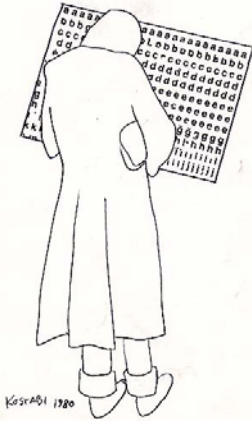


Critical Response #2: Close Reading Of

engl 111 / sec. I / spring quarter 2007-08 / chang



Close reading is a necessary skill that will be very useful to you no matter your interests, discipline, or job. Your classes, your work, your government, and even your pastimes will require you to read or evaluate something difficult, to find hand- and footholds in the material, and make sense of it. Basically, “close reading” simply means analyzing a text very carefully – be it a photograph, a scholarly essay, an operation manual, a website, a tax form – crystallizing main ideas, and then drawing conclusions or making decisions based on your analysis. In this class, close reading and the skill to read for the sake of writing will be employed primarily for written texts. The following are key ways to help you close read:

1) Annotate the text. This is sometimes called “active reading.” Annotating involves underlining important words, writing notes or questions in the margins, highlighting, bracketing important passages, taking reading notes, and so on.

2) Look up difficult terms or concepts or names and keep a running list. Also try to discover the meaning of key words and concepts from the reading. Some terms have

specialized definitions that you will learn only from context. Two good places to look online are:

<www.dictionary.com> and <www.wikipedia.com>.

3) Consider the historical and cultural context of the text. For whom was it written? By whom? Why? Has it been well received? Maybe look up the author’s biographical information to help situate the text.

4) Read a difficult passage several times. Read out loud, slowly, deliberately. Difficult parts will be easier the second or third time through.

5) Decide how a difficult passage fits into the larger text. What arguments, arcs, themes does the passage develop?

6) Remember the big picture. Why is the text or passage or statement important? What are its overall claims?

7) Finally, as mentioned above, actively take specific notes on the reading. Write down key ideas, pages to return to, terms, and quotes that may be helpful in your own understanding and argument. Make note of any recurring words, phrases, themes, threads, and arguments.

For this assignment, you will do a close reading of **one** of the readings we have done so far in class (e.g. Anatol’s “Introduction,” Orwell’s “Such, Such Were the Joys,” Smith’s “Harry Potter’s Schooldays,” or an excerpt from *The Sorcerer’s Stone* or *The Chamber of Secrets*). Read actively. Annotate and underline rather than just highlight. Make notes of key ideas and questions you may have about the text. Read through the text more than once. While you are reading, pay special attention to main themes, threads, concepts, vocabulary, or arguments.

Then, write a 2- to 3-page distillation of the text’s main ideas. Your short paper should **not** be a simple summary (particularly if you’re close-reading a story). **Read carefully, read conscientiously, and read closely.** Keep in mind our work on thesis, argument, claim, and evidence. Then **identify a central main idea or argument** made by the reading and **support the argument with direct quotes** from the text itself. Explicate why the argument is important and what the text is claiming. Your claim in this response paper then is what you believe to be the reading’s most important ideas. Be prepared to discuss your findings in class as well.

Targeted outcomes: 1, 2

Turn in: 23-34 inches, typed, no title page, proper heading, double-spaced, stapled

Due: Monday, April 14