

## WEEK 2 – CLOSE READING

### WHAT IS CLOSE READING?

Close reading is a particular method for approaching a text. This method uses slow, careful reading to analyze how **structure and language** work together with **ideas and meanings**. This analysis is neither summary nor paraphrasing; rather, it identifies language elements of the passage in connection with the passage's meaning to craft an **argument** about the passage. Examples of language elements that we watch for when we close read include (but are not limited to):

- Diction
- Imagery
- Figurative Language
- Sensory Language
- Syntax
- Tone
- Point of View
- Symbolism

### WHAT IS THE GOAL OF CLOSE READING?

Now that we have identified language elements in a passage, our next step is to construct an argument, which is the ultimate goal of close reading. It's insufficient (and boring) to make a series of observations about a text (Here's a symbol, here's alliteration, here's an onomatopoeia, etc.). Instead, we highlight details in the text to make a compelling claim. This is where we tie our analysis into our interpretation of the larger cultural issues in the text (the "so what").

- Does this passage reveal something about the text's attitude toward a particular theme?
- Does this passage implicitly comment on / critique / endorse some broader cultural idea?
- Does the language of the passage reveal contradictions or tensions in the text's position?

There is no formula for constructing the perfect argument, but analyzing how the specific passage supports, works against, or undermines the larger themes in the text often provides a good beginning.

### HELPFUL HINTS AND BEGINNINGS

A few basic steps and questions you can ask of a text can help make close reading a less painful and more fun experience!

- Begin by reading the passage carefully, slowly, and more than once, underlining or highlighting any provocative words or phrases that catch your eye and relate to your topic
  - If you're working from a digital copy, it can be helpful to transcribe the passage into a Word Document (or Google Doc) and then use the comments tools to annotate it.
- Circle any unfamiliar words. Look them up.
- Identify ways that the text uses language elements (see above) to convey meaning. What effect do these authorial choices have on your understanding of this passage and its significance to the theme/issue you are examining?
  - What is the passage's tone (sad, foreboding, celebratory, etc.)?

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- What kinds of imagery are used (visual, tactile, auditory, stark, rich, soothing, threatening, inconsistent with the passage)?
- What is the style of the prose (flowery, grandiose, plain)?
- What is the general sentence structure (long or short? flowing or choppy?) and where does the sentence structure vary?
- If you get stuck or have trouble getting started, think about which words or phrases that “jump out” at you when you read the passage. What words seem to have multiple meanings? What connotations do these words carry? How do the connotations relate to your topic?

Remember that any and all of these elements matter only insofar as they affect your argument, the interpretation that you offer of the passage. Don't try to answer questions that distract from your main point.