

Assignment: Short Close-Reading Paper

Task

For this assignment, you will pick a passage (1-3 paragraphs) from one of the texts we have read so far (either “My American Uncle” or our excerpts from *My Life with Things*). You will then prepare a short paper of 750 words in which you offer a “close reading” of this passage.

Pick a place in the text that you find indicative of some larger issue, question, or phenomenon related to our course’s focus on memory and “stuff.” Analyze those paragraphs through attention to specific literary devices and make a claim about the author’s argument or perspective on their inquiry question.

Step 1. Select and reread the paragraphs, taking notes on ethos/pathos/logos or other literary devices (sensory description, narrative style, setting, structure, metaphors, etc.).

Step 2. Interpret the details you chose using analytical strategies like “Notice and Focus”; in other words, say why those details are important—why were you pulled toward them? How can you interpret just one detail in multiple different ways? Why and how was the author using these devices? Think beyond persuading audiences or gaining their trust: why exactly did the author try to gain trust in that way?

Step 3. Connect steps 1 and 2 to a broader argument about memory and “stuff.” What is the author’s take on their question, and what implications does it have for our class topic?

Evaluation

For the assignment to be marked as complete, you must include all the sections outlined in the “Task” box as well as complete the [Self-Acknowledgement Form](#) for minor assignments, which includes acknowledgement of AI usage.

Objectives

Knowledge

After completing this assignment, you will be able to understand:

- How nonfiction authors use narrative devices to accomplish their argument and answer big questions

Skills

After completing this assignment, you will be able to:

- Write about nonfiction prose
- Close-read, analyzing authors’ use of literary devices