Part Two: Text Wrestling

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Section Introduction: Text Wrestling Analysis

Chapter Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>critical/active reading</td>
<td>also referred to in this text as “engaged reading,” a set of strategies and concepts to interrupt projection and focus on a text. See Appendix B: Engaged Reading Strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>interpretation</td>
<td>the process of consuming rhetoric to create meaning. “An interpretation” refers to a specific meaning we build as we encounter a text, focusing on certain ideas, language, or patterns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>text</td>
<td>any artifact through which a message is communicated. Can be written or spoken; digital, printed, or undocumented; video, image, or language. Every text is rhetorical in nature. See rhetoric.</td>
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<tr>
<td>text wrestling</td>
<td>a rhetorical mode in which an author analyzes a text using close reading, then presents an interpretation supported by evidence from the text.</td>
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Along the way to this point of your educational career, you’ve probably encountered the term critical reading or active reading more than a few times. Teachers tell students of all ages that using active reading skills is important for reading comprehension, critical thinking, and even effective writing. But what exactly does it mean to read critically or actively?

Perhaps it would serve us to step back and first consider what is being read.

"CSAF releases 2009 reading list" by Master Sgt. Steven Goetsch is in the Public Domain
Most often, we think of a text as a written piece—an essay, a poem, a newspaper article, a novel. While this is often the case, a text can be anything: it is an articulation of rhetoric, bearing in mind that we are constantly surrounded by rhetoric. An advertisement is a text; a series of tweets is a text; a TV show is a text; an improvised dance number is a text.

Every text, in turn, is subject to interpretation. Interpretation refers to the process of consuming rhetoric to create meaning. A text by itself does not actually mean anything; rather, we build meaning as we engage with a text. This is an important distinction to make because

- As a reader, your interpretation is unique, informed by your lived experiences, your education, your mood(s), your purpose, and your posture. To an extent, no two readers will interpret a text exactly the same way.
- As an author, you must be cognizant that your writing only impacts your audience when they encounter it from their unique interpretive position. You may carefully construct a piece of writing to capture meaning, but that meaning only exists when a reader engages with what you’ve written.

Because texts can come in such diverse and complex forms, the strategies entailed in “critical” and “active reading” are only the first step: they are tools in our toolkits that lay the groundwork for interpretation. In other words, engaged reading strategies (like those in the so-titled Appendix A) prepare us for text wrestling.

Text wrestling refers to an analytical encounter with a text during which you, the reader, make observations and informed arguments about the text as a method of creating meaning and cultivating unique insight. Most often, this encounter will eventually lead to an essay that shares your analysis with your classmates, your teacher, or a broader audience.

The following section explores the cognitive and rhetorical techniques that support text wrestling. While your teacher may ask you to focus on a particular medium or genre of text for a text wrestling essay, this section will explore analytical processes that can be applied to many different kinds of texts. First, in Chapter Four, we will review the ideas and skills for thinking analytically. After that, we will turn to ideas and skills for writing about that analytical thinking, including summary, note-taking, and synthesis.
Chapter Four
Interpretation, Analysis, and Close Reading

Interpretation

When Mad Max: Fury Road came out in 2015, it was lauded as a powerful feminist film. No longer was this franchise about men enacting post-apocalyptic violence; now, there was an important place in that universe for women. A similar phenomenon surrounded Wonder Woman in 2017: after dozens of male-fronted superhero movies, one would finally focus on a female hero exclusively.

Some people, though, were resistant to this reading of feminism in film. I found myself in regular debates after each of these releases about what it meant to promote gender equality in film: does substituting a violent woman for a violent man constitute feminism? Is the leading woman in a film a feminist just by virtue of being in a female-fronted film? Or do her political beliefs take priority? Does the presence of women on the screen preclude the fact that those women are still highly sexualized?

These questions, debates, and discussions gesture toward the interpretive process. Indeed, most arguments (verbal or written) rely on the fact that we each process texts and information from different positions with different purposes, lenses, and preoccupations. Why is it that some people leave the theater after Mad Max or Wonder Woman feeling empowered, and others leave deeply troubled?
Interpretation is a complex process that is unique to every reader. It is a process of meaning-making that relies on your particular position as a reader. Your interpretive position is informed by several factors.

- **Your purpose** – In the same way you have a rhetorical purpose in writing, you often have a purpose in reading, either consciously or subconsciously. What are you trying to accomplish in this encounter with a text?

- **Your background** – Your lived experiences have trained you to perceive texts with certain assumptions. This background is a blend of cultural, educational, geographical, familial, ideological, and personal influences, among many others.

- **Your posture** – The stance you assume relative to a text will contribute to what meaning you make as you read, think about, and write about that text. This relative position might be emotional (what mood you’re in while reading) or contextual (what situation you’re reading in), and may also be impacted by your background and purpose.

- **Your lens** – Related to your purpose, lens refers to the way you focus your attention on particular ideas, images, and language to construct meaning. Toward what elements are you directing your attention?

It would be simpler, perhaps, to acknowledge that we will never all agree on an interpretation of a text because of these differences. But the stakes are higher here than simply, “Is *Mad Max* feminist?” Interpretation gets down to the very way we encounter the world; it is about all our biases and flaws; it is about truth; it is about building new knowledges and dismantling institutional oppression. In other words, analytical interpretation is not so esoteric as slotting texts into labels like “feminist” or “not feminist.” It is a practice of thinking critically, examining our sense of community and communication, and pursuing social justice.

**Analysis**

On a basic level, **analysis** refers to the conceptual strategy of “part-to-whole.” Because I grew up playing with LEGOs® (or, more often, the cheap knock-offs), I like to use this analogy: Imagine a castle built of 1000 LEGO bricks. I can look at the entire structure and say, “Oh, that’s a castle”—this is a reasonable interpretation. But to understand how that castle has actually come together, I pull a few of the LEGO bricks from various parts of the structure. I look at those bricks individually, closely examining each side (even the sides that I couldn’t see when they were part of the castle).
When I say, “This is a castle,” I am not analyzing. But next, perhaps I ask myself, “What is each of these blocks doing to create what I can clearly interpret as a castle?” This is the process of analysis.

Which bricks to choose, though? As we discussed in Chapter One, attention is always selective: we automate most of our daily experience for the sake of efficiency and survival, so we often overlook the trees when we see the forest—or each LEGO brick when we see the castle.

Analysis, then, is a practice of radical noticing (like description): it invites you to attend to the details that add up to a complex reality. But analysis also involves conscientious focus of your attention, or a lens. Just like reading glasses can bring these words into focus, an analytical lens brings specific ideas, words, or patterns into sharper focus, making them easier to process and interpret.

Sometimes, especially in English classrooms, analysis of a text is referred to as close reading. Importantly, close reading as a technique is not a magical key to meaning, not a super-secret decoder ring for a deeply encrypted code. Rather, it is a means to unpack a text and construct a unique, focused interpretation. Close reading is an iterative process: by repeatedly encountering, unpacking, and discussing a text, you can develop an analytical insight through guided and focused interpretation of its meaning.

In an analytical situation, your readerly purpose might determine your focus: for example, if you’re trying to convince a friend that Wonder Woman is a feminist film, you would keep your eyes peeled for images, words, and other markers that align with such an interpretation, like situations featuring independent powerful women or an equitable ratio of dialogue spoken by female characters vs. male characters. It is important to note, though, that good analysis embraces curiosity and allows you to notice elements that might contradict, complicate, or nuance your original purpose: in addition to finding evidence in support of your interpretation, you should also be aware of characteristics that push back against your expectations.
## Chapter Vocabulary

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<td>authorial intent</td>
<td>the inferred or speculated intention of a writer. Must be overlooked in the process of text wrestling analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>analysis</td>
<td>the cognitive process and/or rhetorical mode of studying constituent parts to demonstrate an interpretation of a larger whole.</td>
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<tr>
<td>connotation</td>
<td>the associated meanings of a word, phrase, or idea beyond its ‘dictionary’ definition; the complex, subjective, and dynamic meanings of a word, phrase, or idea the shift based on interpretive position. Contrast with denotation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>close reading</td>
<td>a technique of reading that focuses attention on features of the text to construct an interpretation. (This is in contrast to interpretive methods that rely on research, historical context, biography, or speculation.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denotation</td>
<td>the dictionary definition of a word, phrase, or idea; the standard and objective meaning of a word, phrase, or idea which, theoretically, does not vary based on interpretive position. Contrast with connotation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>interpretation</td>
<td>the process of consuming rhetoric to create meaning. “An interpretation” refers to a specific meaning we build as we encounter a text, focusing on certain ideas, language, or patterns.</td>
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<td>interpretive position</td>
<td>the unique position from which each of us interprets a text—necessarily different for all people at any given time, and often different for the same person at different times in their life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iterative</td>
<td>literally, a repetition within a process. Analysis is iterative because it requires repeated critical encounters with a text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>lens</td>
<td>a metaphor for the conceptual framework a reader applies to an analysis. A “lens” brings certain elements into focus, allowing the reader to attend to specific parts of a text to develop an interpretation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>motif</td>
<td>a recurring image or phrase that helps convey a theme. Similar to a symbol, but the relationship...</td>
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between symbol and symbolized is more one-to-one than between motif and theme.

a notable sequence; structure or shape; recurring image, word, or phrase found in a piece of rhetoric.

a connection a text makes to another text. Can be explicit or implicit; might include allusion, allegory, quotation, or parody. Referencing text adopts some characteristics of the referenced text.

an artifact (usually something concrete) that stands in for (represents) something else (often something abstract).

Techniques

Authorial Intent

In a groundbreaking 1967 essay, Roland Barthes declared that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”⁵⁷ In the fifty years since its publication, “The Death of the Author” has greatly influenced the way students, teachers, and academics conduct analysis. Most critics have come to acknowledge that the personal and historical context of the author is not entirely irrelevant, as Barthes might seem to suggest; rather, most people value Barthes’ notion that we must free ourselves from the trap of authorial intent. This is to say, what we have to work with is the text itself, so it doesn’t matter what the author wanted to say, but instead what they did say. Therefore, we should work from the assumption that every choice the author made was deliberate.

This choice to avoid speculation about the author’s intent or personality is consistent with the theories of text wrestling analysis explored in this chapter’s introduction. Because meaning is always and only constructed through interpretation, we should let go of the idea that the author (or the “secret meanings” the author wrote into a text) is hidden somewhere beneath the surface. There is nothing “hidden” behind the text or in between the lines: there is only the text and those who interpret it.

This idea might seem to contradict one of the central frameworks of this textbook: that unpacking the rhetorical situation is crucial to critically consuming and producing rhetoric.
Overlooking authorial intent does not mean that the author’s rhetorical situation is no longer important. Instead, we should simply avoid unproductive speculation: we can consider the author’s occasion, but we shouldn’t try to guess about their motives. For instance, we can say that Malcolm X’s writing was influenced by racial oppression in the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S., but not by his preference for peas over carrots. It’s a fine line, but an important one.

Moreover, the choice to focus on what the author actually wrote, assuming that each word is on purpose, is part of the rhetorical situation of analysis. Your audience might also be curious about the author’s intent, but your rhetorical purpose in this situation is to demonstrate an interpretation of the text—not the author.

**Radical Noticing: Seeing What’s On the Page**

When we were early readers, we were trained to encounter texts in a specific way: find the main idea, focus on large-scale comprehension, and ignore errors, digressions, or irrelevant information. As Jane Gallop discusses in her essay, “The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters,” this is a useful skill but a problematic one. Because we engage a text from a specific interpretive position (and because we’re not always aware of that position), we often project what we anticipate rather than actually reading. Instead of reading what is on the page, we read what we think should be.

**Projection** is efficient—one e-mail from Mom is probably like all the others, and one episode of *The Simpsons* will probably follow the same trajectory as every episode from the last twenty-odd years. But projection is also problematic and inhibits analysis. As Gallop puts it,

> When the reader concentrates on the familiar, she is reassured that what she already knows is sufficient in relation to this new book. Focusing on the surprising, on the other hand, would mean giving up the comfort of the familiar, of the already known for the sake of learning, of encountering something new, something she didn’t already know.

> In fact, this all has to do with learning. Learning is very difficult; it takes a lot of effort. It is of course much easier if once we learn something we can apply what we have learned again and again. It is much more difficult if every time we confront something new, we have to learn something new.

> Reading what one expects to find means finding what one already knows. Learning, on the other hand, means coming to know something one did not know before. Projecting is the opposite of learning. As long as we project onto a text, we cannot learn from it, we can only find what we already know. Close reading is thus a technique to make us learn, to make us see what we don’t already know, rather than transforming the new into the old.58

Analysis as “learning,” as Gallop explains, is a tool to help interrupt projection: by focusing on and trying to understand parts, we can redirect our attention to what the author is saying.
rather than what we think they should have said. In turn, we can develop a more complex, ethical, and informed understanding of a whole.

Perhaps the most important part of analysis is this attention to detail. If we assume that every word the author published is intentional (in order to avoid speculation about authorial intent), then we can question the meaning and impact of each word, each combination of words, each formal feature of the text. In turn, you should pay special attention to words or forms that surprise you or confuse you: the eye-catching and the ambiguous.

Symbols, Patterns, and References

There is no definitive “how-to” guide on text wrestling, but I often ask my students to direct their attention to three particular elements of a text during their interpretive processes. When you draw connections through the following categories, you are actively building meaning from the words on the page.

27) Symbol: A symbol, as you may already know, is an artifact (usually something concrete) that stands in for (represents) something else (often something abstract). Here are a few examples in different media:

- Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign logo: the O, of course, stands in for the candidate’s last name; the red lines seem to suggest a road (implying progress), or maybe waving American flag; the blue curve represents a clear, blue sky (implying safety or wellbeing); the colors themselves are perhaps symbolic of bipartisan cooperation, or at the very least, the American color palette of red, white, and blue.
- In Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black Cat,” the titular black cat symbolizes the narrator’s descent into madness, alcoholism, and violence, and later his guilt for that descent.
- The teaspoon used to hypnotize people in the film Get Out (2017) symbolizes wealth, power, and privilege (a “silver spoon [Wikipedia entry]”), suggesting that those structures are tools for control and domination.
- In Beowulf, the Old English epic poem, the monster Grendel symbolizes a fear of the unknown and the intractability of nature.
- In The Great Gatsby, the green light at the end of the Buchanans’ dock symbolizes nostalgia and hope.

