WRIT 100: Pretty Hurts
Short close reading assignment

Each of your papers this semester should incorporate close reading in the analysis; Papers I will be exclusively devoted to close reading. To prepare for these papers, your first writing assignment will be a short (500 word) close reading about a single passage from The Bluest Eye. You will then revise this short close reading into a longer close reading that compares two scenes for Paper I.

What is close reading?

One of the skills we will focus on this semester will be close reading. “Close reading” is an important skill for reading, discussing and writing about literature. It might be unfamiliar at first, and it will require practice, but it essentially means nothing more mysterious than reading slowly and paying careful attention to the details of a text. Close reading is the basis of all literary analysis: arguments about poems, plays, novels, etc., must account for cultural and historical contexts, but they are ultimately grounded in what is on the page.

What should your close reading look like?

- The goal of this assignment is to look in depth at a small part of the text, rather than reflecting generally on the whole thing. You should be able to identify a few paragraphs—a page at most—that you will draw your evidence from and will focus your analysis on.
- Your reading should take the form of a mini-essay that poses a question or problem that can be reasonably explored in 500 words.
- You should avoid a long general introduction, but you must have a thesis stating what insight your reading will provide into the work as a whole.
- The bulk of your assignment should consist of a close examination of the text. It is not enough to merely note interesting syntax, images, tone, etc. You must connect these details back to your thesis for your reader, and show how they expand, contradict, or otherwise complicate your initial insight. In a paper this short there is no need for a summary at the end. However, you should try to say what the implications of your reading are in a manner that is more complex (because your reader knows more now) than your original thesis. You may want to suggest other passages in the text that would be useful complements, or make a larger claim about the author’s argument.

How should you start your close reading?

Your close reading should begin with a clear, focused question that can be addressed by exploring a single passage, section, or scene from the novel. For help drafting a question that can jump-start your close reading, see the “Analytic questions” handout.

Once you have identified an analytic question that focuses on a single passage of the text, your next step will be to answer that question.
### What are the parts of a good close reading?

A good close reading moves from specific textual details through a somewhat larger strategy for reading the text and towards a better understanding of the text as a whole

*For example...*

- the description of Babbitt’s house doesn’t make it sound very home-like
- the description of the house emphasizes its commercial and social functions
- the impersonal and commercial description of Babbitt’s house connects the home to the larger city of Zenith and emphasizes Babbit’s role as a representative citizen of Zenith

### What kind of evidence should you use to support your close reading?

Your close reading should provide evidence in the form of short quotations from the text, but it should also provide analysis of those quotations to explain the significance of the quotation and show how it fits into your argument. Your paper should not contain any quotations that are not accompanied by analysis. Your paper also should not cite outside sources, secondary research, or any evidence not drawn from the text itself—this is not a research paper. For more help with planning and writing your close reading, consult the resources posted on Sakai, visit the Writing Center, and come by my office hours.

### Who is the audience for your close reading?

Your audience for this paper should be a hypothetical classmate who has attended class and done the reading, but has not been overly studious or attentive. This classmate will definitely notice if you make an obvious claim, but there is also room to teach her something new about the readings and concepts from class. Your classmate does not need full, detailed summaries of the novel, because she has already read it, but she does need concise reminders to help locate herself in the text and to remind her of what the important points were.

### How should you submit your close reading?

Your close reading is due by **5 PM on Tuesday, Jan. 19.** You should save your paper as a Microsoft Word file and upload it to the appropriate folder on Sakai.

### How will your close reading be evaluated?

Your close reading is worth **4 points.** Although you may revise your close reading, your time will probably be better spent using the comments to help you write Paper I.