

Assignment 1

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Close Reading Assignment Description

Over the course of the quarter, you will submit four close readings (CRs). Your lowest score will be dropped, leaving you with three CRs that, when combined, will be worth 15% of your final grade for COM 180.

You will submit your CRs to Smartsite “Forums” no later than 8:00 pm the night before your poem will be discussed in class. This will give me and the rest of the class a chance to read your CR before we meet. Because you have so many opportunities to complete your four CRs, no late work will be accepted.

If you wish to comment on someone else’s CR, please do! I will consider such activity in the forums to be a kind of participation, so this could be a supplementary option for people who have a more difficult time speaking up in class.

Directions for composing the Close Reading:

Select one of the poems assigned for the day. If we are on day two of discussing a particular author or group of authors, **be sure to tackle a poem that we haven’t yet discussed in class.**

If you are analyzing a poem in **translation**, be sure to consult the original Italian, Spanish, or French. Even if you can’t read the poem in its original language, look at its structure and rhyme scheme. Try to sound it out if you can.

In an essay of **300-500 words**, provide a close reading of the poem, considering the following questions:

- What do you notice about the structure or **form** of the poem? How is it constructed?
- Who/what is the **persona** or **speaking voice** of the poem, and what seems to be his/her/its **mood**?
- What literary devices, tropes, and rhetorical figures can you identify? For example...
 - ...where do you see **repetition**? Repeated or varied words, phrases, sounds (assonance, alliteration, rhymes), punctuation, themes, rhythms?
 - ...what **contrasts** can you identify (black/white, I/you, here/there, alive/dead)?
 - ...are there any **comparisons** (similes or metaphors)? Any **contradictions**?
- What seems strange about the poem? Are there places where it changes its **tone**? Shifts its **perspective**? Are there **ambiguities**—things that seem deliberately unclear?

Are there indeterminacies—places in the poem that could have dual or multiple meanings? Does the poem ever seem to contradict itself? How?

- Looking back at all these things you’ve noticed, what **effect** is achieved by these? How do the elements add to or disrupt your original surface reading?
- **Conclude** by making an **interpretive** statement about this poem: a statement that goes beyond the objective (saying “I observe that...”), pushing toward interpretive analysis (saying “I would argue that...”)

Close Reading Grading Rubric:

Criterion	Description
Completeness and Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300-500 words of essay-style paragraphs • A sustained meditation on the form, language, mood, and literary/poetic/rhetorical devices of the poem • Does not digress from the poem at hand (no “This reminds me of the time....”)
Tone/Mode	Refrains from subjective utterances (“I like this; this is good/bad”) and sticks to objective observations (“This poem is a sonnet”) and interpretive analysis (“The laurel tree in this poem is a symbol of...”)
Organization	Ideas follow each other logically, with the connections between ideas explained
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The prose is clear, concise, and elegant • Words are chosen for their precise meanings, and the terminology/vocabulary of the course is accurately deployed where appropriate
Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper is free (or very nearly free) of mechanical errors, spelling mistakes, and typos • The in-text citations follow MLA format • It is uploaded to SmartSite “Forums” correctly and on time