* A motif is closely related to a symbol, but it is different. A motif is a recurring image, word, or phrase that helps to carry a theme or other abstract idea. For example, William Faulkner’s short story “A Rose for Emily” includes frequent use of the word “dust.” While the dust is not directly symbolic of anything, it certainly brings to mind a variety of connotations: reading “dust” makes you...
think of time passing, stagnancy, decay, and so on. Therefore, the motif of “dust” helps contribute to bigger characteristics, like tone and themes.

5. **Pattern**: Patterns are created by a number of rhetorical moves, often in form. Repetition of phrases or images, the visual appearance of text on a page, and character archetypes might contribute to patterns. While patterns themselves are interesting and important, you might also notice that breaking a pattern is a significant and deliberate move.

- The episode of the TV series *Master of None* titled “Parents” (Season 1, Episode 2) tells the respective stories of two immigrant families. By tracing the previous generation of each immigrant family through a series of flashbacks, the episode establishes a pattern in chronology: although the families have unique stories, the pattern highlights the similarities of these two families’ experiences. In turn, this pattern demonstrates the parallel but distinct challenges and opportunities faced by the immigrants and first-generation American citizens the episode profiles.

- In Wilfred Owen’s poem “Dulce Et Decorum Est,” each line of the first stanza contains ten syllables. However, the following stanzas contain occasional deviations—more or fewer syllables—creating a sense of disorder and also drawing emphasis to the pattern-breaking lines.

- Tyehimba Jess, author of *Olio* and *Leadbelly*, painstakingly crafts patterns in his poetry. For instance, his series of sonnets on Millie and Christine McKoy [Wikipedia entry] follows not only the conventions of traditional sonnets, but are also interlocking, exemplifying the distinct but overlapping voices of conjoined twins.

6. **Reference**: A reference is a connection a text makes to another text. By making a reference (whether obvious or hidden), the referencing text adopts some characteristics of the referenced text. References might include allusion, allegory, quotation, or parody.

- C.S. Lewis’ classic young adult series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is a Christian allegory. The imagery used to describe the main hero, Aslan the lion, as well as a number of the other stories and details, parallel the New Testament. In turn, Aslan is imbued with the savior connotation of Jesus Christ.

- The TV show *Bob’s Burgers* makes frequent references to pop culture. For instance, the fictional boy band featured in the show, Boyz 4 Now, closely resembles One Direction, *NSYNC, and Backstreet Boys—and their name is clearly a reference to Boyz II Men.
“Woman Hollering Creek,” a short story by Sandra Cisneros, deals with the dangers of interpersonal violence. The protagonist refers frequently to telenovelas, soap operas that set unrealistic and problematic assumptions for healthy relationships. These references suggest to us that interpersonal violence is pervasive in media and social norms.

Sociocultural Lenses

In addition to looking for symbols, patterns, and references, you might also focus your analytical reading by using a sociocultural critical lens. Because your attention is necessarily selective, a limited resource, these lenses give you a suggestion for where you might direct that attention. While it is beyond the scope of this book to give in-depth history and reading practices for different schools of literary criticism or cultural studies, the following are common lenses applied during textual analysis. (Free resources from the Purdue OWL introduce students to some of these schools of criticism.)

As you engage with a text, you should look for touchstones, tropes, or symbols that relate to one or more of the following critical perspectives.

- **Gender and sexuality**
  How does the text portray the creation and performance of gender? How many people of different genders are included in the story? Do the characters in the text express gender according to traditional standards? How do characters resist the confines of gender? How much attention, agency, and voice are allowed to women, men, and non-binary or genderqueer characters? What sorts of relationships—familial, friendly, romantic, sexual, etc.—are portrayed in the text? How do these relationships compare to the relationships of the dominant culture? How much attention, agency, and voice are allowed to LGBTQIA2S+ people?

- **Disability**
  How does the text represent people with disabilities? Does the text reveal damaging stereotypes or misconceptions about people with disabilities or their life experiences? Does the text illuminate the social/environmental construction of disabilities? How does the text construct or assume the normative body?

- **Race, ethnicity, and nationality**
  How does the text represent people of color, of minority status, and/or of different nationalities? What does it suggest about institutionalized racism and discrimination? How does the text examine or portray cultural and individual identities? How do the characters resist racism, xenophobia, and oppression? How do they reproduce, practice, or contribute to racism, xenophobia, or oppression?
Part Two: Text Wrestling

- Social class and economy
  
  *How does the text represent differences in wealth, access, and resources? Do people cross the divisions between socioeconomic statuses? Are characters of greater status afforded more power, agency, or freedom—in the plot events or in the text more generally? How do exploited people resist or reproduce exploitation?*

- Ecologies and the environment
  
  *Does the setting of the text represent a ‘natural’ world? How does the text represent nature, ecosystems, non-human animals and other living organisms? Does the text, its narrative, or its characters advocate for environmental protection? Does the text speak to the human impact on global ecological health?*

- (Post)colonialism
  
  *What is the relationship of the characters and the setting, historically and culturally? Does the text take place in a currently or formerly colonized nation? Which of the characters are from that place? How have the effects of colonialism and imperialism influenced the place and its indigenous people? How have subjected, enslaved, or exploited people preserved culture or resisted colonialism? How does the text represent patterns of migration—forced or voluntary?*

Some texts will lend themselves to a certain lens (or combination of lenses) based on content or the rhetorical situation of the author or reader. Bring to mind a recent movie you watched, book you read, or other text you’ve encountered; by asking the italicized questions above, determine whether that text seems to be asking for a certain sociocultural perspective.
Activities

**Personal Photo Analysis**

For this activity, find a photograph (digital or printed) that has some sort of emotional gravity for you: it could be a picture of a loved one, a treasured memory, a favorite place, anything that makes **you** feel something.

On a clean sheet of paper, free-write about the photo in response to the following prompts for three minutes each:

1) Describe the photograph as a whole. What’s happening? Who is in it? Use vivid description to capture the photo in writing as best you can.

2) Zoom in on one element of the photo—one color, shape, object, person, etc. How does this part relate to the greater whole?

3) Zoom out and describe what’s **not** shown in the photo. What’s happening just out of frame? What’s happening just before, just after? What are the emotions you associate with this moment?

Now, trade photos with a friend or classmate who’s also working on this activity. Repeat the same free-write prompts and compare your responses. What do the differences indicate about the interpretive process? About context? About the position of the reader and the limitations on the author (photographer)?

**Unpacking Advertisements: Analyzing Visual Rhetoric**

One of the most common forms of visual rhetoric we encounter on a daily basis are advertisements; indeed, advertisements are more and more prominent with the growth of technology, and increasingly tailored to the target audience. The ads we encounter often blend language, images, sound, and video to achieved their intended purpose—to convince you to buy something.

To practice analysis, you can close read an advertisement or advertising campaign.

1) Choose a brand, product, or corporation that you find interesting. One that I’ve found especially engaging is Levi’s 2009 “Go Forth” advertising campaign.61

2) Try to identify the subject, occasion, audience, and purpose of the advertisement. Often, there is an obvious or declared answer for each of these (the subject of the Levi’s campaign is “Levi’s jeans” and the purpose is “to make you buy Levi’s jeans”), but there are also more subtle answers (the subject is also “American millennial empowerment” and the purpose is also “create a youthful, labor-oriented brand”).

3) Identify what parts of the advertisement contribute to the whole: what colors, shapes, words, images, associations, etc., does the ad play on in order to achieve its purpose? Do you notice symbols, patterns, or references?
4) Interpret the observations you collected in number three. How do the parts contribute to the whole? What might you overlook if you weren’t paying close enough attention?

**Radical Noticing Promenade**

This exercise encourages you to focus on details, rather than the big picture, as a way to better understand the big picture. You will need a notebook and a camera. (If you have a cell phone with a camera, it will do the trick.)

Take about twenty minutes to wander around an area that you often spend time in: your house, your neighborhood, the halls of your school, etc. Walk slowly and aimlessly; this exercise works best when you don’t have a destination in mind.

As you wander, look around you and focus on small details—a piece of garbage on the sidewalk, the color of that guy’s shoes, the sound of a leaf blower in the distance. Record (using your camera, notebook, or both) these small details. When you return to your desk, choose three of these details to meditate on. Using descriptive writing (see Chapter One), spend a few minutes exploring these details in writing. Then, consider what they might reflect about the place where you promenaded—the piece of garbage might indicate that neighborhood is well-maintained but not pristine; the leaf blower might reflect a suburban American commitment to both manicured lawns and convenience.

**Poem Explication**

Practice analyzing a text using your choice of one of the following poems. First, read a poem through once silently and once aloud. Then read the poem again, this time annotating words and phrases that strike you. Look for patterns (and breaks in patterns) in language, rhyme, meter, and form. Look for potential symbolism, concrete objects that seem to suggest something more abstract. Look for references, connections to other texts you know. You can also consider whether the poem speaks to any analytical lenses and how it compares to your experiences.

Next, develop several questions that the poem raises. What is ambiguous about the content or language? What might it suggest about our lives, our society?

Finally, synthesize your observations and questions into a brief essay driven by a thesis statement. Use specific parts of the text to support your insight.
On our way to the river
the gist of American storytelling
dragged along like a dog
leashed to the back of the car.

I had to pull over.
You said, “I hope

We switched seats.

Parked at milepost 6, the grease fire night
pulled the river toward the delta.
The water ran low;
the trees performed their shakes.

We removed our hats then went down to the banks.
Richard Cory

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
“Good-morning,” and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.
Model Texts by Student Authors

Annotation: “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”

Original text:
As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
  The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
  No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
‘Twere profanation of our joys  
  To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears,  
  Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
  Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers’ love  
  (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
  Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
  That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
  Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
  Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
  Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so  
  As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
  To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
  Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
    And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
    Like th’ other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
    And makes me end where I begun.

[Video: Text Wrestling/Close Reading Roundtable]
Chapter Five:
Summary and Response

As you sharpen your analytical skills, you might realize that you should use evidence from the text to back up the points you make. You might use direct quotes as support, but you can also consider using summary.

A **summary** is a condensed version of a text, put into your own words. Summarizing is a useful part of the analytical process because it requires you to read the text, interpret and process it, and reproduce the important points using your own language. By doing so, you are (consciously or unconsciously) making choices about what matters, what words and phrases mean, and how to articulate their meaning.

Often (but not always), **response** refers to a description of a reader’s experience and reactions as they encounter a text. Response papers track how you feel and what you think as you move through a text. More importantly, responses also challenge you to evaluate exactly how a text acts upon you—to make you feel or think a certain way—using language or images. While a response is not an analysis, it will help you generate ideas for the analytical process.

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<td>direct quote</td>
<td>the verbatim use of another author’s words. Can be used as evidence to support your claim, or as language to analyze/close-read to demonstrate an interpretation or insight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paraphrase</td>
<td>author reiterates a main idea, argument, or detail of a text in their own words without drastically altering the length of the passage(s) they paraphrase. Contrast with summary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response</td>
<td>a mode of writing that values the reader’s experience of and reactions to a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summary</td>
<td>a rhetorical mode in which an author reiterates the main ideas, arguments, and details of a text in their own words, condensing a longer text into a smaller version. Contrast with paraphrase.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Techniques

Identifying Main Points, Concerns, and Images

If you ever watch TV shows with a serial plot, you might be familiar with the phrase “Previously, on _________.” The snippets at the beginning of an episode are designed to remind the viewer of the important parts of previous episodes—but how do makers of the show determine what a viewer needs to be refreshed on? And why am I watching full episodes if they’ll just tell me what I need to know in the first minute of the next episode?

Typically, the makers of the show choose short, punchy bits that will be relevant in the new episode’s narrative arc. For instance, a “Previously, on The Walking Dead” might have a clip from ten episodes ago showing zombies invading Hershel’s farm if the new episode focuses on Hershel and his family. Therefore, these “previously ons” hook the viewer by showcasing only exciting parts and prime the viewer for a new story by planting specific details in their mind. Summaries like this are driven by purpose, and consequently have a specific job to do in choosing main points.

You, too, should consider your rhetorical purpose when you begin writing summary. Whether you are writing a summary essay or using summary as a tool for analysis, your choices about what to summarize and how to summarize it should be determined by what you’re trying to accomplish with your writing.

As you engage with a text you plan to summarize, you should begin by identifying main points, recurring images, or concerns and preoccupations of the text. (You may find the Engaged Reading Strategies appendix of this book useful.) After reading and rereading, what ideas stick with you? What does the author seem distracted by? What keeps cropping up?

Tracking Your Reactions

As you read and reread a text, you should take regular breaks to check in with yourself to track your reactions. Are you feeling sympathetic toward the speaker, narrator, or author? To the other characters? What other events, ideas, or contexts are you reminded of as you read? Do you understand and agree with the speaker, narrator, or author? What is your emotional state? At what points do you feel confused or uncertain, and why?

Try out the double-column note-taking method. As illustrated below, divide a piece of paper into two columns; on the left, make a heading for “Notes and Quotes,” and on the right, “Questions and Reactions.” As you move through a text, jot down important ideas and words from the text on the left, and record your intellectual and emotional reactions on the right. Be sure to ask prodding questions of the text along the way, too.
Writing Your Summary

Once you have read and re-read your text at least once, taking notes and reflecting along the way, you are ready to start writing a summary. Before starting, consider your rhetorical situation: What are you trying to accomplish (purpose) with your summary? What details and ideas (subject) are important for your reader (audience) to know? Should you assume that they have also read the text you’re summarizing?

I’m thinking back here to the “Previously on...” idea: TV series don’t include everything from a prior episode; they focus instead on moments that set up the events of their next episode. You too should choose your content in accordance with your rhetorical situation.

Summarizing requires you to make choices about what matters, what words and phrases mean, and how to articulate their meaning.
I encourage you to start off by articulating the “key” idea or ideas from the text in one or two sentences. Focus on clarity of language: start with simple word choice, a single idea, and a straightforward perspective so that you establish a solid foundation.

The authors support feminist theories and practices that are critical of racism and other oppressions.

Then, before that sentence, write one or two more sentences that introduce the title of the text, its authors, and its main concerns or interventions. Revise your key idea sentence as necessary.

