

Amer. Studies 316, Rutgers University, Fall 2015
Instructor: Frances Tran

Assignment #1 **Close Reading Paper**

Peer-review: Monday, September 21st (please come to class with 4 hard copies of your draft)
Due date: Wednesday, September 23rd (papers are due at the beginning of class; an electronic copy should be sent to me by 11:00pm)

Prompt (3-4 pages): This assignment is aimed at helping you improve your close reading skills so its requirements will be more structured than that of a conventional thesis-driven paper.

Below is the format you should use to write this essay:

- **Select a passage** (5-10 lines of typed prose) from one of the literary texts that we have reviewed in the first section of our class “Time Travel and Alien Encounters.” Copy and format it as a **block quote** underneath the **title** of your essay.
- In the introductory paragraph you should offer a **close reading** of this passage, paying particular attention to the author’s use of language and literary devices. Then, use your analysis of this passage to develop an **arguable thesis statement** about the text as a whole.
- In subsequent body paragraphs close read **at least two additional passages** (of any length) from the text and demonstrate how they support your thesis statement. Your analysis of these passages should make it clear to me that you have read and understood the work in its entirety.
- Close your essay with a **conclusion** paragraph that reinforces your thesis statement.

(If you choose to write on M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!*, you may draw on passages from more than one poem as long as you indicate clearly in your writing when you are shifting from one poem to the next).

Things to Keep in Mind:

- Assume the **audience** is our class and that we are familiar with the course material.
- Remember that this is a **close reading** paper, so I will be evaluating you mainly on the depth of your engagement with the primary text. **Avoid over-summarizing.** Rather than reiterating plot points, elaborate on how the author uses literary devices (e.g. diction, metaphors, imagery, irony, etc.) and its impact on the reader.
- The passages you cite in this paper should be **well-chosen and relevant** to your thesis statement. When you quote from the text, you should take the time and space necessary to unpack and elaborate on how that quote supports your argument at that particular

point. In other words, it should make sense to a reader why you decided to include this quote here.

- **Never generalize** or make broad, sweeping claims--always be specific and explicit, and say only what you can prove in the scope of your essay. (In other words, try to avoid vague phrases like “Throughout history,” “Many people say,” “Women have always been oppressed,” etc.)
- To avoid generalization, **define your key terms**. Do not assume that your readers share the same understanding of terms like “society,” “people,” “culture,” or, for the purposes of this class, “science and speculative fiction.” Also, keep in mind that dictionary definitions are not always the best resource since they are written for generalized and popular audiences. Instead, consider defining these ideas and concepts in your own words or drawing from the secondary sources we have reviewed in class.

Formatting and other details*

- 3-4 pages (i.e. no less than three FULL pages), typed, double-spaced, in standard 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins, and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner
- Include a heading in the upper-left-hand corner that includes your name, professor’s name, course number and date
- Include parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page formatted according to MLA style
- Do not include a cover page, and do staple your work prior to class
- A late assignment will be penalized a full letter grade for each day it is late

*Points will be deducted for incorrect formatting

Email policy: You are welcome to email me any questions or concerns you have about the assignment and I will do my best to help you. I cannot read full paper drafts because I simply do not have the time. You can, however, email me a **working thesis paragraph** and up to a **one-page outline** of your paper. I will answer any questions about the assignment up until 6:00pm on the peer-review date (Monday, September 21st).