

Baruch COLLEGE | WRITING CENTER

ANALYZING TEXTS WORKSHOP

CONTENTS

Lesson Plan

Handout 1: Selecting What to Observe

Handout 2: Identifying Patterns

Handout 3: Excerpt from “Mrs. Sen’s”

MATERIALS NEEDED

Whiteboard markers

LEARNING GOALS

At the close of the workshop, students will be able to:

- Describe criteria by which effective close readers identify analytically fruitful passages from a text.
- Appropriately select analytically fruitful passages from a literary text.
- Raise analytical questions in response to observed patterns within a literary text.

OVERVIEW

In this workshop, four primary activities take place:

- Students observe the opening of “A Rose for Emily” in order to extract principles by which fruitful textual passages may be identified.
- Students cluster textual evidence into suggested model patterns.
- Practicing independently, students make selections and articulate patterns in their own texts.
- Students return to the Faulkner text to collaboratively generate analytical questions from the previously discussed patterns.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction

Begin by framing for students the foundational role played by close reading, emphasizing it as a flexible and recursive method to understand a text, to initiate writing about a text, to expand and enrich writing about a text, to develop arguments about a text, etc. **Foreground the three steps of close reading:**

- 1) selecting textual features to *observe*
- 2) identifying *patterns* in those features
- 3) *posing analytical questions* in response

Explain that at each stage, a period of group practice will precede work on the student's individual text.

Part One: Extracting Principles for Analytical Observation

1. **Common text: Distribute Handout 1, "Selecting What to Observe."**
 - Frame this handout as the opening paragraphs of a short story, highlighted (bolded) by an effective analytical reader.
 - Explain that the group will read the text aloud, then work backward to determine the reader's reasons for calling out these words and phrases from the whole.
2. **Common text: After reading, provide a few moments for additional annotation.**
 - Disclose that for simplicity's sake, the workshop works only with highlighting, but that the best readers also:
 - define new terms
 - take notes
 - record questions
 - use symbols to code their responses to texts (such as ! to indicate surprise or ? to signal confusion).
 - Direct students to spend a minute or two adding these kinds of notes.
3. **Common text: Facilitate discussion on how this reader made her observations.**
 - Prompt students with questions such as:
 - *What do you notice about what the reader has highlighted?*
 - *What did she determine important or potentially useful?*
 - *What criteria does it seem she used to make these determinations?*
 - *Can we figure out how she knew what to pay attention to?*

- Elicit the responses below, recording in a T-chart both the principles/criteria, and the specific textual passages that reflect them:

The reader marked passages that...	Examples
...seem confusing or even unknowable	“cedar-bemused”
...are paradoxical or contradictory	“heavily lightsome”
...have parallel syntax, distinct rhythm, echoed words, or other evidence of the author’s emphasis	“a tradition, a duty and a care;” “eyesore among eyesores”
...are intriguing, surprising, or curious	“stubborn and coquettish decay”
...are repetitive	“august names” in l. 8 and 10

Part Two: Identifying Patterns

- Common text: Segue to the commonalities or patterns in the bolded passages.**

 - Explain that identifying patterns helps shape the isolated pieces into a trend we can actually write about.
 - Elicit or model a pattern evident in the pieces the group has discussed.
 - **Distribute Handout 2, “Identifying Patterns.”**
 - Again frame the handout as the model reader’s work; here she’s clustering her passages into patterns.
 - Direct students to categorize the bolded phrases from Handout 1 into the provided headings on Handout 2.
 - Allay anxiety about correct answers by noting that some snippets easily bridge categories, and that these headings are not exhaustive.
- Common text: Facilitate a full-group discussion of students’ findings and choices, and what these might suggest about the text.**

 - Elicit their thoughts on how the categories were determined and how they put them to use:
 - *What elements of each phrase do you think led to these categories?*
 - *How did our model reader decide what labels to use?*
 - *Which groups might be the most useful and why?*
 - *How did you decide where to put each phrase?*
 - Invite students to generate other potential categories for the passage.
- Individual texts: Provide students two discrete units of reading and note-taking time to use on their own texts.**

 - Ensure that students have brought a reading, and ask them to select a passage of one to three paragraphs on which to focus. If any students do not have reading with them, offer the sample text, **Handout 3, “Excerpt from Mrs. Sen’s.”**

They should:

- first underline and annotate their passages as they read, and then

- seek and articulate patterns—repetitions, contradictions, parallels, similarities—of their own.
- Circulate as they do so, ensuring their progress.
- Conclude by sharing out.

