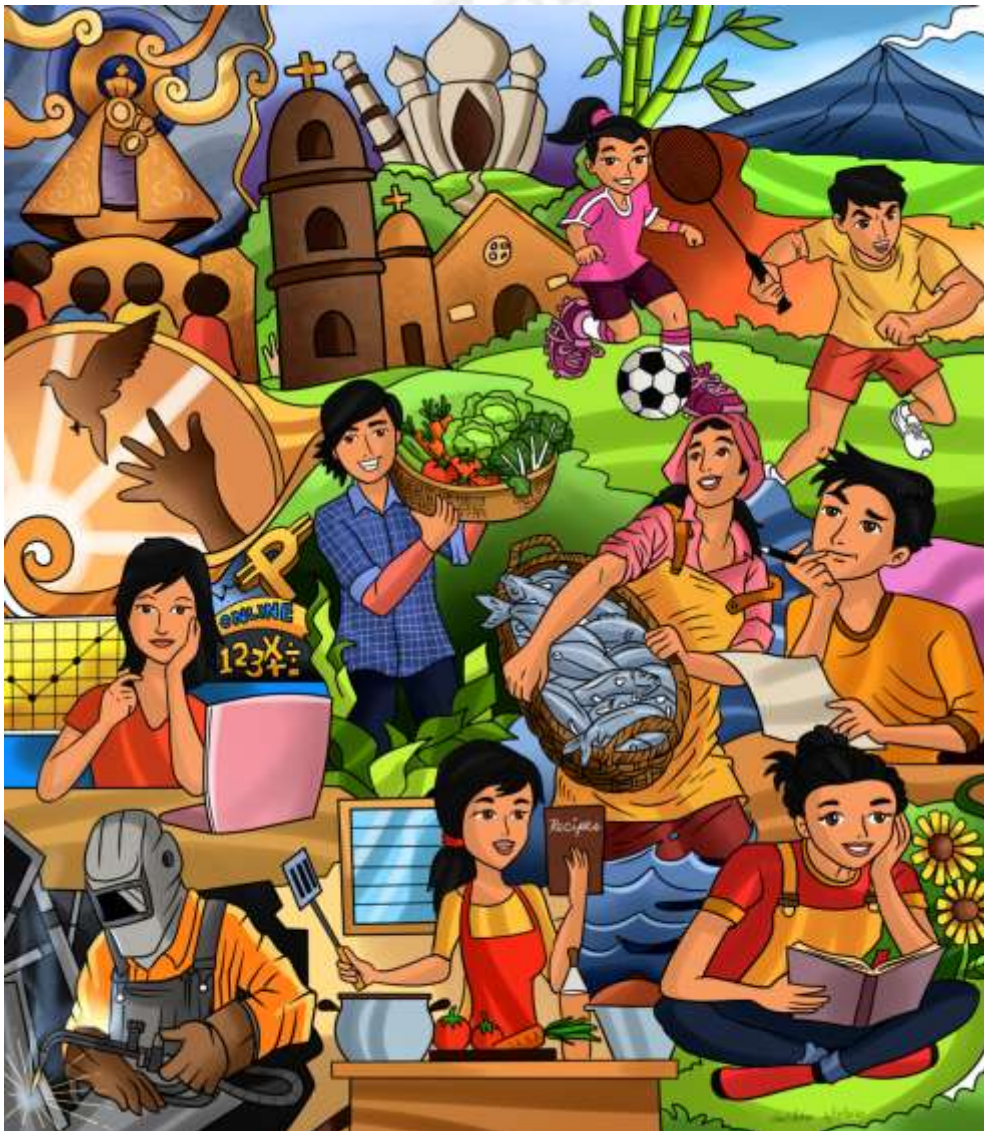


Creative Nonfiction

Quarter 2 – Module 3:

Analyze, Interpret and Comment on a Creative Nonfiction Work



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QUARTER 2, MODULE 3

• **Analyze, Interpret and Comment on a Creative Nonfiction Work**

Reading is a skill that gives rise to other equally important skills. In this lesson, you will read and try to dig deep into two different creative nonfiction works: that of your peer and that of a veteran writer of creative nonfiction. Agitated about reading? No need to worry because the lesson comes with a concise introduction on what to do when engaging in a close reading of a text. After reading, you will write a critique of the works you have read, based on a set criterion. It's going to be another critical thinking session!