In “Why Our Feminism Must Be Intersectional (And 3 Ways to Practice It),” Jarune Uwuajaren and Jamie Utt critique what is known as ‘white feminism.’ They explain that sexism is wrapped up in racism, Islamophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, and other systems of oppression. The authors support feminist theories and practices that recognize intersectionality.

Your next steps will depend largely on the reasons you are summarizing. Has your teacher asked you to summarize objectively, reproducing the ideas of the text without adding your own ideas or reactions? Have they asked you to critique the article, by both showing understanding and then pushing back against the text? Follow the parameters of your assignment; they are an important element of your rhetorical situation.

In most summary assignments, though, you will be expected to draw directly from the article itself by using direct quotes or paraphrases in addition to your own summary.

**Paraphrase, Summary, and Direct Quotes**

Whether you’re writing a summary or broaching your analysis, using support from the text will help you clarify ideas, demonstrate your understanding, or further your argument, among other things. Three distinct methods, which Bruce Ballenger refers to as “The Notetaker’s Triad,” will allow you to process and reuse information from your focus text.67

A **direct quote** might be most familiar to you: using quotation marks (“ ”) to indicate the moments that you’re borrowing, you reproduce an author’s words verbatim in your own writing. Use a direct quote if someone else wrote or said something in a distinctive or particular way and you want to capture their words exactly.
Direct quotes are good for establishing *ethos* and providing evidence. In a text wrestling essay, you will be expected to use multiple direct quotes: in order to attend to specific language, you will need to reproduce segments of that language in your analysis.

**Paraphrasing** is similar to the process of summary. When we paraphrase, we process information or ideas from another person’s text and put it in our own words. The main difference between paraphrase and summary is scope: if summarizing means rewording and condensing, then paraphrasing means rewording without drastically altering length. However, paraphrasing is also generally more faithful to the spirit of the original; whereas a summary requires you to process and invites your own perspective, a paraphrase ought to mirror back the original idea using your own language.

Paraphrasing is helpful for establishing background knowledge or general consensus, simplifying a complicated idea, or reminding your reader of a certain part of another text. It is also valuable when relaying statistics or historical information, both of which are usually more fluidly woven into your writing when spoken with your own voice.

**Summary**, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is useful for “broadstrokes” or quick overviews, brief references, and providing plot or character background. When you summarize, you reword and condense another author’s writing. Be aware, though, that summary also requires individual thought: when you reword, it should be a result of you processing the idea yourself, and when you condense, you must think critically about which parts of the text are most important. As you can see in the example below, one summary shows understanding and puts the original into the author’s own words; the other summary is a result of a passive rewording, where the author only substituted synonyms for the original.

Original Quote: “On Facebook, what you click on, what you share with your ‘friends’ shapes your profile, preferences, affinities, political opinions and your vision of the world. The last thing Facebook wants is to contradict you in any way” (Filloux).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary example</th>
<th>Pass/Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Facebook, the things you click on and share forms your profile, likings, sympathies, governmental ideas and your image of society. Facebook doesn’t want to contradict you at all (Filloux).</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When you interact with Facebook, you teach the algorithms about yourself. Those algorithms want to mirror back your beliefs (Filloux).
Part Two: Text Wrestling

Each of these three tactics should support your summary or analysis: you should integrate quotes, paraphrases, and summary with your own writing. Below, you can see three examples of these tools. Consider how the direct quote, the paraphrase, and the summary each could be used to achieve different purposes.

**Original Passage**

It has been suggested (again rather anecdotally) that giraffes do communicate using infrasonic vocalizations (the signals are verbally described to be similar—in structure and function—to the low-frequency, infrasonic “rumbles” of elephants). It was further speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production. Moreover, particular neck movements (e.g. the neck stretch) are suggested to be associated with the production of infrasonic vocalizations.\(^\text{68}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Paraphrase</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some zoological experts have pointed out that the evidence for giraffe hums has been “rather anecdotally” reported (Baotic et al. 3). However, some scientists have “speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production” (Ibid. 3).</td>
<td>Giraffes emit a low-pitch noise; some scientists believe that this hum can be used for communication with other members of the social group, but others are skeptical because of the dearth of research on giraffe noises. According to Baotic et al., the anatomy of the animal suggests that they may be making deliberate and specific noises (3).</td>
<td>Baotic et al. conducted a study on giraffe hums in response to speculation that these noises are used deliberately for communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The examples above also demonstrate additional citation conventions worth noting:

- A parenthetical in-text citation is used for all three forms. (In MLA format, this citation includes the author’s last name and page number.) The purpose of an in-text citation is to identify key information that guides your reader to your Works Cited page (or Bibliography or References, depending on your format).
- If you use the author’s name in the sentence, you do not need to include their name in the parenthetical citation.
- If your material doesn’t come from a specific page or page range, but rather from the entire text, you do not need to include a page number in the parenthetical citation.
- If there are many authors (generally more than three), you can use “et al.” to mean “and others.”
- If you cite the same source consecutively in the same paragraph (without citing any other sources in between), you can use “Ibid.” to mean “same as the last one.”

In Chapter Six, we will discuss integrating quotes, summaries, and paraphrases into your text wrestling analysis. Especially if you are writing a summary that requires you to use direct
quotes, I encourage you to jump ahead to “Synthesis: Using Evidence to Explore Your Thesis” in that chapter.

Activities

Summary and Response: TV Show or Movie

Practice summary and response using a movie or an episode of a television show. (Although it can be more difficult with a show or movie you already know and like, you can apply these skills to both familiar and unfamiliar texts.)

7. Watch it once all the way through, taking notes using the double-column structure above.
8. Watch it once more, pausing and rewinding as necessary, adding additional notes.
9. Write one or two paragraphs summarizing the episode or movie as objectively as possible. Try to include the major plot points, characters, and conflicts.
10. Write a paragraph that transitions from summary to response: what were your reactions to the episode or movie? What do you think produced those reactions? What seems troubling or problematic? What elements of form and language were striking? How does the episode or movie relate to your lived experiences?

Everyone’s a Critic: Food Review

Food critics often employ summary and response with the purpose of reviewing restaurants for potential customers. You can give it a shot by visiting a restaurant, your dining hall, a fast-food joint, or a food cart. Before you get started, consider reading some food and restaurant reviews from your local newspaper. (Yelp often isn’t quite thorough enough.)

Bring a notepad to your chosen location and take detailed notes on your experience as a patron. Use descriptive writing techniques (see Chapter One), to try to capture the experience.

• What happens as you walk in? Are you greeted? What does it smell like? What are your immediate reactions?
• Describe the atmosphere. Is there music? What’s the lighting like? Is it slow, or busy?
• Track the service. How long before you receive the attention you need? Is that attention appropriate to the kind of food-service place you’re in?
• Record as many details about the food you order as possible.

After your dining experience, write a brief review of the restaurant, dining hall, fast-food restaurant, or food cart. What was it like, specifically? Did it meet your expectations? Why or
why not? What would you suggest for improvement? Would you recommend it to other diners like you?

Digital Media Summary and Mini-Analysis

For this exercise, you will study a social media feed of your choice. You can use your own or someone else’s Facebook feed, Twitter feed, or Instagram feed. Because these feeds are tailored to their respective user’s interests, they are all unique and represent something about the user.

After closely reviewing at least ten posts, respond to the following questions in a brief essay:

- What is the primary medium used on this platform (e.g., images, text, video, etc.)?
- What recurring ideas, themes, topics, or preoccupations do you see in this collection? Provide examples.
- Do you see posts that deviate from these common themes?
- What do the recurring topics in the feed indicate about its user? Why?
- Bonus: What ads do you see popping up? How do you think these have been geared toward the user?
Maggie as the Focal Point

Shanna Greene Benjamin attempts to resolve Toni Morrison’s emphasis on Maggie in her short story “Recitatif”. While many previous scholars focus on racial codes, and “the black-and-white” story that establishes the racial binary, Benjamin goes ten steps further to show “the brilliance of Morrison’s experiment” (Benjamin 90). Benjamin argues that Maggie’s story which is described through Twyla’s and Roberta’s memories is the focal point of “Recitatif” where the two protagonists have a chance to rewrite “their conflicting versions of history” (Benjamin 91). More so, Maggie is the interstitial space where blacks and whites can engage, confront America’s racialized past, rewrite history, and move forward.

Benjamin highlights that Maggie’s story is first introduced by Twyla, labeling her recollections as the “master narrative” (Benjamin 94). Although Maggie’s story is rebutted with Roberta’s memories, Twyla’s version “represent[s] the residual, racialized perspectives” stemming from America’s past (Benjamin 89). Since Maggie is a person with a disability her story inevitably becomes marginalized, and utilized by both Twyla and Roberta for their own self-fulfilling needs, “instead of mining a path toward the truth” (Benjamin 97). Maggie is the interstitial narrative, which Benjamin describes as a space where Twyla and Roberta, “who represent opposite ends of a racial binary”, can come together to heal (Benjamin 101). Benjamin also points out how Twyla remembers Maggie’s legs looking “like parentheses” and relates the shape of parentheses, ( ), to self-reflection (Morrison 141). Parentheses represent that inward gaze into oneself, and a space that needs to be filled with self-reflection in order for one to heal and grow. Twyla and Roberta create new narratives of Maggie throughout the story in order to make themselves feel better about their troubled past. According to Benjamin, Maggie’s “parenthetical body” is symbolically the interstitial space that “prompts self-reflection required to ignite healing” (Benjamin 102). Benjamin concludes that Morrison tries to get the readers to engage in America’s past by eliminating and taking up the space between the racial binary that Maggie represents.
Not only do I agree with Benjamin’s stance on “Recitatif”, but I also disapprove of my own critical analysis of “Recitatif.” I made the same mistakes that other scholars have made regarding Morrison’s story; we focused on racial codes and the racial binary, while completely missing the interstitial space which Maggie represents. Although I did realize Maggie was of some importance, I was unsure why so I decided to not focus on Maggie at all. Therefore, I missed the most crucial message from “Recitatif” that Benjamin hones in on.

Maggie is brought up in every encounter between Twyla and Roberta, so of course it makes sense that Maggie is the focal point in “Recitatif”. Twyla and Roberta project themselves onto Maggie, which is why the two women have a hard time figuring out “‘What the hell happened to Maggie’” (Morrison 155). Maggie also has the effect of bringing the two women closer together, yet at times causing them to be become more distant. For example, when Twyla and Roberta encounter one another at the grocery store, Twyla brings up the time Maggie fell and the “gar girls laughed at her”, while Roberta reminds her that Maggie was in fact pushed down (Morrison 148). Twyla has created a new, “self-serving narrative[ ]” as to what happened to Maggie instead of accepting what has actually happened, which impedes Twyla’s ability to self-reflect and heal (Benjamin 102). If the two women would have taken up the space between them to confront the truths of their past, Twyla and Roberta could have created a “cooperative narrative” in order to mend.

Maggie represents the interstitial space that lies between white and black Americans. I believe this is an ideal space where the two races can come together to discuss America’s racialized past, learn from one another, and in turn, understand why America is divided as such. If white and black America jumped into the space that Maggie
defines, maybe we could move forward as a country and help one another succeed. When I say “succeed”, I am not referring to the “American dream” because that is a false dream created by white America. “Recitatif” is not merely what characteristics define which race, it is much more than. Plus, who cares about race! I want America to be able to benefit and give comfort to every citizen whatever their “race” may be. This is time where we need black and white America to come together and fight the greater evil, which is the corruption within America’s government.

Works Cited


The article “Pronouns and Bathrooms: Supporting Transgender Students,” featured on Edutopia, was written to give educators a few key points when enacting the role of a truly (gender) inclusive educator. It is written specifically to high-school level educators, but I feel that almost all of the rules that should apply to a person who is transgender or gender-expansive at any age or grade level. The information is compiled by several interviews done with past and present high school students who identify with a trans-identity. The key points of advice stated are supported by personal statements made by past or present students that identify with a trans-identity.

The first point of advice is to use the student’s preferred name and/or pronoun. These are fundamental to the formation of identity and demand respect. The personal interview used in correlation with the advice details how the person ended up dropping out of high school after transferring twice due to teachers refusing to use their preferred name and pronoun. This is an all-too-common occurrence. The trans community recommend that schools and administrators acquire updated gender-inclusive
documentation and update documentation at the request of the student to avoid misrepresentation and mislabeling. When you use the student’s preferred name and pronoun in and out of the classroom you are showing the student you sincerely care for their well-being and the respect of their identity.

The second and other most common recommendation is to make “trans-safe” (single-use, unisex or trans-inclusive) bathrooms widely available to students. Often these facilities either do not exist at all or are few-and-far-between, usually inconveniently located, and may not even meet ADA standards. This is crucial to insuring safety for trans-identified students.

Other recommendations are that schools engage in continual professional development training to insure that teachers are the best advocates for their students. Defend and protect students from physical and verbal abuse. Create a visibly welcoming and supportive environment for trans-identified students by creating support groups, curriculum and being vocal about your ally status.

The last piece of the article tells us a person who is trans simply wants to be viewed as human—a fully actualized human. I agree wholeheartedly. I believe that everyone has this desire. I agree with the recommendations of the participants that these exhibitions of advocacy are indeed intrinsic to the role of gender-expansive ally-ship,

While they may not be the most salient of actions of advocacy, they are the most foundational parts. These actions are the tip of the iceberg, but they must be respected.
Being a true ally to the gender-expansive and transgender communities means continually expanding your awareness of trans issues. I am thankful these conversations are being had and am excited for the future of humanity.

Works Cited

**Education Methods: Banking vs. Problem-Posing** 

Almost every student has had an unpleasant experience with an educator. Many times this happens due to the irrelevant problems posed by educators and arbitrary assignments required of the student. In his chapter from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire centers his argument on the oppressive and unsuccessful banking education method in order to show the necessity of a problem-posing method of education.

Freire begins his argument by intervening into the conversation regarding teaching methods and styles of education, specifically responding in opposition to the banking education method, a method that “mirrors the oppressive society as a whole” (73). He describes the banking method as a system of narration and depositing of information into students like “containers” or “receptacles” (72). He constructs his argument by citing examples of domination and mechanical instruction as aspects that create an assumption of dichotomy, stating that “a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others” (75). Freire draws on the reader’s experiences with this method by providing a list of banking attitudes and practices including “the teacher chooses and enforces his choices, and the students comply” (73), thus allowing the reader to connect the subject with their lived experiences.

