



ELA Virtual Learning

Composition and Reading 2: Close Reading and Annotation

April 30, 2020



Composition and Reading II

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Objective/Learning Target:

Students will apply critical reading skills and theory to a story of their choice in order to form a unique and defensible statement about the chosen text.

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Answer the following questions in your notebook.

Starting Question(s):

1. Recall what story you chose from the lesson yesterday when we were choosing our topics. Before you annotate the piece, what is the initial connection you are making between the story and the critical literary theory? (this should just be what you had said for the practice yesterday)
2. Do you know what you are looking for when you are applying critical theory to a text?
3. Recall what you know about “close reading.” Can the methods of close reading be combined with other modes of literary analysis? For example, can you use close reading strategies when applying feminist criticism?

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Learn:

Before we can write our thesis (our defensible statement that we are arguing for the paper) and our outline (the list of bullet points that help us organize our ideas), we must annotate the stories we have chosen and apply the theory we have chosen to gather primary source supports that will help us strengthen our arguments. The best way to go about annotation is to utilize the close reading strategies we learned about in previous lessons and use them in tandem with a critical literary theory (like feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc.). Let's look at an example.

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Learn:

Yesterday, my example stated that I was going to do a feminist reading of Octavia Butler's story "Speech Sounds". I know which type of criticism I am going to do, so I would pull up the [link that was posted on feminist criticism](#) from a couple of weeks ago (don't worry, I will post the other approaches to criticism in a later slide in this presentation).



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Learn:

Now let's start annotating. First, I would read the story to ensure I fully understand the plot. My initial reactions about the story are formed. Then, I would look on the link about feminist criticism and see if there are any questions to consider when applying a feminist lens. Oh good, there are:

Is the author male or female? - Is the text narrated by a male or female? - What types of roles do women have in the text? - Are the female characters the protagonists or secondary and minor characters? - Do any stereotypical characterizations of women appear? - What are the attitudes toward women held by the male characters? - What is the author's attitude toward women in society? - How does the author's culture influence his/her attitude? - Is feminine imagery used? If so, what is the significance of such imagery? - Do the female characters speak differently than the male characters? In your investigation, compare the frequency of speech for the male character to the frequency of speech for the female characters.

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Learn:

With those questions in mind, I need to do a ***second*** reading of the story while looking for anything that would help me answer the questions about feminist theory.

- Is the text narrated by a male or female?

The text is narrated by a woman who refers to herself as “Rye”

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Learn:

- What are the attitudes toward women held by the male characters?

Rye is treated as a sexual object by strangers in the text. In one paragraph, after Rye and other passengers had been ejected from a bus due to a fist fight, a man stares her down with the intent of assaulting her. “He gestured obscenely and several other men laughed. Loss of verbal language had spawned a whole new set of obscene gestures. The man, with stark simplicity, had accused her of sex with the bearded man and had suggested she accommodate the other men present— beginning with him” (Butler, 5). But she is also treated with kindness by the only named male character in the story, Obsidian. Obsidian tries to protect Rye from these men in the same scene, and offers to drive her to where she is headed on the bus...



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Learn:

I would continue in this manner, gathering as much support from the text that I could so that the literary theory could be supported by scenes, symbols, and dialogues in the text. After I have gathered as much as I could to support my approach to criticism, I would need to turn these supports into an actual statement about how this one story fits into the larger societal discussion about my literary theory. In my case, I am trying to come up with a statement about how this dystopian story is reflective of current attitudes toward women. What is Butler attempting to say about gender roles? Does she include any symbolism that is supposed to make us think about how women are treated today? **How does “Speech Sounds” represent the larger discussion about gender relations?**

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Practice:

Now it is your turn. Remember: read once for content and once for analysis. Take as many notes as you can, reading with your specific critical lens and answering how the story you are reading fits into a larger social, cultural, or historical framework. Take your notes on a doc or sheet of paper that is easily accessible so that you don't lose them.

- [Deconstruction Questions](#)
- [Feminism Questions](#)
- [Marxism questions](#)
- ["Close Reading" questions](#)
- [Psychoanalysis Questions](#)
- [Reader-Response Questions](#)



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Wrap-Up:

In the next lesson, we will be using your annotations to make a statement that you can support with examples from the text. I would highly recommend reading the text twice. You want to understand this story inside and out in order to make the best statement that you can about it.