**Beginning *1984*: Close Reading**

**What is Close Reading?**

Close reading is the most important skill you need for any form of literary studies. It means paying especially close attention to what is printed on the page. Close reading means not only reading and understanding the meanings of the individual printed words; it also involves making yourself sensitive to all the nuances and connotations of language as it is used by skilled writers. This can mean anything from a work’s particular vocabulary, sentence construction, and imagery, to the themes that are being dealt with, the way in which the story is being told, and the view of the world that it offers. It involves almost everything from the smallest linguistic items to the largest issues of literary understanding and judgment.

Close reading can be seen as four separate levels of attention which we can bring to the text. Most people read without being aware of them and employ all four simultaneously. The four levels or types of reading become progressively more complex.

* **Linguistic**  
  You pay especially close attention to the surface linguistic elements of the text – that is, to aspects of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. You might also note such things as figures of speech or any other features which contribute to the writer’s individual style.
* **Semantic**  
  You take account at a deeper level of what the words mean – that is, what information they yield up, what meanings they denote and connote.
* **Structural**  
  You note the possible relationships between words within the text – and this might include items from either the linguistic or semantic types of reading.
* **Cultural**  
  You note the relationship of any elements of the text to things outside it. These might be other pieces of writing by the same author or other writings of the same type by different writers. They might be items of social or cultural history or even other academic disciplines which might seem relevant, such as philosophy or psychology.

Source: http://www.mantex.co.uk/2009/09/14/what-is-close-reading-guidance-notes/

**Practicing Close Reading**

Read the first paragraph of *1984* by George Orwell, which is copied below. In your notes, write down observations about vocabulary, sentence construction, imagery, themes that are being dealt with, the way in which the story is being told, the view of the world that it offers, and any allusions it makes to outside ideas.

*It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.*

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**DO NOT TURN THE PAGE UNTIL AFTER YOU HAVE WRITTEN YOUR OBSERVATIONS!**

**Sample Close Reading Interpretations for the First Paragraph of *1984***

“Bright cold day”

* Infers blindness because on cold days in winter, the sun reflects off the snow blindingly
* Cold day in April could mean the setting is Europe
* Bright cold days could be viewed as torture
* Also, bright could infer that nothing can hide….

“Thirteen”

* Thirteen is an unlucky number
* Sets the tone that bad things will happen
* An odd set of numbers means there is no balance
* Thirteen could mean military time: Is martial law in effect?
* Closely linked with time—means the character is not in a happy state; character’s life is regimented

“Winston”

* Could be a reference to Winston Churchill (a possible political frame to research)

“Smith”

* Common name, devoid of individuality

“Nuzzled into his breast”

* Looking for safety and security
* Reverting to a childlike state
* May appear as an adult but is lacking growth in some area of his life
* Used to looking down to avoid drawing attention to himself
* Can’t see what is ahead of him in the future

“Glass”

* See through= lack of privacy and personal freedom
* Easily broken; presents danger when broken

“Victory Mansions”

* Status is defined by ability to own this “mansion”
* Victory implies that a battle or war was won by the possessors

“Gritty dust”

* Annoying
* Old or dirty (think about where it collects)
* Enters with Winston= he may have a connection to the past
* Hinting a tornado or hurricane may be coming
* Winston may be spinning in life, not growing: Why?

Source: Mr. Luedtke