In response to the banking method, Freire then advocates for a problem-posing method of education comprised of an educator constantly reforming her reflections in the reflection of the students. He theorizes that education involves a constant unveiling of reality, noting that “they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation” (83). Thus, the problem-posing method draws on discussion
and collaborative communication between students and educator. As they work together, they are able to learn from one another and impact the world by looking at applicable problems and assignments, which is in direct opposition of the banking method.

While it appears that Freire’s problem-posing method is more beneficial to both the student and educator, he fails to take into account the varying learning styles of the students, as well as the teaching abilities of the educators. He states that through the banking method, “the student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance” (71). While this may be true for many students, some have an easier time absorbing information when it is given to them in a more mechanical fashion. The same theory applies to educators as well. Some educators may have a more difficult time communicating through the problem-posing method. Other educators may not be as willing to be a part of a more collaborative education method.

I find it difficult to agree with a universal method of education, due to the fact that a broad method doesn’t take into consideration the varying learning and communication styles of both educator and student. However, I do agree with Freire on the basis that learning and education should be a continuous process that involves the dedication of both student and educator. Students are their own champions and it takes a real effort to be an active participant in one’s own life and education. It’s too easy to sit back and do the bare minimum, or be an “automaton” (74). To constantly be open to learning and new ideas, to be a part of your own education, is harder, but extremely valuable.

As a student pursuing higher education, I find this text extremely reassuring. The current state of the world and education can seem grim at times, but after reading this I feel more confident that there are still people who feel that the current systems set in place are not creating students who can critically think and contribute to the world. Despite being written forty years ago, Freire’s radical approach to education seems to be a more humanistic style, one where students are thinking authentically, for “authentic thinking is concerned with reality” (77). Problem-posing education is one that is concerned with liberation, opposed to oppression. The banking method doesn’t allow for liberation, for “liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon
their world in order to transform it” (79). Educational methods should prepare students to be liberators and transformers of the world, not containers to receive and store information.

Works Cited


Teacher Takeaways

“I love that this student combines multiple forms of information (paraphrases, quotes, and summaries) with their own reactions to the text. By using a combined form of summary, paraphrase, and quote, the student weaves ideas from the text together to give the reader a larger sense of the author’s ideas and claims. The student uses citations and signal phrases to remind us of the source. The student also does a good job of keeping paragraphs focused, setting up topic sentences and transitions, and introducing ideas that become important parts of their thesis. On the other hand, the reader could benefit from more explanation of some complex concepts from the text being analyzed, especially if the author assumes that the reader isn’t familiar with Freire. For example, the banking method of education is never quite clearly explained and the reader is left to derive its meaning from the context clues the student provides. A brief summary or paraphrase of this concept towards the beginning of the essay would give us a better understanding of the contexts the student is working in.”

– Professor Dannemiller

You Snooze, You Peruse

This article was an interesting read about finding a solution to the problem that 62% of high school students are facing — chronic sleep deprivation (less than 8 hours on school nights). While some schools have implemented later start times, this article argues for a more unique approach. Several high schools in Las Cruces, New Mexico have installed sleeping pods for students to use when needed. They “include a reclined chair with a domed sensory-reduction bubble that closes around one’s head and torso” and “feature a one-touch start button that activates a relaxing sequence of music and soothing lights” (Conklin). Students rest for 20 minutes and then go back to
class. Some of the teachers were concerned about the amount of valuable class time students would miss while napping, while other teachers argued that if the students are that tired, they won’t be able to focus in class anyway. Students who used the napping pods reported they were effective in restoring energy levels and reducing stress. While that is great, there was concern from Melissa Moore, a pediatric sleep specialist, that napping during the day would cause students to sleep less during that “all-important nighttime sleep.”

Sleep deprivation is a serious issue in high school students. I know there are a lot of high school students that are very involved in extra-curricular activities like I was. I was on student council and played sports year-round, which meant most nights I got home late, had hours of homework, and almost never got enough sleep. I was exhausted all the time, especially during junior and senior year. I definitely agree that there is no point in students sitting in class if they’re so tired they can barely stay awake. However, I don’t know if sleeping pods are the best solution. Sure, after a 20-minute nap students feel a little more energetic, but I don’t think this is solving the chronic issue of sleep deprivation. A 20-minute nap isn’t solving the problem that most students aren’t getting 8 hours of sleep, which means they aren’t getting enough deep sleep (which usually occurs between hours 6-8). Everyone needs these critical hours of sleep, especially those that are still growing and whose brains are still developing. I think it would be much more effective to implement later start times. High school students aren’t going to go to bed earlier, that’s just the way it is. But having later start times gives them the opportunity to get up to an extra hour of sleep, which can make a huge difference in the overall well-being of students, as

Teacher Takeaways

“I appreciate that this author has a clear understanding of the article which they summarize, and in turn are able to take a clear stance of qualification (‘Yes, but...’). However, I would encourage this student to revisit the structure of their summary. They’ve applied a form that many students fall back on instinctively: the first half is ‘What They Say’ and the second half is ‘What I Say.’ Although this can be effective, I would rather that the student make this move on the sentence level so that paragraphs are organized around ideas, not the sources of those ideas.”

– Professor Wilhjelm
well as their level of concentration and focus in the classroom.

Works Cited


Also of note are recent emphases to use Bloom’s work as a conceptual model, not a hard-and-fast, infallible rule for cognition. Importantly, we rarely engage only one kind of thinking, and models like this should not be used to make momentous decisions; rather, they should contribute to a broader, nuanced understanding of human cognition and development.

In consideration of revised versions Bloom’s Taxonomy and the previous note, it can be mentioned that this process necessarily involves judgment/evaluation; using the process of interpretation, my analysis and synthesis require my intellectual discretion.

Mays 1258.


Read more advice from the Purdue OWL relevant to close reading at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/4/17/.

One particularly useful additional resource is the text “Annoying Ways People Use Sources,” externally linked in the Additional Recommended Resources appendix of this book.

Gallop 7.

Essay by an anonymous student author, 2014. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

This essay is a synthesis of two students’ work. One of those students is Ross Reaume, Portland State University, 2014, and the other student wishes to remain anonymous. Reproduced with permission from the student authors.

Essay by Marina, who has requested her last name not be included. Portland Community College, 2018. Reproduced with permission from the student author.

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Essay by Marina, who has requested her last name not be included. Portland Community College, 2018. Reproduced with permission from the student author.
What does it mean to know something? How would you explain the process of thinking? In the 1950s, educational theorist Benjamin Bloom proposed that human cognition, thinking and knowing, could be classified by six categories. Hierarchically arranged in order of complexity, these steps were:

- **judgment**
- **synthesis**
- **analysis**
- **application**
- **comprehension**
- **knowledge**

Since his original model, the taxonomy has been revised, as illustrated in the diagram below:

- **Bloom’s Original Design**
  - judgment
  - synthesis
  - analysis
  - application
  - comprehension
  - knowledge

- **One Revised Version**
  - creating
  - evaluating
  - analyzing
  - applying
  - understanding
  - remembering

- **Another Revised Version**

- Each word is an action verb instead of a noun (e.g., “applying” instead of “application”);
- Some words have been changed for different synonyms;
One version holds “creating” above “evaluating”;
And, most importantly, other versions are reshaped into a circle, as pictured above. The significance of these changes is what you think.

I introduce this model of cognition to contextualize analysis as a cognitive tool which can work in tandem with other cognitive tasks and behaviors. Analysis is most commonly used alongside synthesis. To proceed with the LEGO® example from Chapter 4, consider my taking apart the castle as an act of analysis. I study each face of each block intently, even those parts that I can’t see when the castle is fully constructed. In the process of synthesis, I bring together certain blocks from the castle to instead build something else—let’s say, a racecar. By unpacking and interpreting each part, I’m able to build a new whole.

In a text wrestling essay, you’re engaging in a process very similar to my castle-to-racecar adventure. You’ll encounter a text and unpack it attentively, looking closely at each piece of language, its arrangement, its signification, and then use it to build an insightful, critical insight about the original text. I might not use every original block, but by exploring the relationship of part-to-whole, I better understand how the castle is a castle. In turn, I am better positioned to act as a sort of tour guide for the castle or a mechanic for the racecar, able to show my readers what about the castle or racecar is important and to explain how it works.

In this chapter, you’ll learn about crafting a thesis for a text wrestling essay and using evidence to support that thesis. As you will discover, an analytical essay involves every tier of Bloom’s Taxonomy, arguably even including “judgement” because your thesis will present an interpretation that is evidence-based and arguable.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>analysis</td>
<td>the cognitive process and/or rhetorical mode of studying constituent parts to demonstrate an interpretation of a larger whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidence</td>
<td>a part or combination of parts that lends support or proof to an arguable topic, idea, or interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synthesis</td>
<td>a cognitive and rhetorical process by which an author brings together parts of a larger whole to create a unique new product. Examples of synthesis might include an analytical essay, found poetry, or a mashup/remix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis (statement)</td>
<td>a 1-3 sentence statement outlining the main insight(s), argument(s), or concern(s) of an essay; not necessary in every rhetorical situation; typically found at the beginning of an essay, though sometimes embedded later in the paper. Also referred to as a “So what?” statement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Techniques

So What? Turning Observations into a Thesis

It’s likely that you’ve heard the term “thesis statement” multiple times in your writing career. Even though you may have some idea what a thesis entails already, it is worth reviewing and unpacking the expectations surrounding a thesis, specifically in a text wrestling essay.

A thesis statement is a central, unifying insight that drives your analysis or argument. In a typical college essay, this insight should be articulated in one to three sentences, placed within the introductory paragraph or section. As we’ll see below, this is not always the case, but it is what many of your audiences will expect. To put it simply, a thesis is the “So what?” of an analytical or persuasive essay. It answers your audience when they ask, Why does your writing matter? What bigger insights does it yield about the subject of analysis? About our world?

Thesis statements in most rhetorical situations advocate for a certain vision of a text, phenomenon, reality, or policy. Good thesis statements support such a vision using evidence and thinking that confirms, clarifies, demonstrates, nuances, or otherwise relates to that vision. In other words, a thesis is “a proposition that you can prove with evidence..., yet it’s one you have to prove, that isn’t obviously true or merely factual.”

In a text wrestling analysis, a thesis pushes beyond basic summary and observation. In other words, it’s the difference between:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does the text say?</td>
<td>What do I have to say about the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I noticed ______</td>
<td>I noticed ______ and it means ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I noticed ______ and it matters because ______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you think of your essay as the human body, the thesis is the spine. Yes, the body can still exist without a spine, but its functionings will be severely limited. Furthermore, everything comes back to and radiates out from the spine: trace back from your fingertips to your backbone and consider how they relate. In turn, each paragraph should tie back to your thesis, offering support and clear connections so your reader can see the entire “body” of your essay. In this way, a thesis statement serves two purposes: it is not only about the ideas of your paper, but also the structure.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) suggests this specific process for developing your thesis statement:

1. Once you’ve read the story or novel closely, look back over your notes for patterns of questions or ideas that interest you. Have most of your questions been about the characters, how they develop or change?
   For example:
   If you are reading Conrad’s The Secret Agent, do you seem to be most interested in what the author has to say about society? Choose a pattern of ideas and express it in the form of a question and an answer such as the following:
   Question: What does Conrad seem to be suggesting about early twentieth-century London society in his novel The Secret Agent?
   Answer: Conrad suggests that all classes of society are corrupt.
   Pitfalls:
   Choosing too many ideas.
   Choosing an idea without any support.

2. Once you have some general points to focus on, write your possible ideas and answer the questions that they suggest.
   For example:
   Question: How does Conrad develop the idea that all classes of society are corrupt?
   Answer: He uses images of beasts and cannibalism whether he’s describing socialites, policemen or secret agents.
3. To write your thesis statement, all you have to do is turn the question and answer around. You’ve already given the answer, now just put it in a sentence (or a couple of sentences) so that the thesis of your paper is clear.
   For example:
   In his novel, *The Secret Agent*, Conrad uses beast and cannibal imagery to describe the characters and their relationships to each other. This pattern of images suggests that Conrad saw corruption in every level of early twentieth-century London society.

4. Now that you’re familiar with the story or novel and have developed a thesis statement, you’re ready to choose the evidence you’ll use to support your thesis. There are a lot of good ways to do this, but all of them depend on a strong thesis for their direction.
   For example:
   Here’s a student’s thesis about Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*.
   In his novel, *The Secret Agent*, Conrad uses beast and cannibal imagery to describe the characters and their relationships to each other. This pattern of images suggests that Conrad saw corruption in every level of early twentieth-century London society.
   This thesis focuses on the idea of social corruption and the device of imagery. To support this thesis, you would need to find images of beasts and cannibalism within the text.

There are many ways to write a thesis, and your construction of a thesis statement will become more intuitive and nuanced as you become a more confident and competent writer. However, there are a few tried-and-true strategies that I’ll share with you over the next few pages.

Your thesis statement can and should evolve as you continue writing your paper.
Often, I prefer to think of a thesis instead as a (hypo)thesis—an informed estimation of how you think your analysis will come together.
**The T3 Strategy**

T3 is a formula to create a thesis statement. The T (for Thesis) should be the point you’re trying to make—the “So what?” In a text wrestling analysis, you are expected to advocate for a certain interpretation of a text: this is your “So what?” Examples might include:

In “A Wind from the North,” Bill Capossere conveys the loneliness of isolated life or Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” suggests that marriage can be oppressive to women

But wait—there’s more! In a text wrestling analysis, your interpretation must be based on evidence from that text. Therefore, your thesis should identify both a focused statement of the interpretation (the whole) and also the particular subjects of your observation (the parts of the text you will focus on support that interpretation). A complete T3 thesis statement for a text wrestling analysis might look more like this:

In “A Wind from the North,” Bill Capossere conveys the loneliness of an isolated lifestyle using the motif of snow, the repeated phrase “five or six days” (104), and the symbol of his uncle’s car.

or

“The Story of an Hour” suggests that marriage can be oppressive to women. To demonstrate this theme, Kate Chopin integrates irony, foreshadowing, and symbols of freedom in the story.

Notice the way the T3 allows for the part-to-whole thinking that underlies analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole (T)</th>
<th>Parts (3)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill Capossere conveys the loneliness of an isolated lifestyle</td>
<td>the motif of snow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the repeated phrase “five or six days” (104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the symbol of his uncle’s car.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Story of an Hour” suggests that marriage can be oppressive to women</td>
<td>irony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>foreshadowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>symbols of freedom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is also a useful strategy because it can provide structure for your paper: each justifying support for your thesis should be one section of your paper.

