

A Guide to Close Reading

When you speak up in an argument, you better be ready to back up what you're saying—or back down. The same goes for discussions about literature: we say what a text means by *showing how a text means*, using *evidence* to support our *claims*. Close reading is the process of gathering details into a coherent interpretation, developing our initial response into a logical, insightful argument. Close reading is reading *more than once!*

1. Impressions: Read with a pencil and mark what grabs your attention.
2. Understanding: Try to summarize what is going on. Look up any words that you aren't familiar to you.
3. Interpretation: Examine how parts of the text work together to produce meaning as you read.

How do you know what to look for? Which details are significant?

Repetition: Note any sounds, words, phrases, or images that are repeated, and consider the *effects* of this repetition. For poetic texts, listen for end rhymes and other echos (alliteration, assonance, rhyme scheme, other rhythms).

Lexicon: Group words/images into categories, using different colors to mark words, or make lists. Note any overlap between categories, and also include opposites. How do these words interact to produce contrast, associations, complex meanings?

Word choice/Diction: Do any words have multiple meanings? associations or value judgements? cultural specific or idiomatic meanings? Are any words/phrases being used in an unusual context? What is the style of language (i.e., elevated, everyday, jargon)?

Images/Metaphors: What are the striking/recurring images? Do any images produce associations in memory? Are any images distorted, blended, or evolving? Do any images make comparisons or suggestions? Do images create a sense of space, place, or time?

Allusions/Figures: Does the text refer to other texts? to historical figures or moments? Does the reader need special knowledge to understand these references?

Grammar/Syntax: What kind of sentences do you notice (descriptive, imperative, interrogative, conditional)? How do the sentences hang together (commas, semi-colons, colons, run-on, choppy, contrast, sound effects, repetition)? What are the verb tenses? Is there variety in the structure of sentences? How it organized? How does it progress?

Point of view/Tone: Who is speaking? to whom? What is their relationship? How do we know? What is the speaker's tone like (serious? sarcastic? etc.)

What do these details tell us about what a text means? *How?* (This is the basis of your argument . . .)