

Close Reading

Activity 1

Closely read the following paragraphs from Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, mark them up as needed. Keep in mind any strategies you used or particular problem areas you ran into.

"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination -- indeed, everything and anything except me.

Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful" (Ellison).

Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. New York: Signet, 1952. *Bpi.edu*. Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. Web. 26 April 2016.



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Strategies for Effective Close Reading

Below are strategies for close reading to help with difficult texts and readings.

1.) Annotate or write down main points

“Annotating” means highlighting or underlining key words and phrases. Write down or note anything that seems significant, surprising or that raises questions. A great place to do this is the margins. This acts as a way to communicate with the text and remind you of important places in the text.

2.) Ask questions and look up unknown terms

If something doesn’t make sense that is a great place to make a note in the margin. Asking questions acts as a reminder of a difficult passage, but also helps further your thought about the content in general. When you come to words that you don’t know, circle or mark it so when you look it up and find a definition, you know where in the text it applies.

3.) Know context

Contextuality is knowing and understanding whom the author is, when the work was written, and how or why it was written. It’s much like categorizing the work as a genre or placing the work in a specific category. These categories help you understand the type of text and any preconceived notions. Usually these categories can answer some of the questions you may have.


4.) Take your time and reread

When we read a text for the first time we can miss some of the important information, leaving you with questions. Reading again helps to clarify some of these points.

Things to Look for While Reading

- What is the first thing you notice about the work? What mood does the work create for you if any?
- What words stand out to you? Do any words have dual or multiple meanings? Are there metaphors/similes in the work that might be further analyzed?
- What counts as evidence in the work? What kind of evidence is it (statistical, literary, historical, etc)? From what sources is the evidence taken? Are these sources primary or secondary?
- Is the work persuasive/argumentative? Is it poorly constructed? If so, why? If not, how is the argument effective/strong? Are there inconsistencies in the argument? Could the evidence be interpreted differently? Does it address counterarguments effectively?
- How is the text “interconnected”? Are their systems of thought that you can recognize that help you understand the work more thoroughly?



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