

Short Paper 2.1: Pratt Close Reading

engl 131 / sec. A7 / fall quarter 2005 / chang



The practice of close reading is and will remain a central part of your academic, intellectual, political, and cultural life. Remember that close reading means analyzing a text, noticing its rhetorical strategies, distilling its main ideas, and then drawing conclusions or making decisions based on your analysis. Again, keep in mind the following rubric for active, close reading:

- 1) Read a difficult passage several times. Read out loud, slowly, deliberately. Difficult parts will be easier the second or third time through.
- 2) Annotate the text. This is sometimes called “active reading.” Annotating involves underlining important words, writing notes or questions in the margins, highlighting, bracketing important passages, taking reading notes, and so on.
- 3) Look up difficult terms or concepts or names. Also try to discover the meaning of key words and concepts from the reading. Some terms have specialized definitions that you will learn only from context. Two good places to look online are: <www.dictionary.com> and <www.wikipedia.com>.
- 4) Consider the historical and cultural context of the text. For whom was it written? By whom? Why? Has it been well received?
- 5) Decide how a difficult passage fits into the larger text. What theme(s) does the passage develop?
- 6) Remember the big picture. Why is the text or passage or statement important? What are its overall claims?
- 7) Finally, as mentioned above, actively take specific notes on the reading. Write down key ideas, pages to return to, terms, and quotes that may be helpful in your own understanding and argument.

For this assignment, you will do a close reading of Mary Louise Pratt’s essay “Arts of the Contact Zone” in *Reading Contexts*, pages 583-597. Read actively. Annotate and underline rather than just highlight. Make notes of key ideas and questions you may have about the text. Do not just read for content. Read through the text more than once. While you are reading, pay special attention to the following concepts:

- contact zone
- autoethnographic text (or autoethnography)
- transculturation
- imagined community
- citizenship
- safe houses

Then, write a 3-page articulation of the text’s main argument and apply Pratt’s ideas to your own claim. Identify and deploy at least three of the concepts listed above in a brief but precise presentation of how you understand and see in your own community (e.g. school, family, state, religion, nation) these concepts at work. In other words, can you locate an example, practice, artifact that demonstrates Pratt’s main arguments? How does your example illuminate three of the concepts Pratt defines? Finally, why is your example important to you and your community? Your short paper should not be a simple summary. Please support your claims and subclaims with direct quotes from Pratt’s essay. Be prepared to discuss your findings in class as well.

Targeted outcomes:

Turn in: 3 pages, typed, no title page, double-spaced, stapled

Due: Thursday, November 3