**Outline for Research Paper on Stephen King**

**Thesis:** One of the most skilled writers of the 20th and 21st centuries is worthy of literary merit because of his journey from rags to riches, as well as because of the sheer popularity and success of his work.

1. **Background:** One of the best-known writers of the 20th and 21st centuries is Stephen King.
   1. Stephen King was born in Portland, Maine in 1947 to Donald and Nellie Ruth Pillsbury King.
   2. King grew up in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Stratford, Connecticut, and Durham, Maine.
   3. He graduated from Lisbon Falls High School in 1966 and attended the University of Maine at Orono.
      1. He wrote for the school newspaper until he graduated with a BA in English in 1970.
      2. He met Tabitha Spruce, who he later married in 1971.
   4. He began teaching at Hampden Academy in Fall of 1971 for $6400 per year.
   5. In 1973, he lived in a double wide trailer and his wife worked 2nd shift at Dunkin donuts. He worked summers at an industrial laundry and even as a janitor and gas pump attendant.
   6. Over the years he adopted the pseudonyms: Richard Bachman and John Swithen because he became more popular and was concerned, “that the public wouldn’t accept more than one work from an author within a year.”
   7. On June 19, 1999, King was struck by a van while walking near his summer home in Bangor, Maine.
      1. He had a collapsed lung and multiple fractures in his leg and hip.
      2. He incorporates this in the Dark Tower series.
   8. King currently spends less and less time in his summer home and rarely goes on announced book talks, because he is annoyed (an worried) by obsessive tourists and fans.
2. **Literary works**: During his time as writer, King has functioned like a well-oiled machine, crafting book after book for his readers.
   1. King’s books have sold more than 350 million copies worldwide and have been adapted into numerous successful films.
      1. Notable works include: Salem’s Lot, Cujo, It, The Shining, and The Running Man.
      2. Recent novels include: 11//22/63, Joyland, Doctor Sleep, and Finders Keepers (which is set to be released 6/2/15).
   2. He got his start in magazines.
      1. “King flourished in the nudie mag market.”
      2. He was featured in Cavalier and Playboy.
   3. His first novel, Carrie, was accepted for publication in 1973.
      1. It was initially rejected by 30 publishers.
      2. It was accepted by Doubleday Books with a $2500 advance, which he used to buy a Ford Pinto, move into a 4 BR apartment and install a phone.
      3. Carrie only sold 13,000 hardback copies, but the rights went to Signet Books for $400,000.
         1. $200,000 went to King.
         2. Carrie sold over $1 million as a paperback.
   4. “Many of the locations he writes about are based on places he grew up in when he lived in Maine and other locations.”
   5. “His work features everyday language, attention to the details of the story’s surroundings, the emotional feelings of his characters, realistic settings, and an emphasis on modern problems.
   6. One theme found in his work is the idea of “the flawed individual who experiences a number of hardships, and who as a result develops into a more informed, enlightened, and ethically responsible person.”
   7. His work is “filled with characters who exhibit tragic flaws that prevent their development into self-actualized individuals.”
   8. In King’s fictional America, society is the ultimate corrupting force which individual characters must either rise above or be dragged down by.”
3. **Impact on Society/Literary World**: Throughout the years, Stephen King has become a bestselling author. Despite his popularity and success, some people question whether he has made a contribution to the literary world.
   1. Those who think that King is not worthy of literary merit, oppose him for a number of reasons.
      1. Many people were upset when the National Book Awards decided to honor King with a medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters in 2003.
         1. Harold Bloom, a Yale professor says, “that they could believe that there is any literary value there or any aesthetic accomplishment or signs of inventive human intelligence is simply a testimony to their own idiocy.”
         2. Richard Snyder, the former executive of Simon & Schuster (King’s publisher) says, “You put him in the company of a lot of great writers, and one has nothing to do with the other. He sells a lot of books. But is it literature? No.”
      2. “As early as 1990, a shorthand had emerged in King’s writing, in which massaged clichés, redundancies, laundry-list sentences, italics and the caps lock key do all the work on the writer’s behalf.”
      3. Many find his acceptance to be an issue because the films based on his books have been awful, he is labeled as a writer of Gothic horror fiction (a genre that’s like the black sheep of the family), and he is the best-selling novelist of all time.
   2. However, many people feel that Stephen King has made a contribution to literature and to society.
      1. Some people feel that King should be applauded for his storytelling skill, promotion of less-established writers, donation to libraries and schools, and cultural influence of his works that have been adapted for film and television.
      2. Samuel G. Freedman wrote an essay called, “Stephen King deserves an award for Creating Readers” which was published in USA Today.
      3. “Even Shakespeare, whose name has become synonymous with literary academia, was for all practical purposes a popular culture phenomenon in his day.”
      4. In a Pop Matters article, Bill Gibron says, “More so than any other writer of previous generations, King has redefined the medium, turning terror and its written counterpart into a mass appeal model of efficiency and effectiveness.”
         1. “He’s dabbled in every classical and post-modern form of macabre, and has even sprinkled his prose with political and personal ideology.”
         2. “He is perhaps the only author working who can still claim a connection to the one element that put him on the publishing map in the first place.”
         3. Decades from now, fans will unearth his tomes and savor their sensational scares the way we lord over Stoker’s violent vamp, or Shelly’s modern Promethus.”
   3. Stephen King says of himself, “I’ve never fooled myself that I’m going to have much popularity beyond my lifetime.”