

Assignment: Text Context Presentations (5% of your final grade)

Each week, you will be responsible for a 5-10 minute presentation that gives some context for one of our day's readings and then begins the conversation. There will be three kinds of presentations depending on the kind of the text or where we are in the novel for that day but all presentations involve some brief research and a critical question. You will need to **write up** your presentation in some way (an outline or notes is fine) and pass it in the day of your presentation.

Option 1) Presenters who lead the discussion on a *critical or theoretical text* will need to:

- **Situate the author** by researching and giving a brief intellectual biography
- **Contextualize the text** by researching and giving discussing the historical context and/or theoretical background for the essay
- **Discuss the text** by elucidating its key claim(s) or any new idea(s) it introduces
- **Begin our discussion of the day's reading** by each posing their critical question along with some passages in the text we might close read to engage the questions/reading

Option 2) Presenters who lead the discussion on the *first day of a literary text* will need to:

- **Situate the author** by researching and giving a brief intellectual and/or artistic biography
- **Contextualize the text** by researching and discussing the historical context and/or reception of the text
- **Elucidate your section** by giving a brief synopsis and connecting it to one of our scholarly readings
- **Begin our discussion of the day's reading** by each posing their critical question along with some passages to close read that engage those questions

Option 3) Presenters on *other literature reading days* will need to:

- **Contextualize the text** by researching and discussing either a scholarly or historical work germane to the novel we are reading (essentially tell us something new about the novel)
- **Elucidate your section** by giving a very brief synopsis, discussing its importance to the novel as a whole, and connecting it to some of our scholarly readings
- **Begin our discussion of the day's reading** by each posing their critical question along with some passages to close read that engage those questions
- AND then **perform a close reading** of a passage in your section you find particularly useful, interesting, frustrating, or relevant to our class questions

1. More than one person can go per class. You can form a group or just present different things on the same day if you are both interested in the same text. Each person will have to do their own presentation, however, though they can be linked in some way. You can divvy up the presentation and research duties as you like but *everyone* must present their own critical question and textual passage.
2. Spend time preparing your presentation, doing research when necessary and thinking about your Critical Question and passage reading.
3. You may make a handout for the class but it is not necessary.
4. Feel free to stop by office hours (alone or as a group) to discuss your presentation.
5. You needn't supply a Works Cited list but if someone wants to know where to find the information you present, be prepared to let them know what source you used.

Questions to ask when writing your presentation

Here are some questions to guide you through each section of the presentation (you needn't answer them all but use them to help you plan/write).

Situating the author

For this give a brief biography of the author. Where was s/he born? When did s/he die? What is his/her cultural background? Ethnicity? Nationality? Were any of these an important part of why s/he wrote? Did issues of race, class, gender, and/or sexuality, etc. impact why or how s/he wrote? Tell anything about the author you find pertinent to our explorations of culture or that you find interesting, weird, provocative, etc.

Contextualizing the text

Option 2) Discuss other works by the author. Is what we are reading similar to the rest of his/her oeuvre? In what genre does the author normally work? What are the author's most famous writing(s)? What is his/her career? Is s/he political? Again, mention anything about the author's work you find pertinent or interesting. Talk about when the author wrote what we read. Is it in the early part of his/her career? Later in life? What historical events were going on during the time of the writing? What was happening in the world during the author's lifetime? What is the significance of the time of writing? What was the cultural climate when s/he did most of his/her writing (or other work)? Was the author resistant to dominant ideologies or not?

Option 3) For "other novel reading days" you'll need to find one scholarly article to discuss (because you needn't provide information on the author *or* reception of the novel). How is this novel discussed by scholars? Or how is it used as evidence in scholarly arguments? What kind of history does the novel provide? What specific historical events does the novel represent? How does it represent them? What historical events were taking place at the time of the novel's publication?

Synopsizing your section

Briefly give an overview of your essay or section of the novel. These should not become long re-hashings of the readings but should work toward pointing out either the key ways of thinking offered by an essay or a brief plot summary or some discussion of one specific scene/event that seems really important as a plot device. If you are synopsizing an essay, what are the main idea/claim/argument/intervention of the essay as a whole? What are any keywords it might be introducing or (re)defining? If you are synopsizing a novel section, what happens in your section? Is there one key scene that seems to be integral to the plot movement?

Beginning our discussion

In class, each of you must read and discuss your question to begin our conversation about the text. You should not just read your question but should discuss the ideas in it by (at least) discussing how you came up with the question and what passages in the text are pertinent to the questions you are asking. Are there quotes or scenes that elicited your questions or quotes and scenes that start to answer your questions? And, of course, you should be ready to discuss or answer your question.

Performing a close reading

Use the close reading handout to discuss one passage or scene in your section. What are some details this passage reveals about the novel? How does this passage connect to the text as a whole? Why close read this passage? What does the language tell us? How does this passage speak to your critical question? To our class critical questions? What is something new you've learned/discovered through this close reading? What is the social, cultural, or political relevance of this passage?