I. Introduction
   a. Thesis: In “A Wind from the North,” Bill Capossere conveys the loneliness of an isolated lifestyle using the motif of snow, the repeated phrase “five or six days” (104), and the symbol of his uncle’s car.

II. Section on ‘the motif of snow.’
   Topic sentence: The recurring imagery of snow creates a tone of frostiness and demonstrates the passage of time.

III. Section on ‘the repeated phrase “five or six days” (104).’
   Topic sentence: When Capossere repeats “five or six days” (104), he reveals the ambiguity of death in a life not lived.

IV. Section on ‘the symbol of his uncle’s car.’
   Topic sentence: Finally, Capossere’s uncle’s car is symbolic of his lifestyle.

V. Conclusion

Once you’ve developed a T3 statement, you can revise it to make it feel less formulaic. For example:

In “A Wind from the North,” Bill Capossere conveys the loneliness of an isolated lifestyle by symbolizing his uncle with a “untouchable” car. Additionally, he repeats images and phrases in the essay to reinforce his uncle’s isolation.

or

“The Story of an Hour,” a short story by Kate Chopin, uses a plot twist to imply that marriage can be oppressive to women. The symbols of freedom in the story create a feeling of joy, but the attentive reader will recognize the imminent irony.

The O/P Strategy

An occasion/position thesis statement is rhetorically convincing because it explains the relevance of your argument and concisely articulates that argument. Although you should already have your position in mind, your rhetorical occasion will lead this statement off: what sociohistorical conditions make your writing timely, relevant, applicable? Continuing with the previous examples:

As our society moves from individualism to isolationism, Bill Capossere’s “A Wind from the North” is a salient example of a life lived alone.

or

Although Chopin’s story was written over 100 years ago, it still provides insight to gender dynamics in American marriages.

Following your occasion, state your position—again, this is your “So What?” It is wise to include at least some preview of the parts you will be examining.

As our society moves from individualism to isolationism, Bill Capossere’s “A Wind from the North” is a salient example of a life lived alone. Using recurring images
and phrases, Capossere conveys the loneliness of his uncle leading up to his death.

or

Although Chopin’s story was written over 100 years ago, it still provides insight to gender dynamics in American marriages. “The Story of an Hour” reminds us that marriage has historically meant a surrender of freedom for women.

**Research Question and Embedded Thesis**

There’s one more common style of thesis construction that’s worth noting, and that’s the inquiry-based thesis. (Read more about inquiry-based research writing in Chapter Eight). For this thesis, you’ll develop an incisive and focused question which you’ll explore throughout the course of the essay. By the end of the essay, you will be able to offer an answer (perhaps a complicated or incomplete answer, but still some kind of answer) to the question. This form is also referred to as the “embedded thesis” or “delayed thesis” organization.

Although this model of thesis can be effectively applied in a text wrestling essay, it is often more effective when combined with one of the other methods above.

Consider the following examples:

Bill Capossere’s essay “A Wind from the North” suggests that isolation results in sorrow and loneliness; is this always the case? How does Capossere create such a vision of his uncle’s life?

or

Many people would believe that Kate Chopin’s story reflects an outdated perception of marriage—but can “The Story of an Hour” reveal power imbalances in modern relationships, too?

You may note that these three thesis strategies can be combined to create nuanced and attention-grabbing thesis statements.

**Synthesis: Using Evidence to Explore Your Thesis**

Now that you’ve considered what your analytical insight might be (articulated in the form of a thesis), it’s time to bring evidence in to support your analysis—this is the synthesis part of Bloom’s Taxonomy earlier in this chapter. Synthesis refers to the creation of a new whole (an interpretation) using smaller parts (evidence from the text you’ve analyzed).
There are essentially two ways to go about collecting and culling relevant support from the text with which you’re wrestling. In my experience, students are split about evenly on which option is better for them:

Option #1: Before writing your thesis, while you’re reading and rereading your text, annotate the page and take notes. Copy down quotes, images, formal features, and themes that are striking, exciting, or relatable. Then, try to group your collection of evidence according to common traits. Once you’ve done so, choose one or two groups on which to base your thesis.

Or

Option #2: After writing your thesis, revisit the text looking for quotes, images, and themes that support, elaborate, or explain your interpretation. Record these quotes, and then return to the drafting process.

Once you’ve gathered evidence from your focus text, you should weave quotes, paraphrases, and summaries into your own writing. A common misconception is that you should write “around” your evidence, i.e. choosing the direct quote you want to use and building a paragraph around it. Instead, you should foreground your interpretation and analysis, using evidence in the background to explore and support that interpretation. Lead with your idea, then demonstrate it with evidence; then, explain how your evidence demonstrates your idea.

The appropriate ratio of evidence (their writing) to exposition (your writing) will vary depending on your rhetorical situation, but I advise my students to spend at least as many words unpacking a quote as that quote contains. (I’m referring here to Step #4 in the table below.) For example, if you use a direct quote of 25 words, you ought to spend at least 25 words explaining how that quote supports or nuances your interpretation.

There are infinite ways to bring evidence into your discussion, but for now, let’s take a look at a formula that many students find productive as they find their footing in analytical writing: Front-load + Quote/Paraphrase/Summarize + Cite + Explain/elaborate/analyze.
Set your reader up for the quote using a signpost (also known as a signal phrase; see Chapter Nine). Don’t drop quotes in abruptly: by front-loading, you can guide your reader’s interpretation.

Use whichever technique is relevant to your rhetorical purpose at that exact point. Use an in-text citation appropriate to your discipline. It doesn’t matter if you quote, paraphrase, or summarize—all three require a citation.

Perhaps most importantly, you need to make the value of this evidence clear to the reader. What does it mean? How does it further your thesis?

What might this look like in practice?

The recurring imagery of snow creates a tone of frostiness and demonstrates the passage of time. (1) Snow brings to mind connotations of wintry cold, quiet, and death (2) as a “sky of utter clarity and simplicity” lingers over his uncle’s home and “it [begins] once more to snow” (3) Capossere 104). (4) Throughout his essay, Capossere returns frequently to weather imagery, but snow especially, to play on associations the reader has. In this line, snow sets the tone by wrapping itself in with “clarity,” a state of mind. Even though the narrator still seems ambivalent about his uncle, this clarity suggests that he is reflecting with a new and somber understanding.

1. **Front-load**
   Snow brings to mind connotations of wintry cold, quiet, and death

2. **Quote**
   as a “sky of utter clarity and simplicity” lingers over his uncle’s home and “it [begins] once more to snow”

3. **Cite**
   (Capossere 104).

4. **Explain/elaborate/analysis**
   Throughout his essay, Capossere returns frequently to weather imagery, but snow especially, to play on associations the reader has. In this line, snow sets the tone by wrapping itself in with “clarity,” a state of mind. Even though the narrator still seems
ambivalent about his uncle, this clarity suggests that he is reflecting with a new and somber understanding.

This might feel formulaic and forced at first, but following these steps will ensure that you give each piece of evidence thorough attention. Some teachers call this method a “quote sandwich” because you put your evidence between two slices of your own language and interpretation.

For more on front-loading (readerly signposts or signal phrases), see the subsection titled “Readerly Signposts” in Chapter Nine.

Activities

*Idea Generation: Close Reading Graphic Organizer*

The first time you read a text, you most likely will not magically stumble upon a unique, inspiring insight to pursue as a thesis. As discussed earlier in this section, close reading is an iterative process, which means that you must repeatedly encounter a text (reread, re-watch, re-listen, etc.) trying to challenge it, interrogate it, and gradually develop a working thesis.

Very often, the best way to practice analysis is collaboratively, through discussion. Because other people will necessarily provide different perspectives through their unique interpretive positions, reading groups can help you grow your analysis. By discussing a text, you open yourself up to more nuanced and unanticipated interpretations influenced by your peers. Your teacher might ask you to work in small groups to complete the following graphic organizer in response to a certain text. (You can also complete this exercise independently, but it might not yield the same results.)
6) Start by “wading” back through the text. Remind yourself of the general idea and annotate important words, phrases, and passages.

5. As a group, discuss and explain: What could the meaning or message of this text be? What ideas does the text communicate? (Keep in mind, there are an infinite number of “right” answers here.)

6. What patterns do you see in the text (e.g., repetition of words, phrases, sentences, or images; ways that the text is structured)? What breaks in the patterns do you see? What is the effect of these patterns and breaks of pattern?
7. What symbols and motifs do you see in the text? What might they represent? What is the effect of these symbols? What themes do they cultivate or gesture to?

8. What references do you see in the text? Does the author allude to, quote, imitate, or parody another text, film, song, etc.? Does the author play on connotations? What is the effect of these references?
9. What about this text surprises you? What do you get hung up on? Consider Jane Gallop’s brief list from “The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters” –
   (1) unusual vocabulary, words that surprise either because they are unfamiliar or because they seem to belong to a different context; (2) words that seem unnecessarily repeated, as if the word keeps insisting on being written; (3) images or metaphors, especially ones that are used repeatedly and are somewhat surprising given the context; (4) what is in italics or parentheses; and (5) footnotes that seem too long — but also anything else that strikes you as a reader.

10. Analytical lenses: Do you see any of the following threads represented in the work? What evidence of these ideas do you see? How do these parts contribute to a whole?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality</th>
<th>Gender and Sexuality</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Thesis Builder

Your thesis statement can and should evolve as you continue writing your paper: teachers will often refer to a thesis as a “working thesis” because the revision process should include tweaking, pivoting, focusing, expanding, and/or rewording your thesis. The exercise on the next two pages, though, should help you develop a working thesis to begin your project. Following the examples, identify the components of your analysis that might contribute to a thesis statement.

Your approach to building a thesis will depend on your rhetorical mode; for instance, an analytical thesis (like this one), might not be most appropriate for a persuasive, expository, or research essay.
### Topic
(Name your focus text and its author)

| Ex.: “A Wind from the North” by Bill Capossere |

### Analytical focus
(Identify at least one part of the whole you’re studying)

| Ex.: Repeated phrase “five or six days”  
| (104) Symbol – uncle’s car  
| Motif – snow |

### Analytical insight
(Explain the function of that part in relationship to the whole)

| Ex.: They imply that living in isolation makes you lonely |

(continued on next page)
**Stakes**
(So what? Why does it matter?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ex.: Sheds light on the fragility of life and the relationships we build throughout it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Consider adding...
- A concession statement (“Although,” “even though,” etc.)
  **Ex.:** Although there’s nothing wrong with preferring time alone, …
- A question that you might pursue
  **Ex.:** Can Capossere’s uncle represent other isolated people?

**THESIS:**

**Ex.:** Although there’s nothing wrong with preferring time alone, “A Wind from the North” by Bill Capossere sheds light on the fragility of life and the relationships we build throughout it. The text conveys the loneliness of an isolated lifestyle by symbolizing Capossere’s uncle with a “untouchable” car. Additionally, the narrator repeats images and phrases in the essay to reinforce his uncle’s isolation.
Model Texts by Student Authors

Songs

(A text wrestling analysis of “Proofs” by Richard Rodriguez)

Songs are culturally important. In the short story “Proofs” by Richard Rodriguez, a young Mexican American man comes to terms with his bi-cultural life. This young man’s father came to America from a small and poverty-stricken Mexican village. The young man flashes from his story to his father’s story in order to explore his Mexican heritage and American life. Midway through the story Richard Rodriguez utilizes the analogies of songs to represent the cultures and how they differ. Throughout the story there is a clash of cultures. Because culture can be experienced through the arts and teachings of a community, Rodriguez uses the songs of the two cultures to represent the protagonist’s bi-cultural experience.

According to Rodriguez, the songs that come from Mexico express an emotional and loving culture and community: “But my mama says there are no songs like the love songs of Mexico” (50). The songs from that culture can be beautiful. It is amazing the love and beauty that come from social capital and community involvement. The language Richard Rodriguez uses to explain these songs is beautiful as well. “—it is the raw edge of sentiment” (51). The author explains how it is the men who keep the songs. No matter how stoic the men are, they have an outlet to express their love and pain as well as every emotion in between. “The cry of a Jackal under the moon, the whistle of a phallus, the maniacal song of the skull” (51). This is an outlet for men to express themselves that is not prevalent in American culture. It expresses a level of love and intimacy between people that is not a part of American culture. The songs from the American culture are different. In America the songs get lost. There is assimilation of cultures. The songs of Mexico are important to the protagonist of the story. There is a clash between the old culture in Mexico and the subject’s new American life represented in these songs.

A few paragraphs later in the story, on page 52, the author tells us the difference in the American song. America sings a different tune. America is the land of opportunity.
It represents upward mobility and the ability to “make it or break it.” But it seems there is a cost for all this material gain and all this opportunity. There seems to be a lack of love and emotion, a lack of the ability to express pain and all other feelings, the type of emotion which is expressed in the songs of Mexico. The song of America says, “You can be anything you want to be” (52). The song represents the American Dream. The cost seems to be the loss of compassion, love and emotion that is expressed through the songs of Mexico. There is no outlet quite the same for the stoic men of America. Rodriguez explains how the Mexican migrant workers have all that pain and desire, all that emotion penned up inside until it explodes in violent outbursts. “Or they would come into town on Monday nights for the wrestling matches or on Tuesdays for boxing. They worked over in Yolo County. They were men without women. They were Mexicans without Mexico” (49).

Rodriguez uses the language in the story almost like a song in order to portray the culture of the American dream. The phrase “I will send for you or I will come home rich,” is repeated twice throughout the story. The gain for all this loss of love and compassion is the dream of financial gain. “You have come into the country on your knees with your head down. You are a man” (48). That is the allure of the American Dream.

The protagonist of the story was born in America. Throughout the story he is looking at this illusion of the American Dream through a different frame. He is also trying to come to terms with his own manhood in relation to his American life and Mexican heritage. The subject has the ability to see the two songs in a different light. “The city will win. The city will give the children all the village could not-VCR’s, hairstyles, drumbeat. The city sings mean songs, dirty songs” (52). Part of the subject’s reconciliation process with himself is seeing that all the material stuff that is dangled as part of the American Dream is not worth the love and emotion that is held in the old Mexican villages and expressed in their songs.