Learning Competencies:

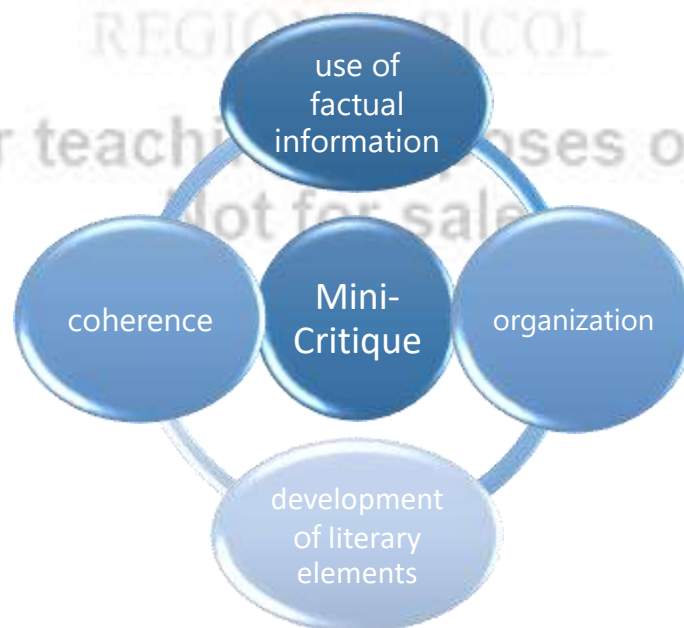
1. Write a mini critique of a peer's work based on coherence and organization of paragraphs, development of literary elements use of factual information, and other qualities concerning form and content;
2. Analyze and interpret a well-written creative nonfictional text based on the peer critique.

Learning Targets:

At the end of the lesson, you are expected to:

Critique two creative nonfiction works (that of a peer and that of a seasoned creative nonfiction writer) based on a set standard.

KEY WORDS



VOCABULARY LIST

1. **Factual Information.** It refers to a data or statistics that are true or concerned with actual details.
2. **Coherence.** It is the quality of being logical and consistent of sentences and paragraphs of a creative nonfiction work.
3. **Development of Literary Elements.** It is the process where writers of fiction tell their stories by using character, plot, setting and scene, point-of-view, style, theme and literary devices and imagery.
4. **Organization.** It refers to the connections between the body and the thesis of a creative nonfiction work.
5. **Mini-Critique.** It involves conducting a systematic analysis of a scholarly article, book or any creative nonfiction work and then writing a fair and reasonable description of its strengths and weaknesses.

PRE-TEST

Directions: Read the following statements about reading creative nonfiction. Write AGREE or DISAGREE for each statement. Write your answer in your notebook.

1. Close reading is similar to a deep analysis of a text.
2. When you do close reading, you read a text rapidly.
3. Take time to consider the title of a work – it's very important, too!
4. A creative nonfiction work can both be informative and literary.
5. The narrator's point of view can influence or construct meaning within a text.
6. The literal form of a text is independent of the text's meaning.
7. Active reading of a text entails taking notes, even reacting to what is read.
8. In close reading, the reader should not only focus on the details but also on the impressions that these details create.
9. Informational text focus on central ideas and address themes and matters of enduring importance.
10. Literary texts allow readers to have access to universal ideas that affect, inspire, and change readers.

LEARNING ABOUT IT

Reading Creative Nonfiction

"In a world of celebrities and fiction, fantasy and virtual reality, the world needs some creative nonfiction. In fact, it needs a lot."

-Samir Husni, Mr Magazine

Reading different text types has been one of the goals of the K to 12 Multi-literacies Program for language. From kinder to Senior High School, the wide array of reading texts which had been included in the different subject areas vary from the simplest to the most complex, and these materials include nonfiction which are classified into informational and literary texts.

Informational texts conveys information about the natural or social world. Duke and Bennet-Armistead (Scholastic, 2003), enumerate six benefits of reading

these types of texts, which include (1) provides the key to success in later schooling, (2) prepares students to handle real-life reading, (3) appeals to readers' preferences, (4) addresses students' questions and interests, (5) builds knowledge of the natural and social world, and (6) boosts vocabulary and other kinds of literacy knowledge.

