

Project #3: Reading Process Research Report

This paper will be a little bit different, as it's not a research project that involves locating sources as we normally might; instead, this project will be an informal research report on your own mental processes as you attempt to read and make sense of an assigned short poem. The idea will be for you to conduct a *study of yourself* as a reader of a difficult text. Your paper will be an account of what you do as a reader from the first time you look at a poem until you complete your reading of it and have acquired some satisfactory sense of its meaning. (The term "reading" is meant here as a noun, not a verb. A "reading" is essentially your version of what you think the text is about—and what it means.) Your report must also include a reflection on what your self-study reveals about you as a reader or about the particular demands of the poem you are reading or about the reading process in general.

If you read the description above carefully, then you've noticed a few things about the project:

- This is not a traditional essay about literature asking you to present an argument about what the text means, and then prove it.
- I'm more interested in "your account of what you do as a reader." So you'll be describing in detail your process of making sense of the poem. Your thinking about—and learning something about—that process is the purpose of the project.
- The topic of the essay isn't so much the poem as it is the process of reading and interpreting a difficult text. And more specifically, the topic is your process. So your goal is to learn something about that process, about what it means to understand—and later interpret—a text.

A Few More Guidelines

Good responses to this project will:

- capture the reading process as a process. They are based on a carefully constructed record of what you actually did and thought.
- show the progress of a mind. They show (they don't merely tell about) how you were thinking in the course of reading the poem, but they selectively show.
- interpret the poem and explain how the interpretation emerged and changed. They explain the meaning that emerges from the process and how it changes and what is and isn't clear.
- refer specifically to the text (meaning, they quote the text). They refer to specific words and lines in the poem, so readers can see how you moved from the lines in the poem to the interpretive statements offered about those lines.
- capture this particular experience. They are based on your experience with this poem and not with poems in general, and they distinguish carefully between what happened with this poem and what usually happens or is supposed to happen.
- include some analysis and/or reflection. They provide some analysis of the process shown or reflect on the process to draw conclusions about what usually happens or might happen when reading a text.

A Few More Guidelines

- Other than looking up the definitions of words you don't know, don't conduct "outside" research on the poem; it's not necessary. The idea here is to lay out how YOU arrived at a meaning for the poem. The point is to study yourself and the process of making meaning. That said, you WILL be allowed to discuss your evolving interpretation with others in class. We'll get into groups at some point to do just that.
- Use freewriting to take notes. If you don't get a record of what you were noticing, thinking, connecting, questioning, wondering, and so forth each time you read the poem, then you won't have much material to work with. The project is more about paying attention to the process of reading and constructing meaning than the actual interpretation of the poem you end up with.
- Keep a record of the rating you assign yourself after each reading of the poem.
- You'll likely fall in the ballpark of