Short Paper 2.3: Close Reading Of

Close reading is a necessary skill that will be very useful to you no matter your discipline or your eventual profession. Your classes, your work, your government, and even your pastimes will require you to read or evaluate something difficult, to find hand- and footholds in the material, and make sense of it. In general, "close reading" simply means analyzing a text — be it a photograph, a short story, a poem, a scholarly essay, an operation manual, a tax form, a television commercial — very carefully, crystallizing main ideas, and then drawing conclusions or making decisions based on your analysis. In this class, close reading and the skill to read for the sake of writing will be employed primarily for written texts. The following are key ways to help you close read:

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. Write down key ideas, pages to return to, terms, and quotes that may be helpful in your own understanding and argument.

3) Look up difficult terms or concepts or names and keep a running list. 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) Pay close attention to the rhetorical features of the text, the figures of speech, repetitions, imagery, and word choices. How does the language itself work in the text?

5) Consider the historical and cultural context of the text. For whom was it written? By whom? Why? Has it been well received?

6) Decide how a difficult passage fits into the larger text. What theme(s) does the passage develop?

7) Remember the big picture. Why is the text or passage or statement important? What are its overall claims?

For this short paper, select a reading we have done in class (e.g. Douglass, Alexie, Tan, Hughes, Bartholomae, Freire, even the GIS course policies). Select a passage (a couple of paragraphs at least) to close read, to think about, and to write about. Select a passage that is interesting both as "words on the page" and as "primary evidence to produce ideas" (Rosenwasser & Stephen 53). You need only focus on a handful of paragraphs, but you should keep your passages in context with the whole of the piece in mind.

In chapter four of *Writing Analytically*, Rosenwasser and Stephen open with the line, "In a sense, the world is a text" (53). They continue to think about, talk about reading and writing as a way to underscore the idea that "[w]ords matter: they are how we process the world" (53). To further this claim, Rosenwasser and Stephen see reading as two related activites: "(1) reading in the literal sense of tackling words on the page, written materials and (2) reading in the metaphoric sense of gathering data that can be analyzed as primary evidence to produce ideas" (54).

You are to write a 2- to 3-page distillation of the passage's main idea and analyze its rhetorical strategies, writing features, and language. Your paper should **not** be a simple summary or list of figures of speech. Read carefully, read conscientiously, and read closely. **Determine not only what is being argued or said but how it is argued or said and why is the argument or point important.** An outstanding close reading gets between the lines, makes an interpretation, and provides solid analysis and evidence from the text.

Turn in: 2-3 pages, typed, no title page, proper heading, double-spaced, stapled
                      bibliography in MLA format

Due: Wedensday, August 29