

## Close Reading Assignments (30%)

### Assignment Description

Students will be expected to complete *three* close reading papers in order to develop their skills as critical readers of literature. Cultural artifacts such as literature rely on a number of narrative and expressive techniques to communicate meaning. To become a savvy reader of literary texts we must not only learn and find these expressive and narrative techniques, but we must also examine how they contribute to the overall meaning of a text. This can be quite difficult since many cultural texts produce a multitude of meanings, often for a variety of different audiences. As such, you will practice close reading as a means of exploring the solidity and depth of your ideas about a text rather than arguing for a singular approach to a course material.

Close reading papers are *formal* assignments. This means they should be formatted according to MLA style codes (double spaced), include correct in-text citations, page numbers, headers, and a properly formatted works cited page. Students will have the option to submit **one** revision of a close reading assignment—their grade will be based on the three highest grades.

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### ***Close Reading #1 (Due Sunday, 2/17 by 11:59 pm) – Cultivating a Critical Eye***

The first close reading assignment asks you to slow down your urge to argue. In this essay you will pick a passage, scene, or singular element of a cultural text and deconstruct it. This can be ruminatory in nature and need not lead to an ultimate conclusion about the passage or the text as a whole. Use the pages of the assignment to (1) practice noticing and describing features of a cultural object (2) hypothesizing on the meaning of said features and (3) explaining how what you notice produces the meaning you see in the text.

#### Nitty Gritty:

- Approx. 2 pages
- Essay should engage with *one* passage, scene, or singular element (like lyrics) of a cultural text discussed thus far in class
- Essays should include a summary of the text as a whole that provides brief background for readers and opens up the possibility of ruminating on larger topics and themes throughout the paper
- Essay addresses (at some point, perhaps many) why understanding the inner workings of the passage you chose is important to the text as a whole
- Readings of the passage are contextualized and well-integrated (see handout on integrating quotes on Moodle)

- Readings of the passage are analytic, critical, and reflective
- Readings help your audience understand how something small can affect the text as a whole
- It is clear why the passage is significant (Perhaps it changes the way you read the text as a whole or adds details that make the story ‘work’; Perhaps it builds the narrative’s momentum or resolves a tension or complicates an aspect of meaning)
- No additional sources used

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***Close Reading #2 (Due Sunday, 3/3 by 11:59pm) — How is Meaning Made?***

The second close reading asks you to develop a hypothesis about how a theme, motif, or underlying meaning of a text is produced through a specific repeated or related set of expressive techniques in a *singular* text. Utilizing CR#1 skills, this essay asks that you place two moments in dialogue with each other, examining how their relationship speaks to a larger meaning of the text.

Nitty Gritty (in addition to those listed for CR#1):

- 4-5 pages
- Essay brings together 2 - 3 moments in *one* text discussed in class thus far
- Essay puts forth a hypothetical claim about the larger meaning of a text based on the relationship between the 2-3 closely read passages
- Essay puts close reading moments *in conversation* with each other through the use of transition sentences, sign posts, and relational language (see handout)
- Essay move slowly through close readings, taking time to draw connections in order to make a comprehensive claim
- No additional sources used

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***Close Reading #3 (Due Sunday, 4/7 by 11:59pm) — Do your thing.***

This essay asks that you make a claim about a text of your choosing that we discussed during class. The claim should be specific and debateable. Moreover, it should be insightful, presenting an approach to a cultural text discussed in class that makes your reader rethink the text as a whole. As with every close reading paper, you must make your claim by integrating textual evidence that is slowly and carefully analyzed, explained, and related back to the larger claim of the paper. This final close reading paper should feel the most like a standard, US academic cultural studies paper.

Nitty Gritty (in addition to those listed in CR#1 and CR#2):

- 6-8 pages

- This essay should have a clear purpose (reasons one should read the essay) and takeaway
- The essay should clarify the importance and significance of the claim (ie: Why should your reader care that Chimamanda Adichie uses textual objects (like a mask) to illuminate the intersections of colonialism and patriarchy?)
- The essay should use the claim as the crucial connective tissue, weaving it into paragraphs, analytic moments, and sentences so that it shines throughout the essay

**Close Readings are assessed using the course rubric on Moodle.**