**How to do a Close Reading**

What is a close reading?

To read well requires one to develop one’s thinking about reading, and, as a result, to learn how to engage in the process of what we call **close reading**. Students not only need to learn **how** to determine whether a text is worth reading, but also **how to take ownership of a text’s important ideas** (when it contains them). This requires the active use of intellectual skills. It requires command of the theory of close reading as well as guided practice based on that theory.

Why do we do close reading?

In general, we read to figure out when authors mean. Our reading is further influenced by our **purpose** for reading and by the nature of the text itself. For example, if we are reading for pure pleasure and personal amusement, it may not matter if we do not fully understand the text. *However, a significant part of literary study is to determine what the authors truly mean by their narrative.*

The How – 4 steps:

1. Observe **facts** and **details** about the text:

a. Particularly in short pithy passages or small sections of the text. Your aim may be to notice all striking features of the text, including rhetorical features, structural elements, cultural references; or, your aim may be to notice only selected features of the text – for instance, imagery or use of juxtaposition.

2. Reading with a pencil in hand, and annotate the text:

a. Underline, circle and highlight key words and phrases – anything that strikes you as surprising or significant, or that raises questions.

b. Make notes in the margins

c. These tasks force us to pay close attention, but we also begin to think like the author.

3. Look for patterns in the things you’ve noticed about the text:

a. This includes: repetitions, contradictions, similarities

b. Look for archetypes (characters, symbols, events, etc.)

4. Ask questions about the patterns you’ve noticed **– especially how and why**:

a. To answer some of the questions, look back at the text and see what else is going on.

b. How do these patterns provide some larger meaning?

c. Pay close attention to the evidence and ask questions about the things you notice.

d. **Formulate your own interpretations** from the things you notice in steps 1-3 This does not mean to *observe* and *identify* – it means: what do you observations make you conclude/deduct/believe/interpret?