Rodriguez represents this conflict of culture on page 53. The protagonist of the story is taking pictures during the arrest of illegal border-crossers. “I stare at the faces. They stare at me. To them I am not bearing witness; I am part of the process of being arrested”(53). The subject is torn between the two cultures in a hazy middle ground. He
is not one of the migrants and he is not one of the police. He is there taking pictures of
the incident with a connection to both of the groups and both of the groups see him
connected with the other.

The old Mexican villages are characterized by a lack of: “Mexico is poor” (50). However, this is not the reason for the love and emotion that is held. The thought that
people have more love and emotion because they are poor is a misconception. There
are both rich people and poor people who have multitudes of love and compassion. The
defining elements in creating love and emotion for each other comes from the level of
community interaction and trust—the ability to sing these love songs and express
emotion towards one another. People who become caught up in the American Dream
tend to be obsessed with their own personal gain. This diminishes the social interaction
and trust between fellow humans. There is no outlet in the culture of America quite the
same as singing love songs towards each other. It does not matter if they are rich or
poor, lack of community, trust, and social interaction; lack of songs can lead to lack of
love and emotion that is seen in the old songs of Mexico.

The image of the American Dream is bright and shiny. To a young boy in a poor
village the thought of power and wealth can dominate over a life of poverty with love
and emotion. However, there is poverty in America today as well as in Mexico. The
poverty here looks a little different but many migrants and young men find the American
Dream to be an illusion. “Most immigrants to America came from villages.

The America that Mexicans find today, at the decline of the century, is a closed-
circuit city of ramps and dark towers, a city without God. The city is evil. Turn. Turn”
(50). The song of America sings an inviting tune for young men from poor villages.
When they arrive though it is not what they dreamed about. The subject of the story can
see this. He is trying to come of age in his own way, acknowledging America and the
Mexico of old. He is able to look back and forth in relation to the America his father
came to for power and wealth and the America that he grew up in. All the while, he
watches this migration of poor villages, filled with love and emotion, to a big heartless
city, while referring back to his father’s memory of why he came to America and his own
memories of growing up in America. “Like wandering Jews. They carried their home
with them, back and forth: they had no true home but the tabernacle of memory” (51).
The subject of the story is experiencing all of this conflict of culture and trying to compose his own song.

Works Cited


Normal Person: An Analysis of the Standards of Normativity in “A Plague of Tics”81

David Sedaris’ essay “A Plague of Tics” describes Sedaris’ psychological struggles he encountered in his youth, expressed through obsessive-compulsive tics. These abnormal behaviors heavily inhibited his functionings, but more importantly, isolated and embarrassed him during his childhood, adolescence, and young adult years. Authority figures in his life would mock him openly, and he constantly struggled to perform routine simple tasks in a timely manner, solely due to the amount of time that needed to be set aside for carrying out these compulsive tics. He lacked the necessary social support an adolescent requires because of his apparent abnormality. But when we look at the behaviors of his parents, as well as the socially acceptable tics of our society more generally, we see how Sedaris’ tics are in fact not too different, if not less harmful than those

Teacher Takeaways

“The student clearly states their thesis in the beginning, threading it through the essay, and further developing it through a synthesized conclusion. The student’s ideas build logically through the essay via effective quote integration: the student sets up the quote, presents it clearly, and then responds to the quote with thorough analysis that links it back to their primary claims. At times this thread is a bit difficult to follow; as one example, when the student talks about the text’s American songs, it’s not clear how Rodriguez’s text illuminates the student’s thesis. Nor is it clear why the student believes Rodriguez is saying the “American Dream is not worth the love and emotion.” Without this clarification, it’s difficult to follow some of the connections the student relies on for their thesis, so at times it seems like they may be stretching their interpretation beyond what the text supplies.”

– Professor Dannemiller
of the society around him. By exploring Sedaris’ isolation, we can discover that socially constructed standards of normativity are at best arbitrary, and at worst violent.

As a young boy, Sedaris is initially completely unaware that his tics are not socially acceptable in the outside world. He is puzzled when his teacher, Miss Chestnut, correctly guesses that he is “going to hit [himself] over the head with [his] shoe” (361), despite the obvious removal of his shoe during their private meeting. Miss Chestnut continues by embarrassingly making fun out of the fact that Sedaris’ cannot help but “bathe her light switch with [his] germ-ridden tongue” (361) repeatedly throughout the school day. She targets Sedaris with mocking questions, putting him on the spot in front of his class; this behavior is not ethical due to Sedaris’ age. It violates the trust that students should have in their teachers and other caregivers. Miss Chestnut criticizes him excessively for his ambiguous, child-like answers. For example, she drills him on whether it is “healthy to hit ourselves over the head with our shoes” (361) and he “guess[es] that it was not,” (361) as a child might phrase it. She ridicules his use of the term “guess,” using obvious examples of instances when guessing would not be appropriate, such as “[running] into traffic with a paper sack over [her] head” (361). Her mockery is not only rude, but ableist and unethical. Any teacher—at least nowadays—should recognize that Sedaris needs compassion and support, not emotional abuse.

These kinds of negative responses to Sedaris’ behavior continue upon his return home, in which the role of the insensitive authority figure is taken on by his mother. In a time when maternal support is crucial for a secure and confident upbringing, Sedaris’ mother was never understanding of his behavior, and left little room for open, honest discussion regarding ways to cope with his compulsiveness. She reacted harshly to the letter sent home by Miss Chestnut, nailing Sedaris, exclaiming that his “goddamned math teacher” (363) noticed his strange behaviors, as if it should have been obvious to young, egocentric Sedaris. When teachers like Miss Chestnut meet with her to discuss young David’s problems, she makes fun of him, imitating his compulsions; Sedaris is struck by “a sharp, stinging sense of recognition” upon viewing this mockery (365). Sedaris’ mother, too, is an authority figure who maintains ableist standards of normativity by taunting her own son. Meeting with teachers should be an opportunity to truly help David, not tease him.
On the day that Miss Chestnut makes her appearance in the Sedaris household to discuss his behaviors with his mother, Sedaris watches them from the staircase, helplessly embarrassed. We can infer from this scene that Sedaris has actually become aware of that fact that his tics are not considered to be socially acceptable, and that he must be “the weird kid” among his peers—and even to his parents and teachers. His mother’s cavalier derision demonstrates her apparent disinterest in the well-being of his son, as she blatantly brushes off his strange behaviors except in the instance during which she can put them on display for the purpose of entertaining a crowd. What all of these pieces of his mother’s flawed personality show us is that she has issues too—drinking and smoking, in addition to her poor mothering—but yet Sedaris is the one being chastised while she lives a normal life. Later in the essay, Sedaris describes how “a blow to the nose can be positively narcotic” (366), drawing a parallel to his mother’s drinking and smoking. From this comparison, we can begin to see flawed standards of “normal behavior”: although many people drink and smoke (especially at the time the story takes place), these habits are much more harmful than what Sedaris does in private.

Sedaris’ father has an equally harmful personality, but it manifests differently. Sedaris describes him as a hoarder, one who has, “saved it all: every last Green Stamp and coupon, every outgrown bathing suit and scrap of linoleum” (365). Sedaris’ father attempts to “cure [Sedaris] with a series of threats” (366). In one scene, he even enacts violence upon David by slamming on the brakes of the car while David has his nose pressed against a windshield. Sedaris reminds us that his behavior might have been unusual, but it wasn’t violent: “So what if I wanted to touch my nose to the windshield? Who was I hurting?” (366). In fact, it is in that very scene that Sedaris draws the aforementioned parallel to his mother’s drinking: when Sedaris discovers that “a blow to the nose can be positively narcotic,” it is while his father is driving around “with a lapful of rejected, out-of-state coupons” (366). Not only is Sedaris’ father violating the trust David places in him as a caregiver; his hoarding is an arguably unhealthy habit that simply happens to be more socially acceptable than licking a concrete toadstool. Comparing Sedaris’s tics to his father’s issues, it is apparent that his father’s are much more harmful than his own. None of the adults in Sedaris’ life are innocent—“mother
smokes and Miss Chestnut massaged her waist twenty, thirty times a day—and here I couldn't press my nose against the windshield of a car” (366)—but nevertheless, Sedaris’s problems are ridiculed or ignored by the ‘normal’ people in his life, again bringing into question what it means to be a normal person.

In high school, Sedaris’ begins to take certain measures to actively control and hide his socially unacceptable behaviors. “For a time,” he says, “I thought that if I accompanied my habits with an outlandish wardrobe, I might be viewed as eccentric rather than just plain retarded” (369). Upon this notion, Sedaris starts to hang numerous medallions around his neck, reflecting that he “might as well have worn a cowbell” (369) due to the obvious noises they made when he would jerk his head violently, drawing more attention to his behaviors (the opposite of the desired effect). He also wore large glasses, which he now realizes made it easier to observe his habit of rolling his eyes into his head, and “clunky platform shoes [that] left lumps when used to discreetly tap [his] forehead” (369). Clearly Sedaris was trying to appear more normal, in a sense, but was failing terribly. After high school, Sedaris faces the new wrinkle of sharing a college dorm room. He conjures up elaborate excuses to hide specific tics, ensuring his roommate that “there’s a good chance the brain tumor will shrink” (369) if he shakes his head around hard enough and that specialists have ordered him to perform “eye exercises to strengthen what they call he ‘corneal fibers’” (369). He eventually comes to a point of such paranoid hypervigilance that he memorizes his roommate’s class schedule to find moments to carry out his tics in privacy. Sedaris worries himself sick attempting to approximate ‘normal’: “I got exactly fourteen minutes of sleep during my entire first year of college” (369). When people are pressured to perform an identity inconsistent with their own—pressured by socially constructed standards of normativity—they harm themselves in the process. Furthermore, even though the responsibility does not necessarily fall on Sedaris’ peers to offer support, we can assume that their condemnation of his behavior reinforces the standards that oppress him.

Sedaris’ compulsive habits peak and begin their slow decline when he picks up the new habit of smoking cigarettes, which is of course much more socially acceptable while just as compulsive in nature once addiction has the chance to take over. He
reflects, from the standpoint of an adult, on the reason for the acquired habit, speculate that “maybe it was coincidental, or perhaps ... much more socially acceptable than crying out in tiny voices” (371). He is calmed by smoking, saying that “everything’s fine as long I know there’s a cigarette in my immediate future” (372). (Remarkably, he also reveals that he has not truly been cured, as he revisits his former tics and will “dare to press [his] nose against the doorknob or roll his eyes to achieve that once-satisfying ache” [372.]) Sedaris has officially achieved the tiresome goal of appearing ‘normal’, as his compulsive tics seemed to “[fade] out by the time [he] took up with cigarettes” (371). It is important to realize, however, that Sedaris might have found a socially acceptable way to mask his tics, but not a healthy one. The fact that the only activity that could take place of his compulsive tendencies was the dangerous use of a highly addictive substance, one that has proven to be dangerously harmful with frequent and prolonged use, shows that he is conforming to the standards of society which do not correspond with healthy behaviors.

In a society full of dangerous, inconvenient, or downright strange habits that are nevertheless considered socially acceptable, David Sedaris suffered through the psychic and physical violence and negligence of those who should have cared for him. With what we can clearly recognize as a socially constructed disability, Sedaris was continually denied support and mocked by authority figures. He struggled to socialize and perform academically while still carrying out each task he was innately compelled to

Teacher Takeaways

“I like how this student follows their thesis through the text, highlighting specific instances from Sedaris’s essay that support their analysis. Each instance of this evidence is synthesized with the student’s observations and connected back to their thesis statement, allowing for the essay to capitalize on the case being built in their conclusion. At the ends of some earlier paragraphs, some of this ‘spine-building’ is interrupted with suggestions of how characters in the essay should behave, which doesn’t always clearly link to the thesis’s goals. Similarly, some information isn’t given a context to help us understand its relevance, such as what violating the student-teacher trust has to do with normativity being a social construct, or how Sedaris’s description of ‘a blow to the nose’ being a narcotic creates a parallel to his mother’s drinking and smoking. Without further analysis and synthesis of this information the reader is left to guess how these ideas connect.”

– Professor Dannemiller
do, and faced consistent social hardship because of his outlandish appearance and behaviors that are viewed in our society as “weird.” Because of ableist, socially constructed standards of normativity, Sedaris had to face a long string of turmoil and worry that most of society may never come to completely understand. We can only hope that as a greater society, we continue sharing and studying stories like Sedaris’ so that we critique the flawed guidelines we force upon different bodies and minds, and attempt to be more accepting and welcoming of the idiosyncrasies we might deem to be unfavorable.

Works Cited


Analyzing “Richard Cory”

In the poem “Richard Cory” by Edward Arlington Robinson, a narrative is told about the character Richard Cory by those who admired him. In the last stanza, the narrator, who uses the pronoun “we,” tells us that Richard Cory commits suicide. Throughout most of the poem, though, Cory had been described as a wealthy gentleman. The “people on the pavement” (2), the speakers of the poem, admired him because he presented himself well, was educated, and was wealthy. The poem presents the idea that, even though Cory seemed to have everything going for him, being wealthy does not guarantee happiness or health.

Throughout the first three stanzas Cory is described in a positive light, which makes it seem like he has everything that he could ever need. Specifically, the speaker compares Cory directly and indirectly to royalty because of his wealth and his physical appearance: “He was a gentleman from sole to crown, / Clean favored and imperially slim” (Robinson 3-4). In line 3, the speaker is punning on “soul” and “crown.” At the same time, Cory is both a gentleman from foot (sole) to head (crown) and also soul to crown. The use of the word “crown” instead of head is a clever way to show that Richard was thought of as a king to the community. The phrase “imperially slim” can
also be associated with royalty because imperial comes from “empire.” The descriptions used gave clear insight that he was admired for his appearance and manners, like a king or emperor.

In other parts of the poem, we see that Cory is ‘above’ the speakers. The first lines, “When Richard Cory went down town, / We people on the pavement looked at him” (1-2), show that Cory is not from the same place as the speakers. The words “down” and “pavement” also suggest a difference in status between Cory and the people. The phrase “We people on the pavement” used in the first stanza (Robinson 2), tells us that the narrator and those that they are including in their “we” may be homeless and sleeping on the pavement; at the least, this phrase shows that “we” are below Cory.

