

# Game Play Presentation & Critical Question

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Our class covers a broad survey of texts, from text games to literature to film to cultural studies to video games. One of the best ways to explore and understand a text is through close reading. Another way to explore and understand a text, using what you have gained through reading, is through lively discussion and questioning both the text and your experience of it.

In order to accommodate everyone in the class, you will sign-up for a readings presentation in small groups of no more than four. As a team, you will play a game for that day, you will read the texts assigned for that week, and then generate a close playing demonstration and a critical and analytical question or two to get class discussion started for the day. You will be required to create a 1/2- to 1-page handout copied for the whole class that may include: a brief biography of the game developer(s), a brief synopsis of the text or game, your critical question or two, and any other information you feel is useful or relevant. Presentations are up to 10 minutes and every group member must have a speaking role.

## What is a Close Playing Demonstration?

Like your week play logs (see Play Log prompt), your presentation and close playing demonstration should focus on a very specific moment or issue of interest in your group's game. Your presentation should address your observations and analyses below:

- Narrative (the game's story, themes, characters, dialogue)
- Mise en scene (visuals, sounds, items, setting)
- Mechanics (controls, actions, interface, rules, exploits)
- Cultural/Social context (player communities, non-gaming communities, news, laws and policies, race, gender, sexuality, class, connections to different disciplines)

Use these observations to generate or elaborate on your presentation's overall goal and critical questions. Connect the game to the theoretical readings for the week. If possible, play the game as part of your presentation or show a brief game play video. Be specific and selective about what you want to show and discuss.

## What is a Critical Question?

Generating critical questions is a necessary and useful academic skill; critical questions are often the beginning of intellectual or theoretical or artistic exploration, require active and attentive reading and thinking, and can generate the beginnings of analysis, multiple perspectives on an issue, topics for research, ways to critique and understand a text, and further curiosity for the material at hand.

Your critical question for your readings presentation should develop from a close reading of one of the week's texts and your critical thinking about the text. **What questions or concerns do you want to ask of the text? What questions or concerns does the text ask of you?** Your critical question should be developed, dimensional, and complex that pushes beyond simple questions of theme, symbolism, personal opinion, or personal reaction. Consider the following when generating your critical question; your critical question:

- May think about the larger critical questions of our class, beyond just the course goals. What does the text reveal about our "culture"? How and why and what does the text respond to, reassert, or critique keywords like race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and citizenship.
- Asks more than, "What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?" Critiques more than just theme, symbol, character, plot, setting. Think about the following: What is important about \_\_\_\_\_? Does \_\_\_\_\_ raise questions about representation (or how the text makes meaning), how we understand our lives and our world? Does \_\_\_\_\_ challenge or perpetuate cultural definitions, norms, traditions, ideologies?
- Begins with "How might..." or "Why..." and requires answers beyond yes or no, right or wrong, black or white. How and why and what would your answer to such a question be? In fact, critical questions often invite many different ways to answer a question and different kinds of evidence and reasoning as well.

–May focus on one section or one main idea of the text. How does the section fit the overall text? How does the main idea run through the whole text? What makes the section or idea important? What connections does it make to other texts, to the course goals?

–May be explicitly about the form, structure, language, and rhetorical or literary features of the text. What is its genre? How and why and what does it play with form? What rhetorical or literary features does it possess? How and why and what does it play with these features? How is the text answering the question, “What is important about this text?”

–Contextualizes the text in history, geography, politics, academia, and its conditions and modes of production. In other words, how and why and what is important about when the text was made, who the text was made for, where it was made, how it was made, and why it was made? What does its context tell us about our own context as we read it now?

### Complex Critical Questions (About Literature)

- 1) Much has been made of the green light at the end of the dock in *The Great Gatsby*, calling it a symbol of unrequited love, the American Dream, or envy and money. Clearly *TGG* is preoccupied by the definition of and critique of class and wealth. If the green light is something unattainable, how might we think about how the novel argues about who gets to achieve the American Dream, who doesn't, and more importantly, how these logics of inclusion and exclusion fall along gendered and raced lines. Moreover, how might the American Dream be deployed to police these lines, particularly for characters like Myrtle or Meyer Wolfsheim?
- 2) Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" troubles the definition of "mad" or "madness" through a narrator that is simultaneously, ambivalently "very, very dreadfully nervous" and "healthy" and "calm." Given that traditional and stereotypical definitions of madness center on irrationality, wild emotions, delusions, and misperceptions, how might the story's narrator resist these definitions with his rationality, calm, and keen perceptions? He says, "Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!" Even the ending of the story, with the narrator overcome by his too keen perceptions, does not seem wholly uncontrolled. The narrator's confession seems more out of frustration over perceived derision than from guilt. How might reading the narrator as not mad challenge the ways madness gets defined, often mapped on to people and bodies that are deemed not "normal" or "acceptable," and how might the story itself challenge the privileging of rationality as inherently "normal" and "good"?

### Guidelines and Due Dates

- Format:** 10 minute oral presentation, prepare a close play demo and critical questions for the class  
prepare a 1/2- to 1-page typed handout, copied for the class, posted to the class blog with the subject line formatted like: "9/26 PRESENTATION: Gender in *ImmorTall*"  
include a game play demonstration, which may require rehearsal  
make connections to specific passages of the texts for the week  
be prepared to answer your own questions
- Evaluation:** you will be graded on preparedness, quality of handout, and overall cooperation  
every group member must contribute to the presentation in some way
- Due:** on your sign-up date, at least once during the quarter