Literary texts, on the other hand, balances the knowledge gained from informational texts, and this is due to the fact that in reading literature, students gain access to: (1) universal ideas that affect, inspire, and change readers far removed from the time and place in which it was written, (2) central ideas address themes and matters of enduring importance, and lastly, (3) noble language.

Creative nonfiction works can both be informational and literary. The style with which they are written is literary while the content is informative. To better understand and appreciate these works in the latter lessons, doing a close reading will help.

Close Reading of Creative Nonfiction

Creative nonfiction works can vary from the simplest to the most complicated. To be able to understand interwoven meanings, one must be able to read the work closely.

Close reading as the name suggests, implies more than casual, superficial reading of a particular text. It involves finding as much information as you can and asking as much questions as you can about a text. Since creative nonfiction writers build their work from various elements, one must be able to examine these components and find clues from its small parts to lead to the understanding of the whole.

Close reading is also akin to a deep analysis of a literary text. It is due this that close reading takes time, but also saves the reader from anxiety especially when one has to write a critique about it.

Here is your guide in doing a close reading of a text:

How to Begin a Close Reading

A close reading should never be your first reading of a text. Before focusing on the details of a text or passage, it is important to have an understanding of the text as a whole.

1. Read the text!

Make sure that you understand its plot, who the characters are, etc. For more difficult texts, it may take more than one read to do this. That is normal. The better your overall understanding of the text, the easier it will be to focus on its details and/or the details of your chosen passage.

2. When you are ready to begin your close reading, take your time!

Read the text actively. Take notes. You may write on a separate sheet of paper, directly in your book, or you may even choose to make a photocopy of the text or passage and take notes on that. Choose the method which works best for you.

3. Do not be afraid to pause to think over what you read as you read!

Do not hesitate to read and re-read sentences or sections several times before moving on. Take note not only of the details in the text, but also of the impressions which those details create in you as a reader. The purpose of a

close reading is to squeeze the details from your chosen text and use those details to formulate an interpretation of a deeper meaning or impression present in the text.

Some Details to Consider When Reading Closely

1. **Titles Matter!** Always take a moment to consider the title of your chosen text and its relationship to the content. The author has chosen the title carefully to represent the text as a whole. Often, titles may point to important symbols or images which you might then focus on more closely in your reading.

***Example:** In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Birthmark" or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," the titles refer to prominent symbols in the texts. Paying close attention to these symbols, how they are described, and how they are treated in the texts would be fertile ground for a close reading.*

Other titles may help to structure the reader's understanding of the text's content.

***Example:** Jamaica Kincaid's short story "Girl" is a list of commands and instructions. The text does not clearly state who these commands are directed towards, but the title hints that they are commands for a specific girl, or perhaps girls in general.*

2. **Audience and Purpose.** Who is the intended audience of the text or passage? What is its purpose? Audience and purpose may help to contextualize some of the text's details.

***Example:** In Jonathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal," he proposes that impoverished Irish communities eat their children in order to limit their financial burdens and gain a source of food.*

Understanding Swift's purpose, to use an absurd and morally reprehensible argument to draw attention to the plights of these communities as well as to criticize the faulty and rather callous logic employed by many English intellectuals in discussing these issues, helps readers to understand his methods and the significance of the way he lays out his hyper-rational and fairly horrifying argument.

3. **Narrative Point of View.** The narrator is the voice through which the reader experiences the text. That means that all of the information a reader receives is colored by the narrator's perspective.

Dissecting this perspective may help to inform your understanding of how the text relates its information and how that dynamic influences or constructs meaning within the text.

Is the text or passage narrated in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person? Is the narrator omniscient (does he or she know all of the characters' thoughts and actions)? Is the narrator's perspective limited to one character's experiences and thoughts? Is the narrator an impartial observer, a fly on the wall who simply relates the events of the text or passage without giving insight into characters' thoughts and feelings?

Does the narrator seem to make any judgments regarding the characters or events of the text? Is the narrator completely reliable? If the narrator may be biased, how does that influence the text? What biases might the narrator possess? Is he or she possibly insane, lying, or mistaken?

