points
• discussion of the writer’s choices (language, structure, style, literary features, etc.)
• concluding sentence ties to thesis

Organization
• ideas developed in proportion to their significance
• logical and climactic arrangement of paragraphs
• order is appropriate to thesis
• organized by topics/sub-topics and ideas grouped together into categories
Conclusion

- grows naturally from preceding paragraphs
- explains significance of thesis
- provides a sense of completion without simply repeating

Content

- unpretentious
- definite, focused, cohesive
- shows that writer has given careful thought to the topic
- well-nourished with specific supports
- relies on careful analysis of text
- developed through specific details and mature interpretations [follows 3-step plan of presentation 1) generalizations, 2) details related to generalizations, and 3) analysis and interpretation of the details in relation to the thesis]
- limits plot summary to the minimum needed for clarity of analysis
- shows independent thinking, unusual insights or perspective

Control of Written Language/Conventions

- fluent expression
- sentences controlled for rhetorical purposes (use the rhetorical device packet to add impact to your work)
- each sentence has a logical relationship to surrounding sentences and fits smoothly into its context
- variety of sentence lengths and patterns
- precise and fresh word choice
- natural and appropriate diction level
- meaning emphasized through creative effects [use of figurative language, sonic devices, parallel structure, etc.] when useful and appropriate
- uses present tense when talking about literature
- no errors in mechanics and usage

Format

- typed, double-spaced
- in-text citations and works cited page follow MLA format
- stapled in upper left corner
- proper heading and page numbers

Additional Resources:
http://www2.ivcc.edu/lockwood/Current/1001/Essay3/SampleLiteraryAnalysisOutline.html
http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Outlining.html