In addition to being ‘above,’ Cory is also isolated from the speakers. In the second stanza, we can see that there was little interaction between Cory and the people on the pavement: “And he was always human when he talked; / But still fluttered pulses when he said, / ’Good- morning’” (Robinson 6-8). Because people are “still fluttered” by so little, we can speculate that it was special for them to talk to Cory. But these interactions gave those on the pavement no insight into Richard’s real feelings or personality. Directly after the descriptions of the impersonal interactions, the narrator mentions that “he was rich—yes, richer than a king” (Robinson 9). At the same time that Cory is again compared to royalty, this line reveals that people were focused on his wealth and outward appearance, not his personal life or wellbeing.

The use of the first-person plural narration to describe Cory gives the reader the impression that everyone in Cory’s presence longed to have the life that he did. Using “we,” the narrator speaks for many people at once. From the end of the third stanza to the end of the poem, the writing turns from admirable description of Richard to a noticeably more melancholy, dreary description of what those who admired Richard had to do because they did not have all that Richard did. These people had nothing, but they thought that he was everything. To make us wish that we were in his place. So on we worked, and waited for the light,

And went without the meat, and cursed the bread…. (Robinson 9-12) They sacrificed their personal lives and food to try to rise up to Cory’s level. They longed to not be required to struggle. A heavy focus on money and materialistic things
blocked their ability to see what Richard Cory was actually feeling or going through. I suggest that “we” also includes the reader of the poem. If we read the poem this way, “Richard Cory” critiques the way we glorify wealthy people’s lives to the point that we hurt ourselves. Our society values financial success over mental health and believes in a false narrative about social mobility.

Though the piece was written more than a century ago, the perceived message has not been lost. Money and materialistic things do not create happiness, only admiration and alienation from those around you. Therefore, we should not sacrifice our own happiness and leisure for a lifestyle that might not make us happy. The poem’s message speaks to our modern society, too, because it shows a stigma surrounding mental health: if people have “everything / To make us wish that we were in [their] place” (11-12), we often assume that they don’t deal with the same mental health struggles as everyone. “Richard Cory” reminds us that we should take care of each other, not assume that people are okay because they put up a good front.

Works Cited


Teacher Takeaways

“I enjoy how this author uses evidence: they use a signal phrase (front-load) before each direct quote and take plenty of time to unpack the quote afterward. This author also has a clear and direct thesis statement which anticipates the content of their analysis. I would advise them, though, to revise that thesis by ‘previewing’ the elements of the text they plan to analyze. This could help them clarify their organization, since a thesis should be a road-map.”

– Professor Wilhjelm
Assignment: Text wrestling Analysis

To practice critical, analytical thinking through the medium of writing, you will perform a text wrestling analysis and synthesize your findings in an essay driven by a central, unifying insight presented as a thesis and supported by evidence.

Assignment

First, you will determine which text it is that you’d like to analyze. Your teacher might provide a specific text or set of texts to choose from, or they may allow you to choose your own.

1) **If your teacher assigns a specific text**, follow the steps in the next section.
2) **If your teacher assigns a set of texts to choose from**, read each of them once. Then, narrow it down by asking yourself,
   a. Which texts were most striking or curious? Which raised the most questions for you as a reader?
   b. How do the texts differ from one another in content, form, voice, and genre?
   c. Which seem like the “best written”? Why?
   d. Which can you relate to personally?

Try to narrow down to two or three texts that you particularly appreciate. Then try to determine which of these will help you write the best close reading essay possible. Follow the steps from #1 once you’ve determined your focus text.

3) **If your teacher allows you to choose any text you want**, they probably did so because they want you to choose a text that means a lot to you personally.
   a. Consider first what medium (e.g., prose, film, music, etc.) or genre (e.g., essay, documentary, Screamo) would be most appropriate and exciting, keeping in mind any restrictions your teacher might have set.
   b. Then, brainstorm what topics seem relevant and interesting to you.
   c. Finally, try to encounter at least three or four different texts so you can test the waters.

Now that you’ve chosen a focus text, you should read it several times using the active reading strategies contained in this section and the appendix. Consider what *parts* are contributing to the *whole* text, and develop an analytical perspective about that relationship. Try to articulate this analytical perspective as a working thesis—a statement of your interpretation which you will likely revise in some way or another. (You might also consider whether a specific critical lens seems relevant or interesting to your analysis.)

Next, you will write a 250-word proposal indicating which text you’ve chosen, what your working thesis is, and why you chose that text and analytical perspective. (This will help keep
your teacher in the loop on your process and encourage you to think through your approach before writing.)

Finally, draft a text wrestling essay that analytically explores some part of your text using the strategies detailed in this section. Your essay will advance an interpretation that will
   a) help your audience understand the text differently (beyond basic plot/comprehension);
      and/or
   b) help your audience understand our world differently, using the text as a tool to
      illuminate the human experience.

Keep in mind, you will have to re-read your text several times to analyze it well and compile evidence. Consider forming a close reading discussion group to unpack your text collaboratively before you begin writing independently.

Your essay should be thesis-driven and will include quotes, paraphrases, and summary from the original text as evidence to support your points. Be sure to revise at least once before submitting your final draft.

Although you may realize as you evaluate your rhetorical situation, this kind of essay often values Standardized Edited American English, a dialect of the English language. Among other things, this entails a polished, “academic” tone. Although you need not use a thesaurus to find all the fanciest words, your voice should be less colloquial than in a descriptive personal narrative.
Before you begin, consider your rhetorical situation:

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Assignment: Text-Wrestling Analysis

Each student will write an essay which analyzes a text and presents a unique, central, unifying insight as a thesis. The essay will incorporate ideas and techniques explored in Section 2, including the use of evidence as to support, elaborate, or nuance the student’s thesis. The essay will demonstrate thoughtful pre-writing, drafting, and revision based on feedback from the instructor, classmates, and/or the Writing Center.

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<td>Structure</td>
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<td>Style and Language</td>
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<td>Does the author use an academic voice appropriate to the rhetorical situation? Does the author effectively integrate evidence by front-loading, punctuating, and explaining?</td>
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<td>Depth, Support, and Analysis</td>
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<td>Has the author provided a convincing amount of evidence to support their analytical insight? Does the author foreground their analytical perspective, using the text in the background to support, elaborate, or nuance their thesis?</td>
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<td>Does the essay read smoothly with minimal spelling/grammatical/mechanical issues? Does it use proper format?</td>
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Guidelines for Peer Workshop

Before beginning the Peer Workshop and revision process, I recommend consulting the Revision Concepts and Strategies Appendix. In your Peer Workshop group (or based on your teacher’s directions), establish a process for workshopping that will work for you. You may find the flowchart titled “Establishing Your Peer Workshop” useful.

One Example of a Peer Workshop Process

Before the workshop, each author should spend several minutes generating requests for support (#1 below). Identify specific elements you need help on. Here are a few examples:

I need help honing my thesis statement.
Do you think my analysis flows logically?
I’m not very experienced with in-text citations; can you make sure they’re accurate?
Do you think my evidence is convincing enough?
During the workshop, follow this sequence:

1) Student A introduces their draft, distributes copies, and makes requests for feedback.  
   *What do you want help with, specifically?*

2) Student A reads their draft aloud while students B and C annotate/take notes.  
   *What do you notice as the draft is read aloud?*

3) Whole group discusses the draft; student A takes notes. Use these prompts as a reference to generate and frame your feedback. Try to identify specific places in your classmates’ essays where the writer is successful and where the writer needs support. Consider constructive, specific, and actionable feedback.  
   *What is the author doing well? What could they do better?*
   
   - What requests does the author have for support? What feedback do you have on this issue, specifically?
   - Identify one “golden line” from the essay under consideration—a phrase, sentence, or paragraph that resonates with you. What about this line is so striking?
   - Consult either the rubric included above or an alternate rubric, if your instructor has provided one. Is the author on track to meet the expectations of the assignment? What does the author do well in each of the categories? What could they do better?
     - Ideas, Content, and Focus
     - Structure
     - Style and Language
     - Depth, Support, and Reflection
     - Mechanics
   - What resonances do you see between this draft and others from your group? Between this draft and the exemplars you’ve read?

4) Repeat with students B and C.

After the workshop, try implementing some of the feedback your group provided while they’re still nearby! For example, if Student B said your introduction needed more imagery, draft some new language and see if Student B likes the direction you’re moving in. As you are comfortable, exchange contact information with your group so you can to continue the discussion outside of class.
Model Text by Student Authors

To Suffer or Surrender? An Analysis of Dylan Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night”

Death is a part of life that everyone must face at one point or another. The poem “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” depicts the grief and panic one feels when a loved is approaching the end of their life, while presenting a question; is it right to surrender to death, or should it be resisted? In this poem Dylan Thomas opposes the idea of a peaceful passing, and uses various literary devices such as repetition, metaphor, and imagery to argue that death should be resisted at all costs.

The first thing that one may notice while reading Thomas’s piece is that there are key phrases repeated throughout the poem. As a result of the poem’s villanelle structure, both lines “Do not go gentle into that good night” and “Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (Thomas) are repeated often. This repetition gives the reader a sense of panic and desperation as the speaker pleads with their father to stay. The first line showcases a bit of alliteration of n sounds at the beginning of “not” and “night,” as well as alliteration of hard g sounds in the words “go” and “good.” These lines are vital to the poem as they reiterate its central meaning, making it far from subtle and extremely hard to miss. These lines add even more significance due to their placement in the poem. “Dying of the light” and “good night” are direct metaphors for death, and with the exception of the first line of the poem, they only appear at the end of a stanza. This structural choice is a result of the villanelle form, but we can interpret it to highlight the predictability of life itself, and signifies the undeniable and unavoidable fact that everyone must face death at the end of one’s life. The line “my father, there on the sad height” (Thomas 16) confirms that this poem is directed to the speaker’s father, the idea presented in these lines is what Thomas wants his father to recognize above all else.

This poem also has many contradictions. In the fifth stanza, Thomas describes men near death “who see with blinding sight” (Thomas 13). “Blinding sight” is an oxymoron, which implies that although with age most men lose their sight, they are wiser and enlightened, and have a greater understanding of the world. In this poem “night” is synonymous with “death”; thus, the phrase “good night” can also be
considered an oxymoron if one does not consider death good. Presumably the speaker does not, given their desperation for their father to avoid it. The use of the word “good" initially seems odd, however, although it may seem like the speaker rejects the idea of death itself, this is not entirely the case. Thomas presents yet another oxymoron by saying “Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears" (Thomas 17). By referring to passionate tears as a blessing and a curse, which insinuates that the speaker does not necessarily believe death itself is inherently wrong, but to remain complicit in the face of death would be. These tears would be a curse because it is difficult to watch a loved one cry, but a blessing because the tears are a sign that the father is unwilling to surrender to death. This line is especially significant as it distinguishes the author’s beliefs about death versus dying, which are vastly different. “Good night" is an acknowledgement of the bittersweet relief of the struggles and hardships of life that come with death, while “fierce tears" and the repeated line “Rage, rage against the dying of the light” show that the speaker sees the act of dying as a much more passionate, sad, and angering experience. The presence of these oxymorons creates a sense of conflict in the reader, a feeling that is often felt by those who are struggling to say goodbye to a loved one.

At the beginning of the middle four stanzas they each begin with a description of a man, “Wise men… Good men… Wild men… Grave men…” (Thomas 4; 7; 10; 13). Each of these men have one characteristic that is shared, which is that they all fought against death for as long as they could. These examples are perhaps used in an attempt to inspire the father. Although the speaker begs their father to “rage" against death, this is not to say that they believe death is avoidable. Thomas reveals this in the 2nd stanza that “wise men at their end know dark is right" (Thomas 4), meaning that wise men know that death is inevitable, which in return means that the speaker is conscious of this fact as well. It also refers to the dark as “right", which may seem contradicting to the notion presented that death should not be surrendered to; however, this is yet another example of the contrast between the author’s beliefs about death itself, and the act of dying. The last perspective that Thomas shows is “Grave men”. Of course, the wordplay of “grave" alludes to death. Moreover, similarly to the second stanza that referred to “wise men", this characterization of “grave men" alludes to the
speaker’s knowledge of impending doom, despite the constant pleads for their father to resist it.

Another common theme that occurs in the stanzas about these men is regret. A large reason the speaker is so insistent that his father does not surrender to the “dying of the light” is because the speaker does not want their father to die with regrets, and believes that any honorable man should do everything they can in their power to make a positive impact in the world. Thomas makes it clear that it is cowardly to surrender when one can still do good, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant.

All of these examples of men are positively associated with the “rage” that Thomas so often refers to, further supporting the idea that rage, passion, and madness are qualities of honorable men. Throughout stanza 2, 3, 4 and 5, the author paints pictures of these men dancing, singing in the sun, and blazing like meteors. Despite the dark and dismal tone of the piece, the imagery used depicts life as joyous and lively. However, a juxtaposition still exists between men who are truly living, and men who are simply avoiding death. Words like burn, rave, sad, and rage are used when referencing those who are facing death, while words such as blaze, gay, bright, and night are used when referencing the prime of one’s life. None of these words are give the feeling of peace; however those alluding to life are far more cheerful. Although the author rarely uses the words “life” and “death”, the text symbolizes them through light and night. The contrast between the authors interpretation of life versus death is drastically different. Thomas wants the reader to
see that no matter how old they become, there is always something to strive for and fight for, and to accept death would be to deprive the world of what you have to offer.

In this poem Dylan Thomas juggles the complicated concept of mortality. Thomas perfectly portrays the fight against time as we age, as well as the fear and desperation that many often feel when facing the loss of a loved one. Although the fight against death cannot be won, in “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” Dylan Thomas emphasizes how despite this indisputable fact, one should still fight against death with all their might. Through the use of literary devices such as oxymorons and repetition, Thomas inspires readers to persevere, even in the most dire circumstances.

Works Cited

In Raymond Carver’s “Cathedral”, the character Robert plays a Christ-like role. To mirror that, the narrator plays the role of Saul, a man who despised and attacked Christ and his followers until he became converted. Throughout the story there are multiple instances where Robert does things similar to miracles performed in biblical stories, and the narrator continues to doubt and judge him. Despite Robert making efforts to converse with the narrator, he refuses to look past the oddity of his blindness. The author also pays close attention to eyes and blindness. To quote the Bible, “Having eyes, see ye not?” (King James Bible, Mark, 8.18). The characters who have sight don’t see as much as Robert, and he is able to open their eyes and hearts.