Example: Jamaica Kincaid's short story "Girl" is narrated in 2nd person. This means that the narrator seems to directly address the reader in his or her stream of commands and instructions.

The reader may feel overwhelmed, defensive, or resentful of the narrator as a result of the narrative point of view. Those feelings may mirror the feelings of a girl who is being lectured regarding "proper" or "acceptable" behavior. Therefore, the narration puts the reader in the position of the "Girl."

What is the relationship between the narrator and the "Girl"/reader? How might that be significant?

- 4. Imagery and Symbols.** Often, a work of literature will emphasize a particular image. Images appeal to our senses, so a text may include visual images, auditory images, images which involve smell, images which involve taste, and images which involve touch.

What images do you find in the text or passage? Are there any images which appear to be emphasized more than others? Why? How does that affect the meaning of the text or passage?

Some images may function as symbols in the text: images which have metaphorical meanings beyond their literal meanings. Are there any symbols present in the text? What metaphorical meanings might those symbols carry? If we accept those meanings, how does that influence our reading of the text?

Example: In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Birthmark," Georgiana, the protagonist's wife, has a birthmark on her face in the shape of a small hand. Her husband sees this as an imperfection, which he then seeks to correct by removing it. Georgiana dies during this process.

One way to interpret Georgiana's birthmark is as a symbol of natural human imperfection. If we accept this symbolic meaning, then how do we read Georgiana's death? Does the text seem to be commenting on the whether or not human perfection is attainable?

- 5. Characterization.** Who are the characters? Is there one protagonist (main character), in the text? Is there an antagonist (a character or force which opposes the protagonist)? If so, how does the conflict influence the text? Which characters are focused on and which characters are treated as secondary? How do we learn about the characters? Does the narrator tell us about them explicitly through description? This is called direct characterization. Do we learn about the characters through their actions and dialogue? This is called indirect characterization. How does the characterization influence the meaning of the text or passage?

Example: *If you were to read a short story which characterized male characters primarily through their actions, but female characters through descriptions given by a male narrator, this might be evidence of gender bias in the text.*

- 6. Chronology.** How is time treated in the text? Is it linear, a-linear? What span of time does it cover? Does it focus on a period of minutes, hours, days, years? How do the choices about representing time influence or construct meaning in the text?

Example: *Toni Morrison's short story "Recitatif" chooses to focus on short spans of time spread across several decades in the lives of its two main characters.*

What might the significance be of choosing those particular moments in the characters' lives to show to the reader? What do those moments have in common? Why skip so much time in between passages? What effect does the chronology of the text have on the reader's experience of the narrative and the characters?

- 7. Form.** The literal form of a text can influence the reader's experience of it. Some details related to form might include line and paragraph breaks, the physical position of the text on the page, the font style, or even something as simple as spacing.

Example: *In concrete poetry, the words which make up the poem are manipulated to create visual images on the page. George Herbert's poem "Easter Wings" is physically shaped like a pair of wings.*

The overall form of the text is important, but so are breaks in form.

Example: *Certain portions of Jamaica Kincaid's short story "Girl" are italicized.*

Why are these portions emphasized and separated from the rest of the text? How does that affect the passage?

- 8. Sentence Level: Diction (connotations), Syntax, and Punctuation.** “Diction” refers to word choice. What types of words are used in the text or passage? Are the words formal or informal, simple or complex, monosyllabic (short) or polysyllabic (long)? What do the words physically sound like? Do the words carry any other connotations beyond their literal meanings which may be relevant to your reading of the text?

Tip: Dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) are useful resources in determining a particular word’s history and connotations.

What do the sentences themselves look like? Are they simple or complex, long or short? Hemingway is often praised for his simple, short sentences. How does the sentence structure influence your reading of the text? What kinds of punctuation does the writer use?

Example: *“Girl” happens to be a single, long sentence with many independent clauses separated by semicolons.*

What might the significance be of that choice? One interpretation is that reading the sentence becomes overwhelming, which may mimic the feelings of a girl being lectured about “proper” and “acceptable” behavior. Therefore, the sentence structure helps the reader to sympathize with the title “character” of the short story.

