

CLOSE READING FICTION WORKSHEET

When close reading any literary text, narrative or fiction, the goal remains to make a claim for potential meanings locatable within a text based supported by analysis of the *way the text is put together*. At the heart of this is a kind of *invention*: taking the materials presented to you and explaining how they lead to ideas and insights that are not explicitly spelled out by the text itself. Training your eye to notice these “materials” in all their forms is the first step. At their core, these materials may be understood in terms of a *collection* of patterns, both miniscule and all encompassing. Such patterns may appear microscopically, in the repetition of a word or a phrase, but they also might appear in the form of the *genre*, which situates a text within a pattern of similar texts.

It can be hard to know where to start, however, because sometimes writing about a novel or a longer text presents you with too much to analyze! This worksheet offers you some preliminary guidelines. Not every question will be productive, but the idea is to think (slowly, resourcefully, and inventively) about the features of a text on a micro- and macro-scale.

1. After you’ve finished reading the full narrative once, pause and think about which moments/passages you remember as particularly striking, utterly confusing, or wonderful (hopefully, you’ve been marking passages all along while reading!). Try to recover the parts of the text that left the greatest impression on you—these parts generally make good fodder for analysis (especially if they were confusing!). Turn back to one of them, and **retype paragraph-length chunk (5-7 sentences!)** you want to spend more time with below:

2. Summarize what is *happening* in this moment in the text, and how this passage fits into what is happening— in just ONE OR TWO SENTENCES. (Basically, introduce this passage as if you were block-quoting it in an essay!)

3. Read over the paragraph slowly, attending to its “poetic” features

Describe the rhythm of the language. Is it hurried? Calm? What makes it so?	
Are there any similes/metaphors/personification involved? What are their tenors and vehicles?	
Are there any repeated words/phrases/images within this passage?	

4. Read the paragraph over again, attending to the narrative and structural features:

What perspective is the passage written from? (Is it 1 st /2 nd /3 rd person?)	
Is the speaker – in this passage alone—presented as omniscient? Limited? Is the narrator dramatized or undramatized? What, if any, pronouns are used?	
What is the setting of this moment in the text? What details are provided about the setting?	
How much time is passing at this moment in the text? How do you know time is passing?	
Characterize the <i>kinds</i> of events occurring in this moment—what <i>kinds</i> of actions are being taken (are they violent? Free? Forced?). If actions are not being taken, what <i>kinds</i> of experiences are being had? (Are characters emotional? Thoughtful? Emotional?)	
Characterize the relationships between the characters in this scene (are they communicating? Fighting? Awkward? Friendly? Intimate?)	

5. Think more pointedly about the passage in relation to the text as a whole.

Poetic Features	Does a <i>motif</i> appear in the passage?	
	Does an image or specific kind of imagery appear in this passage and elsewhere in the text? Which ones, and where else?	
	How does the way this moment is written reflect or contradict the events being described? Does the “tone” or feeling of this moment match the content described?	

Narrative/ Structural Features	Is the narrator behaving differently in this moment of the text than at other times? How? What seems to catalyze the narrator's changes in behavior?	
	How is setting of this passage reflective of the events happening or the ideas being discussed?	
	Do the events occurring in this moment resemble events that occur elsewhere in the text (consider the <i>kinds</i> of events: emotional responses of all kinds, violence, etc.)	
	Do the relationships between the characters in this moment <i>structurally</i> resemble relationships appearing at other moments in the text?	

By now, you've hopefully inventoried patterns contained both within this passage, and within which this passage is a participant. You've also hopefully identified *other* passages that can help you build a "map" for your interpretation that leads through the text. Now, think *creatively* and *inventively* about how this passage or these passages can impact the meanings of the text as a whole.

Taking a more "macro" view, think about the general experience of reading the text:

What are its biggest themes? What ideas does it wrestle with?

What conflicts/ tensions/ relationships seem to be at its core?

Look back at your inventory of observations. **What do the patterns and disjunctions manifested in this passage (poetically, narratively, structurally) have to do with the broader themes/relationships preoccupying the text as a whole?**