

CLOSE READING OF A LITERARY PASSAGE

To do a close reading of literature, you choose a specific passage and analyze it in fine detail, as if with a magnifying glass. You then comment on points of style and on your reactions as a reader. Close reading is important because it is the building block for larger analysis. Your thoughts evolve not from someone else's truth about the reading, but from your own observations. The more closely you can observe, the more original and exact your ideas will be. To begin your close reading, ask yourself several specific questions about the passage. The following questions are not a formula, but a starting point for your own thoughts. When you arrive at some answers, you are ready to organize and write. You should organize your close reading like any other kind of essay, paragraph by paragraph, but you can arrange it any way you like.

I. First Impressions:

- ◆ What is the first thing you notice about the passage?
- ◆ What is the second thing?
- ◆ Do the two things you noticed complement each other? Or contradict each other?
- ◆ What mood does the passage create in you as a reader? Why?

II. Vocabulary and Diction:

- ◆ Which words do you notice first? Why did they stand out from the others?
- ◆ How do the important words relate to one another? Does a phrase here appear elsewhere in the story or poem?
- ◆ Do any words seem oddly used to you? Why? Is that a result of archaic language? Or deliberate weirdness?
- ◆ Do any words have double meanings? Triple meanings? What are all the possible ways to read it?
- ◆ Look up any unfamiliar words. For a pre-20th century text, look in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for possible outdated meanings. Look up very common words as well, since they often have several possible meanings.

III. Discerning Patterns:

- ◆ Does an image here remind you of an image elsewhere in the book?
- ◆ How does this pattern fit into the pattern of the book as a whole?
- ◆ How could this passage symbolize something in the entire work? Could this passage serve as a microcosm, a little picture, of what's taking place in the whole narrative or poem?
- ◆ What is the sentence rhythm like? Short and choppy? Long and flowing? Does it build on itself or stay at an even pace? How does that structure relate to the content?
- ◆ Look at the punctuation. Is there anything unusual about it? What about capitalization?
- ◆ Is there any repetition within the passage? What words are repeated? Why are they repeated?
- ◆ How many *types* of writing are in the passage? (e.g., narration, description, argument, dialogue, rhymed or alliterative poetry inserted into the prose passage, etc.)
- ◆ Can you identify paradoxes in the author's thought or subject?
- ◆ What is left out or silenced? What would you expect the author to say that the author seems to have avoided or ignored? What could the author have done differently—and what's the effect of the current choice?

IV. Point of View and Characterization:

- ◆ How does the passage make us react or think about any characters or events within the narrative?
- ◆ Are there colors, sounds, physical description that appeals to the senses? Does this imagery form a pattern? Why might the author have chosen that color, sound or physical description? Is it symbolic? Foreshadowing?
- ◆ Who speaks in the passage? To whom does he or she speak? Does the narrator have partial or omniscient viewpoint? How does that viewpoint help or hinder the reader's comprehension?

V. Symbolism, Schemes, Tropes:

- ◆ Are there metaphors, similes, figures of speech? What kinds? Why might the author have chosen them?
- ◆ Is there one controlling metaphor? If not, how many different metaphors are there, and in what order do they occur? How might that be significant? Consult the "Schemes and Tropes" section of the Course Packet or on the class website under "Rhetoric" and see if any of these rhetorical tools appear in the writing.

VI. Importance (the most vital part of the exercise):

- ◆ Why is it important for the reader to know what you have just analyzed and explained? How does the passage you have chosen help us understand the story, poem, or play more completely?

APPROPRIATE ANNOTATION

IS	ISN'T
<p>QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About things you don't understand • Things you are predicting • Things you are trying to make sense out of <p>CONNECTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what you already know about yourself • To what you already know about the world • To other readings <p>INTERPRETATIONS that have meaning or depth, not at the surface level of the text. Interpretations that require thinking and inference (putting puzzle pieces together).</p> <p>SUMMARIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting something into your own words • Paraphrasing information in the margins and at the end of sections/chapters <p>PATTERNS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use numbers, bullets, or your own method to organize lists, series, sequences, chronologies, or motifs. <p>WORDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make vocabulary words out of those you don't recognize • Identify any course specific terms • Identify any unique diction choices that stand out 	<p>NOTES WITHOUT THOUGHTS to remember WHY. For example, simply identifying "simile" serves little purpose. Instead, record a thought about WHY that simile is there.</p> <p>PERSONAL REACTIONS like "wow!" or "boring". They are for thoughts worth remembering, instead.</p> <p>ONE-WORD COMMENTS because it just doesn't depict enough thinking to justify the space it takes up.</p> <p>NOTES WITHOUT SYMBOLS OR SYMBOLS WITHOUT NOTES They tag team to bring the passage to life.</p> <p>TOO MUCH OF ANYTHING Like highlighting an entire page or even an entire paragraph or paraphrasing every sentence rather than mixing in interpretations. Too much of anything becomes self-defeating.</p>

CHAPTER 2
I OBSERVE

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty [with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples.] - much more detailed

I believe I can remember these two at a little distance apart, dwarfed to my sight by stooping down or kneeling on the floor, and I going unsteadily from the one to the other. I have an impression on my mind which I cannot distinguish from actual remembrance, of the touch of Peggotty's forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, and of its being roughened by needlework, like a pocket nutmeg-grater.

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentle-

sense of perspective

ness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.

I might have a misgiving that I am 'meandering' in stopping to say this, but that it brings me to remark that I build these conclusions, in part upon my own experience of myself; and if it should appear from anything I may set down in this narrative that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics.

Looking back, as I was saying, into the blank of my infancy, the first objects I can remember as standing out by themselves from a confusion of things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see.

There comes out of the cloud, our house—not new to me, but quite familiar, in its earliest remembrance. On the ground-floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in the centre, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner, without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me, walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner. There is one cock who gets upon a post to crow, and seems to take particular notice of me as I look at him through the kitchen window, who makes me

Observation = memory

looking back

MAN vs BOY

this became blurred

ironic

original drawing =

all senses

get that memory

mentally

not let me think

FAINT TALK IMAGE

looks through windows a lot

PRESENT TENSE

appearances only

clouds

MAN vs THESE

Mr Dick?

Sub Current

something

General Filled with Murdoch's circles

new Pa