- 9. Patterns.** What patterns are present in the text? Consider the significance of the pattern itself.

Example: *In Theodore Roethke’s poem “My Papa’s Waltz,” the meter of the poem is trimeter. This means that there are three beats in each line.*

How might that pattern be significant to the text? Interestingly, a waltz is a dance which follows a 1-2-3 pattern. Therefore, the pattern established by the meter seems to mimic the dance which is mentioned in the poem’s title. This has the effect of emphasizing the “waltzing” of the boy and his father in the poem. How is that important to the poem’s overall meaning?

Is the pattern established in the text ever interrupted? Interruptions or breaks in firmly established textual patterns are usually particularly significant. Remember that the author has gone to a lot of trouble to establish this pattern in the text. If he or she is choosing to disrupt it, there is probably a very good reason.

Example: *In “My Papa’s Waltz,” there are occasional breaks in the meter.*

Why is this significant? If the “waltz” of the poem is imperfect, does it suggest something about the boy, his father, and/or their relationship?

10. Contradictions/Inconsistencies. Like breaks in patterns, inconsistencies or contradictions in the text are also particularly worthy of attention. What inconsistencies or contradictions can you identify? What are the sources of these contradictions?

Is there an unreliable narrator? What is unreliable about this person? Are different characters' perspectives the source of the contradiction? What is the effect or utility of reinforcing the differing perspectives of these characters? Does the text seem to be purposely confusing or contradictory? What might the significance of that be?

Example: In "Recitatif," Twyla and Roberta, the short story's co-protagonists, remember some of the events of their shared childhood differently.

What is the overall significance of this inconsistency in their memories? Is Toni Morrison attempting to make a comment about memory itself? Is she trying to call attention to the differences in the characters' perspectives? Why might that be important?

11. Allusions are references to knowledge or events outside of the text itself, often other literary works, but sometimes current events or politics. Are there any allusions present in the text or passage? To what do they refer?

If the text establishes a connection to another text through an allusion, then how does a reading of the second text influence your understanding of the first text? In western literature, direct allusions to biblical stories can be common. However, some allusions are very subtle and even unexpected.

Example: Disney's *The Lion King* features a young prince whose father is killed by his uncle, the king's own brother. When the prince grows up, he must then make a decision about whether or not to challenge his uncle for the throne.

*The plot of *The Lion King* can be read as a subtle reference to Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, whose plot follows a similar pattern. In this particular example, examining the similarities between the two stories as well as the differences and deliberate changes which Disney has made to the *Hamlet* tale would be valuable to your critical understanding of the film.*

It may also be helpful to consider the significance of a modern children's film borrowing plot from an early modern Shakespearean play, since the two do not appear to have similar audiences or contexts at first glance.

12. **Research Anything Unfamiliar!** A quick online search (or inquiry to your tutor or professor!) for anything unfamiliar in the text or passage can point you to allusions or other connections which you would not have made.

***Example:** In reading the poem “My Papa’s Waltz,” you may not have known that a waltz is a three beat dance. However, by doing a small bit of research on “waltz,” one of the key words in the poem’s title, you might find this information. Then, you might realize the connection between the dance and the meter of the poem itself.*

Some questions you might want to ask

- 1) Who is speaking? Who is being spoken to? What is the reader assumed to know/not know? (University essays aren't written for an interested aunt or friend on a different course, but for an audience familiar with the themes and readings under discussion. Students are writing for an audience of engaged and interested peers. This means that the writer can assume that their reader knows the text and doesn't need extensive plot summary in the introduction or start of the essay. This frees up space for analysis and the laying out of each section's claims. It also helps to develop an authoritative voice: you are an expert speaking to other experts.)
- 2) What is the point of the details included in the passage (e.g. if mundane things are mentioned, why is that; if there are elements of description that don't seem to contribute to the plot what do they do instead)?
- 3) What generic clues are here (what kinds of writing are hinted at)?
- 4) Are there words or phrases which are ambiguous (could mean more than one thing)? If so, are we directed to privilege one reading over the other or do we keep both in play? Does one meaning open up an alternative story/history/narrative? What are the connotations of the words that are chosen? Do any of them open up new or different contexts?
- 5) Are there patterns which emerge in the language (the repetition of words or of certain kinds of words? Repeated phrases? Rhymes or half-rhymes? Metrical patterns?). What effects do they create?
- 6) Is there any movement in the passage you are reading? Are there any shapes or dominant metaphors?
- 7) What kind of rhythm does the passage have? What is its cadence?
- 8) Is there anything that troubles you about the passage or that you're not sure you fully understand?

