

Developing Close Reading Skills via SOAPS & DIDLS

To analyze any piece of writing -- any rhetoric -- it is essential to know the subject of the piece, the occasion for its being written, the audience for whom it is written, the purpose of the piece, and the actual speaker (may differ from the author). In other words, use the SOAPS strategy.

S SUBJECT The general topic, content, and ideas contained in the text. You should be able to state the main subjects in a few words or a short phrase.

O OCCASION The time, place, context, or current situation of the piece. It is important that you understand the context that encouraged the writing to happen, but don't confuse occasion with purpose. Also think of it as the "genesis" of the writing, or what possibly got it started. Why did the author sit down and write about this?

The group of readers to whom this piece is directed. The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or a certain people.

A AUDIENCE Try to be as specific as possible in your description. Authors do not just write and hope someone will read; they write for a specific audience and hope for a possible broader audience than intended. Imagine the author having a conversation. Who is he sitting across from?

P PURPOSE The reason behind the text. This is especially important for examining rhetoric. You cannot examine the logic or argument of a piece until you know the reason for the piece, or what the author is trying to tell you. What does the author want the audience to take away? You might remember to think "to", for example, to inform or to persuade.

S SPEAKER The voice which tells the story. You might believe that the author and the speaker are the same, but that is often not the case. In fiction, the author may choose to tell the story from any number of different points of view or through different methods of narration and characterization. There might be a gender difference. You need to be able to differentiate between the author and the narrator, understanding that what the narrator believes may not be true for the author. In nonfiction, it is important not just to identify the author but also analyze the author's attitude toward the subject and audience and the "tone of voice" that is used in the selection.

To analyze any piece of writing ---any rhetoric---it is essential to identify the key components of all good literature. In other words, use the DIDLS strategy.

- D DICTION The important and individual words the author uses; discuss in terms of levels (formal, colloquial, technical); in terms of meaning (connotation vs. denotation); and levels of abstraction (concrete vs. abstract; general vs. specific)
- I IMAGERY The word pictures created by groups of words, Vivid imagery appeals to understanding through the senses.
- D DETAILS Often confused with images, these are more precisely facts and are notable not only for what is included but what is purposefully omitted
- L LANGUAGE Refers to figurative language; literary devices;
- S SYNTAX Expressed in its most elemental form, syntax refers to sentence structure. Short sentences often indicate an emotional or assertive tone, and longer sentences convey more reasonable, suspenseful or even scholarly intent. Also, consider phrasing such as parallelism and repetition.

Always seek to answer these important questions:

What is the author's ATTITUDE/ author's TONE?

What is the overall MOOD of the passage?

What rhetorical strategies are used to create TONE / MOOD?

Identify the types of figurative language used...give examples and describe how they create TONE / MOOD.

Practice your annotation skills using the SOAPS & DIDLS.

Notes:
