**11AP**

“Close Reading: The Art and Craft of Analysis”

Excerpt from *The Language of Composition*, Renee H. Shea

Do you ever wonder how your teachers can teach the same books year after year and not be bored by them? One reason is that the works we study in school have many layers of meaning, revealing something new each time we read them. That quality is what distinguishes them from literary potato chips – works that are satisfying, even delicious, but that offer little nutritional value. A mystery, romance, gossip blog, or sports rant may absorb us completely, but usually we do not read it a second time.

How do you find the “nutritional value” in the essays, speeches, stories, and poems you study in school? Your teacher may lead you through a work, putting it in context, focusing your attention on themes and techniques, asking for a response. Or you might do these things yourself through a process called **close reading**. When you read closely, you develop an understanding of a text that is based first on the words themselves and then on the larger ideas those words suggest. That is, you start with the small details, and as you think about them, you discover how they affect the text’s larger meaning. When you *write* a close analysis, you start with the larger meaning you’ve discovered and use the small details – the language itself – to support your interpretation.

Of course, as you read the speeches, essays, letters, editorials, and even blog posts throughout your course, you will find that many different factors dictate the stylistic choices a writer makes. Sometimes, it’s the genre: a blog post will likely be less formal than, say, an acceptance speech; an editorial will be less personal than an exchange between two friends. Sometimes, it’s the context or rhetorical situation – considering subject matter, occasion, audience, purpose, and the persona of the speaker. Often, however, the choices writers make are related to the rhetorical strategies of the text: what words in what arrangement are most likely to create the desired effect in the audience?