What is a Critique?

A critique is a careful analysis of an argument to determine what is said, how well the points are made, what assumptions underlie the argument, what issues are

overlooked, and what implications are drawn from such observations. It is a systematic, yet personal response and evaluation of what you have read.

Guide in Writing a Critique

1. What is a literary critical analysis?

A literary critical analysis explains a work of fiction, poetry or drama by means of interpretations. The goal of a literary analysis (as with any other analysis) is to broaden and deepen your understanding of a work of literature.

2. What is an interpretation?

An interpretation is an individual response that addresses meaning.

3. How do you develop an interpretation?

Interpretations are developed by an in-depth examination of a text. An interpretation often will be the thesis of your paper.

4. How do you conduct an "in-depth" examination of a text?

- a) Before reading the work, make sure to examine the title carefully. Often the title is a clue to an important idea in the work.
- b) Make sure you look up in the dictionary any words with which you are not familiar.
- c) After reading the work the first time, ask yourself the following questions:
 - What is the geographical, historical and social setting? How does this affect the story or poem?
 - Who is (are) the main character(s)?
 - Who are the secondary characters, and how are they linked to the main characters?
 - Does the main character change? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
 - What is the conflict? Can you trace the development and resolution of the conflict?
 - Who is telling the story? How does this influence the story or poem?
 - In poetry, can you find a pattern of rhyme and meter?
- d) As you re-read the work, make sure you can answer these questions. Then ask yourself the following questions, which may help you to discover deeper meanings that will lead you to an interpretation.
 - Can you summarize the author's meaning in one paragraph?
 - Can you state a theme of the work in one sentence?
 - Can you identify any symbols or metaphors? What do they mean?

5. How do you prove your interpretation?

You prove your interpretation by finding a pattern of examples in the literature that support your idea. You find this pattern in the literary elements, such as plot, point of view, character, setting, symbols, tone,

and style. In poetry, the uses of language (rime, meter and metaphors) are also patterns that can support your interpretation.

6. If interpretations are an individual response, are all interpretations valid?

Because an interpretation must be supported, the strength or weakness of your interpretation rests on the strength or weakness of your argument. In other words, you must organize a discussion that convinces the reader that your point of view is astute.

7. Where do you find evidence to support your interpretation?

In a literary analysis evidence is found mainly from the work you are discussing. Secondary sources (published critical analyses) may support your point of view as well.

8. How much of the story should you retell in a critical analysis?

You do need to locate your reader to the scene or section of the poem that you are discussing; therefore, some plot summary is necessary, but re-telling the story or a poem is not considered an analysis. You can assume your reader has read the work.

9. What should be documented in a critical analysis?

Any secondary sources must, of course, be documented. Also, direct quotes should be documented. Unlike secondary sources, a summary of a literary scene or event does not need documentation. Typically, MLA style documentation is used.

POST-TEST

Directions: Critique the two selections below. Be sure that you apply the *Nine Guides in Writing a Critique*. One critique must not be less than 200 words and must be written in your notebook.

Unlocking of Difficulties:

1. **Lagonoy.** A town in Camarines Sur, Bicol.
2. **Taraguan.** A children's play where one seeks for his/her playmates who hide from him/her.
3. **Taragaan.** A children's play where one runs after his/her playmates and taps any part of their bodies.
4. **Burabod.** A barangay of Lagonoy, Camarines Sur, Bicol.
5. **Gata.** The coconut milk.
6. **Sili.** Red pepper
7. **Samhod.** A broom that is abundant in Lagonoy.
8. **Malasugi.** An expensive fish that is abundant in Lagonoy Gulf.
9. **Bikol express.** A dish of balao (small shrimp), pork and red pepper cooked in coconut milk.

10. **Binamban.** A small triangular-shaped gummy 'kakanin' made of taro corms, young coconut meat and coconut milk wrapped with Hagikhihik leaves.