Part Three: Posing Analytical Questions

1. Common text: Return to the Faulkner passage and the patterns the group has mapped.

- Explain that with this kind of fruitful, robust material, they can now ask analytical questions—the very questions whose answers will become thesis statements and claims.
- Ask students to pose questions as you record; offer examples or otherwise guide them toward privileging questions that explore:
 - **Origin:** What accounts for *the narrator's distinctions between men and women? Why are they here?*
 - **Function:** How do the “ghosts” of this passage—the Union and Confederate soldiers, the representatives of august names—reveal the town's values? **What's the significance of the repeated references to an outdated style of architecture, handwriting, and paper?**
 - **Paradox:** Why does the narrator both defer to Miss Emily (as when she is paid “respectful affection”) and mock her (“only a woman could have believed” Col. Sartoris' ploy)?

2. Individual texts: Ask students to draft one analytical question about a pattern identified in their own text; encourage them to begin with one of the stubs bolded above.

3. Wrap-up. As students share out their questions, help them reflect on next steps. Questions that are especially strong may be ready to serve as the beginnings of a thesis statement. Others may need refinement, or re-reading.

SELECTING WHAT TO OBSERVE

1 When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: **the men** through a sort of **respectful affection** for **a fallen monument**, **the women** mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

5 It was a big, squarish frame house that **had once been white**, decorated with **cupolas** and **spires** and **scrolled balconies** in the **heavily lightsome style of the seventies**, set on what **had once been our most select** street. But garages and cotton gins had **encroached** and **obliterated** even **the august names** of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its **stubborn and coquettish decay** above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an **eyesore among eyesores**.
10 And now Miss Emily had gone to join **the representatives of those august names** where they lay in the **cedar-bemused** cemetery among **the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell** at the battle of Jefferson.

 Alive, Miss Emily had been **a tradition, a duty, and a care**; a sort of **hereditary obligation** upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the
15 edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's **father had loaned money** to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. **Only a man** of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and **only a woman**
20 could have believed it.

 When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car
25 for her, and received in reply a note on **paper of an archaic shape**, in **a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink**, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

from “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner (1930), all emphasis added

ANALYZING TEXTS WORKSHOP

IDENTIFYING PATTERNS

Distinctions between men and women

References to an outdated aesthetic style

Suggestions of one world or era replaced by another

Suggestions of decay

Allusions to upstanding members of society

References to the Civil War and its memory

Suggestions of Miss Emily's class

References to duty

EXCERPT FROM “MRS. SEN’S”

1 Eliot had been going to Mrs. Sen’s for nearly a month, ever since school started in
September. The year before he was looked after by a university student named Abby, a slim,
freckled girl who read books without pictures on their covers, and refused to prepare any food
for Eliot containing meat. Before that an older woman, Mrs. Linden, greeted him when he
5 came home each afternoon, sipping coffee from a thermos and working on crossword puzzles
while Eliot played on his own. Abby received her degree and moved off to another university,
while Mrs. Linden was, in the end, fired when Eliot’s mother discovered that Mrs. Linden’s
thermos contained more whiskey than coffee. Mrs. Sen came to them in tidy ballpoint script,
posted on an index card outside the supermarket: “Professor’s wife, responsible and kind, I will
10 care for your child in my home.” On the telephone Eliot’s mother told Mrs. Sen that the
previous baby-sitters had come to their house. “Eliot is eleven. He can feed and entertain
himself; I just want an adult in the house, in case of an emergency.” But Mrs. Sen did not know
how to drive.

“As you can see, our home is quite clean, quite safe for a child,” Mrs. Sen had said at their first
15 meeting. It was a university apartment located on the fringes of the campus. The lobby was
tiled in unattractive squares of tan, with a row of mailboxes marked with masking tape or white
labels. Inside, intersecting shadows left by a vacuum cleaner were frozen on the surface of a
plush pear-colored carpet. Mismatched remnants of other carpets were positioned in front of
the sofa and chairs, like individual welcome mats anticipating where a person’s feet would
20 contact the floor. White drum-shaped lampshades flanking the sofa were still wrapped in the
manufacturer’s plastic. The TV and the telephone were covered by pieces of yellow fabric with
scalloped edges. There was tea in a tall gray pot, along with mugs, and butter biscuits on a tray.
Mr. Sen, a short, stocky man with slightly protuberant eyes and glasses with black rectangular
frames, had been there, too. He crossed his legs with some effort, and held his mug with both
25 hands very close to his mouth, even when he wasn’t drinking. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Sen wore
shoes; Eliot noticed several pairs lined on the shelves of a small bookcase by the front door.
They wore flip-flops. “Mr. Sen teaches mathematics at the university,” Mrs. Sen had said by
way of introduction, as if they were only distantly acquainted.

from “Mrs. Sen’s” by Jhumpa Lahiri (1999)