

# RARE BOOK ROOM

## CRITICAL RESPONSE SHEET

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DUE THURSDAY, APRIL 8TH

To properly see and understand a work of art, or almost anything presumed to have meaning, and particularly to communicate your understanding effectively to others, you must be able to see with fresh eyes, organize your experience and perception carefully, and distinguish clearly between your assumptions and your knowledge (if such a distinction can ever be made).

*"All books have a structure. Understanding structure is crucial to analyzing its meaning."*

Analysis is difficult to accomplish without being clear about where it fits into the stages of our reflection.

We can separate our apprehension of meaning into three stages: **Observation...Analysis...& Interpretation** (the meaning). When we **observe** something, we are perceiving only the concrete, the obvious, the easily describable aspects of our experience: in a sense, only those aspects of our reading about which we can all agree. (This is sometimes harder than it sounds. Coming to agreement about what we have read, for instance, can take up a whole seminar). The process continues much like the solving of a mystery...

Step 2, **Analysis** takes all of those little observed pieces and begins chunking them together and describing their interrelationships as we have experienced them. Analysis therefore shows the relationship between a concrete observation and its effect on us. It begins to build meaning by describing discrete relationships between observable elements or parts of the whole. An analysis is effective to the extent that it is believable and follows directly from agreeable observations. **Interpretation** is the leap to meaning, the A-Ha! that occurs, again, by piecing together your analysis, adding it up. It is the big theme or purpose that can be seen by careful consideration of all aspects of *analysis* and does not ignore significant details of *observation*.

¶Notice that each stage builds on the former in essentially the same way, but with an increasing degree of *subjectivity*. Clearly, then, an observation of a table could begin with a molecular analysis of its parts —if that's all we could agree upon. Or it could begin with the table's symbolic meaning —if we can all agree on that. ¶The process works both ways: if you begin with some degree of confusion about what a thing (text, image, what-have you) means, you can slow your thinking down and arrive through observation and analysis at some kind of interpretation. Similarly, you can begin with something about which you already have an interpretation, and use the process to figure out why you have come to that interpretation, to construct a defense for your view, or to see if your interpretation can stand up to careful analysis. Essentially, you do so by asking *why, why why? What leads you to think so?*

Your **Observation** of a book should be a thorough and clear description using *full sentences*. While you don't need to account for every little bit of the book, you should describe enough so that someone who might have looked at the book once before will have is successfully brought to mind again, understand its look, feel, and what is observable in the process of "reading" it. (To some extent, knowing what details are necessary might require knowing where you want to end up in the interpretation stage. In fact, were you preparing to present your interpretation of a work in an essay or review, you might go back and forth through this process. Eventually, the whole process can, in some cases, be reduced to a sentence that will usually trace right through from critical details to analysis of parts to the writer's interpretation.)

Your **Analysis**, stemming from your observation, is a richer, more subjective description. Again, in full sentences describe the text more subjectively, noticing how your subjective impressions and sensations are the direct product of observable qualities of the book.

Your **Interpretation** starts again but with a higher order of thought and impression. Here, your intellect is engaged and can involve complexities of context and so on in order to describe the *meaning* of a book. Your interpretation will likely re-use ideas from your analysis in its explication of the book.

- Create a draft of this task long-hand while sitting with your book of choice.
- Complete this task, typed, and turn it in by the end of the week. In your typed version, take heed of the need for each morsel of interpretation to have immediate basis in analysis, and each bit of analysis to be grounded in observation. Please pursue readability. Mimic Drucker and the *Cutting Edge of Reading* to whatever extent you can, with the constraint of writing the observation, analysis, and interpretation in discrete sections.

The Rare Book Room has hours on Tuesday, Thursday, and (perhaps) Friday, but a librarian can let you into the room at any time.