My Hometown

By Honesto M. Pesimo Jr.

The jam-packed JC Liner bus invited me to Lagonoy where my childhood was a combination of guava, avocado, santol and taraguan with Jao and Ralph. Taragaan brought us to the river where I laughed with our innocence and nakedness. Going home drenched, I took some branches of malunggay from its towering figure along the street of Burabod. I separated all the leaves from their stems so my mother would cook them with gata and sili for a lunch of a family prayer and conversation, a preparation for a long sweeping of dust and dirt and clearing of entwined cobwebs and dried torn leaves that stuck on the yakal walls and ceilings with samhod before a fiesta of grilled malasugi, tasty Bikol express, and gummy binamban on July 3, the Feast of Eloy San Juan.

Unlocking of Difficulties:

1. **Oragon Statue.** A landmark situated at the Naga Centro that depicts the colonization of the Cimarrons, Bikol's natives, by the Spaniards
2. **Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia.** Jesus Christ's mother, the patroness of the Bicolandia
3. **Viva La Virgen!** A chant in honor of Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia, the patroness of the Bikolanos

The Man in Red

By Honesto M. Pesimo Jr.

The man in red long-sleeves was alone in the island where the Oragon statue was built. He stood with his placard and shouted with his megaphone, "There's only one God and He is Jesus Christ."

Why did he celebrate his words during the feast of the mother of Jesus, my Ina, Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia?

He stared at me as if he would enter into my senses: "Your mother is not God." Until a rush of devotees cried and carried the image of Ina in their shoulders and mumbled prayers everybody understood. He would still cry in protest and break his face out of disgust but the pilgrims were in unison: "Viva La Virgen! Viva La Virgen!" and brought my Ina in the pagoda where men guarded her with great faith and joy. My eyes were glued with the waves of the hands that bid farewell to Ina's journey in the river.

The man in red long-sleeves was alone in the island.

Task 1

Directions: Read a creative nonfiction work made by a Bicolano and write a mini-critique about it following the format below.

Mini-Critique of a Creative Nonfiction Work

Title of the Creative Nonfiction Work:

Creative Nonfiction Type/Form:

Author:

I. Content

Some pointers:

- Give a short summary of the work.
- Give the elements of narrative present in the work.
- State the theme in one sentence.

II. Interpretation

Some pointers:

- Who do you think is the intended audience? Why?
- Think about the relevance of the title.
- Are there metaphors and symbolisms? What do they mean? How do you connect them to the title?
- Are there patterns? What is (are) its significance to the overall work?
- As you think about your responses to these questions, ensure to give evidence from the work itself.

III. General Comments

Some points to consider:

- What impression(s) did the work leave on you? Why?
- Was the author successful in conveying his/her intended meaning through the creative nonfiction work? What makes you say so?
- Give other relevant comments on the work you have read.

Task 2

Read another creative nonfiction work, this time, from a seasoned or veteran writer in the Philippines. Then write a mini-critique about it following the format used in Task 1. Write your critique in your notebook.

POST-TEST

Directions: Answer each question in one to two sentences only. Write your answers in your notebook.

1. How was your experience of close reading creative nonfiction works?

2. What did you learn from doing the mini-critique?

3. Write a reflective essay about your experience.

ASSIGNMENT

Look for a travelogue, then, know what the writer's motivations and inspirations to be able to write down the piece of work. Then question the writer's techniques, and objectively critique his work, citing its strengths and weaknesses.

***Rubrics**

5 – Correct use of language/grammar; clarity of ideas; presence of words/expressions about criticisms (strengths and weaknesses)

3 – Minor errors on language/grammar; clarity of ideas; presence of words/expressions about criticisms (strengths and weaknesses)

1– Major errors on grammar; unclear presentation of ideas; presence of words/expressions about criticisms (strengths and weaknesses)



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ANSWER KEY

Pre-Test

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Agree
4. Agree
5. Agree
6. Disagree
7. Agree
8. Agree
9. Disagree
10. Agree

Task 1

(Answers vary)

Task 2

(Answers vary)

Task 3

(Answers vary)

Post-Test

(Answers vary)

Assignment

(Answers vary)



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