When Robert is first brought up, it is as a story. The narrator has heard of him and how wonderful he is, but has strong doubts about the legitimacy of it all. He shares a specific instance in which Robert asked to touch his wife's face. He says, “She told me he touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose—even her neck!”, and goes on to talk about how she tried to write a poem about it (Carver 34). The experience mentioned resembled the story of Jesus healing a blind man by putting his hands on his eyes and how, afterward, the man was restored (Mark 8.21-26). While sharing the story,
however, the only thing the narrator cares about is that the blind man touched his wife’s neck. At this point in the story the narrator still only cares about what’s right in front of him, so hearing retellings means nothing to him.

When Saul is introduced in the Bible, it is as a man who spent his time persecuting the followers of Christ and “made havoc of the church” (Acts 8.3-5). From the very beginning of the story, the narrator makes it known that, “A blind man in my house was not something that I looked forward to” (Carver 34). He can’t stand the idea of something he’d only seen in movies and heard tell of becoming something real. Even when talking about his own wife, he disregards the poem she wrote for him. When he hears the name of Robert’s deceased wife, his first response is to point out how strange it sounds (Carver 36). He despises Robert, so he takes out his aggression on the people who don’t, and drives them away.

The narrator’s wife drives to the train station to pick up Robert while he stays home and waits, blaming Robert for his boredom. When they finally do arrive, the first thing he notices about Robert is his beard. It might be a stretch to call this a biblical parallel since a lot of people have beards, but Carver makes a big deal out of this detail. The next thing the narrator points out, though, is that his wife “had this blind man by his coat sleeve” (Carver 37). This draws the parallel to another biblical story. In this story a woman who has been suffering from a disease sees Jesus and says to herself, “If I may but touch his garment I shall be whole” (Matt. 9.21). Before they had gotten in the house the narrator’s wife had Robert by the arm, but even after they were at the front porch, she still wanted to hold onto his sleeve.

The narrator continues to make observations about Robert when he first sees him. One that stood out was when he was talking more about Robert’s physicality, saying he had “stooped shoulders, as if he carried a great weight there” (Carver 38). There are many instances in the Bible where Jesus is depicted carrying some type of heavy burden, like a lost sheep, the sins of the world, and even his own cross. He also points out on multiple occasions that Robert has a big and booming voice, which resembles a lot of depictions of a voice “from on high.”

After they sit and talk for a while, they have dinner. This dinner resembles the last supper, especially when the narrator says, “We ate like there was no tomorrow”
(Carver 39). He also describes how Robert eats and says “he’d tear of a hunk of buttered bread and eat that. He’d follow this up with a big drink of milk” (Carver 39). Those aren’t the only things he ate, but the order in which he ate the bread and took a drink is the same order as the sacrament, a ritual created at the last supper. The author writing it in that order, despite it being irrelevant to the story, is another parallel that seems oddly specific in an otherwise normal sequence of events. What happens after the dinner follows the progression of the Bible as well.

After they’ve eaten a meal like it was their last the narrator’s wife falls asleep like Jesus’ apostles outside the garden of Gethsemane. In the Bible, the garden of Gethsemane is where Jesus goes after creating the sacrament and takes on the sins of all the world. He tells his apostles to keep watch outside the garden, but they fall asleep and leave him to be captured by the non-believers (Matt. 26.36-40). In “Cathedral,” Robert is left high and alone with the narrator when the woman who holds him in such high regard falls asleep. Instead of being taken prisoner, however, Robert turns the tables and puts all focus on the narrator. His talking to the narrator is like a metaphorical taking on of his sins. On page 46 the narrator tries to explain to him what a cathedral looks like. It turns out to be of no use, since the narrator has never talked to a blind person before, much like a person trying to pray who never has before. Robert decides he needs to place his hands on the narrator like he did to his wife on the first page.

When Saul becomes converted, it is when Jesus speaks to him as a voice “from on high.” As soon as the narrator begins drawing with Robert (a man who is high), his eyes open up. When Jesus speaks to Saul, he can no longer see. During the drawing of the cathedral, Robert asks the narrator to close his eyes. Even when Robert tells him he can open his eyes, the narrator decides to keep them closed. He went from thinking Robert coming over was a stupid idea to being a full believer in him. He says, “I put in windows with arches. I drew flying buttresses. I hung great doors. I couldn’t stop” (Carver 45). Even with all the harsh things the narrator said about Robert, being touched by him made his heart open up. Carver ends the story after the cathedral has been drawn and has the narrator say, “It’s really something” (Carver 46).

Robert acts as a miracle worker, not only to the narrator’s wife, but to him as well. Despite the difficult personality, the narrator can’t help but be converted. He says
how resistant he is to have him over, and tries to avoid any conversation with him. He pokes fun at little details about him, disregards peoples’ love for him, but still can’t help being converted by him. Robert’s booming voice carries power over the narrator, but his soft touch is what finally makes him see.

Works Cited

The Space Between the Racial Binary
Toni Morrison in “Recitatif” confronts race as a social construction, where race is not biological but created from human interactions. Morrison does not disclose the race of the two main characters, Twyla and Roberta, although she does provide that one character is black and the other character is white. Morrison emphasizes intersectionality by confounding stereotypes about race through narration, setting, and allusion. We have been trained to ‘read’ race through a variety of signifiers, but “Recitatif” puts those signifiers at odds.

Twyla is the narrator throughout “Recitatif” where she describes the events from her own point of view. Since the story is from Twyla’s perspective, it allows the readers to characterize her and Roberta solely based on what she mentions. At the beginning of

Teacher Takeaways
“This author has put together a convincing and well-informed essay; a reader who lacks the same religious knowledge (like me) would enjoy this essay because it illuminates something they didn’t already realize about ‘Cathedral.’ The author has selected strong evidence from both the short story and the Bible. I would advise the student to work on structure, perhaps starting off by drafting topic-transition sentences for the beginning of each paragraph. I would also encourage them to work on sentence-level fluff. For example, ‘Throughout the story there are multiple instances where Robert does things similar to miracles performed in biblical stories’ could easily be reduced to ‘Robert’s actions in the story are reminiscent of Biblical miracles.’ It’s easiest to catch this kind of fluff when you read your draft out loud.”

– Professor Wilhjelm
Part Two: Text Wrestling

the story Twyla states that “[her] mother danced all night”, which is the main reason why Twyla is “taken to St. Bonny’s” (Morrison 139). Twyla soon finds that she will be “stuck... with a girl from a whole other race” who “never washed [her] hair and [she] smelled funny” (Morrison 139). From Twyla’s description of Roberta’s hair and scent, one could assume that Roberta is black due to the stereotype that revolves around a black individual’s hair. Later on in the story Twyla runs into Roberta at her work and describes Roberta’s hair as “so big and wild” that “[she] could hardly see her face”, which is another indicator that Roberta has Afro-textured hair (Morrison 144). Yet, when Twyla encounters Roberta at a grocery store “her huge hair was sleek” and “smooth” resembling a white woman’s hair style (Morrison 146). Roberta’s hairstyles are stereotypes that conflict with one another; one attributing to a black woman, the other to a white woman. The differences in hair texture, and style, are a result of phenotypes, not race. Phenotypes are observable traits that “result from interactions between your genes and the environment” (“What are Phenotypes?”). There is not a specific gene in the human genome that can be used to determine a person’s race. Therefore, the racial categories in society are not constructed on the genetic level, but the social. Dr. J Craig Venter states, “We all evolved in the last 100,000 years from the same small number of tribes that migrated out of Africa and colonized the world”, so it does not make sense to claim that race has evolved a specific gene and certain people inherit those specific genes (Angier). From Twyla’s narration of Roberta, Roberta can be classified into one of two racial groups based on the stereotypes ascribed to her.

Intersectionality states that people are at a disadvantage by multiple sources of oppressions, such their race and class. “Recitatif” seems to be written during the Civil Rights Era where protests against racial integration took place. This is made evident when Twyla says, “strife came to us that fall...Strife. Racial strife” (Morrison 150). According to NPR, the Supreme Court ordered school busing in 1969 and went into effect in 1973 to allow for desegregation (“Legacy”). Twyla “thought it was a good thing until she heard it was a bad thing”, while Roberta picketed outside “the school they were trying to integrate” (Morrison 150). Twyla and Roberta both become irritated with one another’s reaction to the school busing order, but what woman is on which side? Roberta seems to be a white woman against integrating black students into her
children’s school, and Twyla suggests that she is a black mother who simply wants best for her son Joseph even if that does mean going to a school that is “far-out-of-the-way” (Morrison 150). At this point in the story Roberta lives in “Annandale” which is “a neighborhood full of doctors and IBM executives” (Morrison 147), and at the same time, Twyla is “Mrs. Benson” living in “Newburgh” where “half the population… is on welfare…” (Morrison 145). Twyla implies that Newburgh is being gentrified by these “smart IBM people”, which inevitably results in an increase in rent and property values, as well as changes the area’s culture. In America, minorities are usually the individuals who are displaced and taken over by wealthier, middle-class white individuals. From Twyla’s tone, and the setting, it seems that Twyla is a black individual that is angry towards “the rich IBM crowd” (Morrison 146). When Twyla and Roberta are bickering over school busing, Roberta claims that America “is a free country” and she is not “doing anything” to Twyla (Morrison 150). From Roberta’s statements, it suggests that she is a affluent, and ignorant white person that is oblivious to the hardships that African Americans had to overcome, and still face today. Rhonda Soto contends that “Discussing race without including class analysis is like watching a bird fly without looking at the sky…”. It is ingrained in America as the normative that whites are mostly part of the middle-class and upper-class, while blacks are part of the working-class. Black individuals are being classified as low-income based entirely on their skin color. It is pronounced that Twyla is being discriminated against because she is a black woman, living in a low-income neighborhood where she lacks basic resources. For example, when Twyla and Roberta become hostile with one another over school busing, the supposedly white mothers start moving towards Twyla’s car to harass her. She points out that “[my] face[ ] looked mean to them” and that these mothers “could not wait to throw themselves in front of a police car” (Morrison 151). Twyla is indicating that these mothers are privileged based on their skin color, while she had to wait until her car started to rock back and forth to a point where “the four policeman who had been drinking Tab in their car finally got the message and [then] strolled over” (Morrison 151). This shows that Roberta and the mothers protesting are white, while Twyla is a black woman fighting for her resources. Not only is Twyla being targeted due to her race, but
as well her class by protesting mothers who have classified her based on intersectionality.

Intersectionality is also alluded in “Recitatif” based on Roberta’s interests. Twyla confronts Roberta at the “Howard Johnson’s” while working as a waitress with her “blue and white triangle on [her] head” and “[her] hair shapeless in a net” (Morrison 145). Roberta boasts that her friend has “an appointment with Hendrix” and shames Twyla for not knowing Jimi Hendrix (Morrison 145). Roberta begins to explain that “he’s only the biggest rockstar, guitarist, or whatever Roberta was going to say. It is clear that Roberta is infatuated with Jimi Hendrix, who was an African American rock guitarist. Because Jimi Hendrix is a black musician, the reader could assume that Roberta is also black. At the same time, Roberta may be white since Jimi Hendrix appealed to a plethora of people. In addition, Twyla illustrates when she saw Roberta “sitting in [the] booth” she was “with two guys smothered in head and facial” (Morrison 144). These men may be two white counter culturists, and possible polygamists, in a relationship with Roberta who is also a white. From Roberta’s enthusiasm in Jimi Hendrix it alludes that she may be black or white, and categorized from this interest.

Intersectionality states that people are prone to “predict an individual’s identity, beliefs, or values based on categories like race” (Williams). Morrison chose not to disclose the race of Twyla and Roberta to allow the reader to make conclusions about the two women based on the vague stereotypes Morrison presented throughout “Recitatif”. Narration, setting, and allusion helped make intersectionality apparent, which

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Teacher Takeaways

“This essay is a good companion to the same author’s summary essay, ‘Maggie as the Focal Point.’ It has a detailed thesis (the last two sentences of the first paragraph) that give me an idea of the author’s argument and the structure they plan to follow in the essay. This is a good example of the T3 strategy and consequent organization. That said, because this student used the three-part thesis and five-paragraph essay that it encourages, each paragraph is long and dense. I would encourage this student to break up those units into smaller, more digestable pieces, perhaps trying to divide the vague topics (‘narration, setting, and allusion’) into more specific subtopics.”

— Professor Wilhjelm
in turn allowed the readers understand, or see, that race is in fact a social construction. “Recitatif” forces the readers to come to terms with their own racial prejudices.

Works Cited


Part Two Endnotes

Complete citations are included at the end of the book.

55 Of particular note are claims that Gal Gadot of Wonder Woman has supported Israeli imperialism, and therefore her claims to feminism are contradicted by different social justice imperatives: The wonder of imperial feminism [Al Jazeera Article]

56 Although this term originated in the New Critical literary movement, it has permeated most other schools of critical theory and cultural studies. In most settings, it is generalized to refer to the attentive reading practices and philosophies discussed in this chapter; however, it does have additional connotations in New Criticism.


59 This framework was inspired by Thomas C. Foster’s in How to Read Literature Like a Professor, Harper, 2003.
Keep in mind that each of these critical lenses has a broad school of theory behind it. Your teacher might encourage you to do a bit of background research on a certain perspective before applying it.


For more on poetry explication, consult the UNC Writing Center’s web page

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Also of note are recent emphases to use Bloom’s work as a conceptual model, not a hard-and-fast, infallible rule for cognition. Importantly, we rarely engage only one kind of thinking, and models like this should not be used to make momentous decisions; rather, they should contribute to a broader, nuanced understanding of human cognition and development.

In consideration of revised versions Bloom’s Taxonomy and the previous note, it can be mentioned that this process necessarily involves judgment/evaluation; using the process of interpretation, my analysis and synthesis require my intellectual discretion.

Mays 1258.


“Developing a Thesis.” *Purdue OWL*, Purdue University, 2014, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/616/02/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/616/02/). [Original link has expired. See Purdue OWL’s updated version: Developing a Thesis]

Read more advice from the Purdue OWL relevant to close reading at [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owlsection/4/17/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owlsection/4/17/).
One particularly useful additional resource is the text “Annoying Ways People Use Sources,” externally linked in the Additional Recommended Resources appendix of this book.

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