

Do We Really Need Close Reading?

Lisa Bazanova

What is close reading and why do we need it? The answer to the second question is obvious: we need it for evaluation. If such a response were convincing to all, that would settle the matter. However, the question arises: why do we need evaluation? After all, everyone has their own opinion. Who dares to tell us what is good or bad about a piece of art? what is valuable and what is not?

Meanwhile, such a position is convincing only at first glance; it is probably good for market where the one with money decides whether to buy things or not. We should understand that to love something in the sphere of art or to hate is a right of any person. The one who insists on his right to love or not to love, takes an absolutely impeccable position until he begins to insist that there is no evaluation of art at all and there can be no objectivity. Then his position becomes intolerably shaky and it is explained by lack of education and poor knowledge of principles of culture.

The fact is that the basis of culture is a hierarchy of values. Without it, without knowledge of its highest achievements (as well as its worst examples), culture turns simply into trash, into a set of optional opinions and preferences. However, the most liberal liberalism needs an objective assessment and clear criteria.

Studying and analyzing literary works, as well as works of art in general, is a part of craving for knowledge, cognitive instinct of mankind. Is it possible to ban it? Of course, to give a number of arguments against cognitive activity will not be difficult, but, as practice shows, the result of such prohibitions is zero. In addition to this, knowledge of art history is, in principle, quite safe and does not threaten the physical existence of mankind.

There is a mistake made by people who have to do with the natural science type of thinking. Usually they say that the analysis of literature gives an unreliable result because it uses some incomprehensible techniques. But the specific feature of the Humanities is that they are descriptive, not experimental. They exist without experiment and repeatability of the result. Their task is not to bring out the universal laws, but to investigate the laws of each particular work of art.

It seemed to me, when I started to write the composition, that it was more important to answer the second question. I think the answer to the first one is quite simple. Close reading is the analysis, i.e. the splitting of the whole into components. Its purpose is, first, to take the text as adequately as possible and, second, to give it a proper assessment.

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Katya Vasilenko

We live in the 21st century. All of us know that it is the age of information technology. It means that we are surrounded by endless information flow from mass media, social nets, books, and advertisement. Some scientists consider news media to be the Fourth Estate because of the influence it has on us. Nowadays we should process a huge amount of information, think it over and sort it out. To do this we need to be ready for such tasks. We should know how to work with information, with texts, get ready to interpret them, to find the main information, to make conclusions and then, discussing things, sound confident.

According to the literary glossary, close reading is a «detailed and careful analysis of a written work». In literary criticism, close reading is a careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage of a text. Close reading implies attention to individual words, the syntax, and the order in which the sentences unfold ideas, as

the reader scans through the lines of text. So, do we need to study it at the university? Sure!

First of all, close reading teaches us to be patient and to work meticulously. These are important skills for us, future teachers and future mothers. We shouldn't expect immediate result – we should work hard and do our best.

Moreover, close reading teaches us not to jump to conclusions. When we work with the text, we should read it several times, select key words, understand their meaning, summarize the whole text or extract and only then try to interpret it. But the skill of interpreting can help us not only when we study. It can also help us to improve our relations with people, to avoid conflicts. If we do not jump to conclusions when somebody says something unpleasant to us we can stop and think a little and then realize that people had something else in mind and we misunderstood them.

Furthermore, we become less categorical thanks to close reading. We learn how to express ourselves right and not to sound like impulsive teens. It is a psychological fact that correct wording is very important for being a successful person. It is crucial to sound confident and manage to give arguments in favor of your own point of view when you try to convince somebody.

Eventually, close reading helps us to develop critical thinking. It is very important nowadays when there is so much foolish, provocative, and unverified information. We need to take time and get something close to the truth.

Honestly, I am sure we need close reading very much to develop our professional skills and personal qualities.

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Aliya Zabirowa

Close reading became a part of the 2nd year syllabus at the university. At first it was rather difficult to understand what it was all about, as I had never had such a subject before and did not even know that it was possible to understand a text by paying attention to what the characters say or wear or how they move or speak and so on. So what is close reading? And how does it help me in my everyday life?

Close reading begins with highlighting key words and phrases - anything that strikes you as surprising or significant, or that raises questions - as well as making notes in the margins. When you respond to a text this way, you not only make yourself pay close attention to the evidence. Close reading is a process of finding as much information as you can in order to give answers to as many questions as you have while reading the text. When it is time to write your essay on it and articulate your ideas, you have to sort out your notes to figure out what proofs are most convincing and helpful to the statement you make.

I will honestly say that at the beginning it was very difficult for me and sometimes even impossible to understand what I really need to do with the text. But thanks to experienced teachers who teach and help me understand things, I have achieved success in this subject. If I can read and learn from what is challenging and unfamiliar, the world is open to me.

So do we really need close reading? My answer is yes. Close Reading develops language efficiency. Having been studying close reading for two years, I realize that it develops in me a keen awareness of words, syntax, rhythm, and structure that is useful applicable across texts. Moreover, I begin to notice details in films and books that I would never have thought of before. For me it is already a great progress. I believe that close reading should be one of the main subjects at the university for those who learn languages or have to do with literature.

Polina Kovalenko

I am sure that close reading is an essential part of learning a foreign language and I am ready to explain my point of view.

First of all, let's start with the definition of 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. It is a much more subtle and complex process than the term might suggest.

Furthermore, close reading means not only reading and understanding the meanings of the individual words; it also involves making yourself sensitive to all its nuances and connotations as they are used by skilled writers. So, close reading helps you to enrich your vocabulary with new words, and from the text you are reading you will also learn in what context you may use them.

Moreover, close reading develops basic aspects of language – semantic, structural, and cultural aspects. You begin to pay attention to all the details of the text: peculiarities at the phonetic, lexical, and syntactical levels. When you read a lot of texts, you acquire the ability to memorize grammar patterns and syntactic constructions. You are also involved into the detailed analysis of words, their meaning, the meaning they have in the context. The structural aspect helps you to understand what combination of words, in what context they are used best. Moreover, close reading develops your knowledge of the authors, the period of time the text was written in. All these aspects help us to broaden our horizon and background knowledge.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that close reading is not a skill that can be developed during one lesson at the Institute. It requires a lot of practice, time, a lot of hard work and efforts. The good news is that the result is worth the effort. I think that during the close reading classes at our Institute we read very interesting texts, in which each character has his or her individuality, and it is very interesting to analyze them. Frankly speaking, I have been studying close reading for two years, but this year gave me a lot of useful skills; for example, I learned to see small and insignificant details, to better understand the characters, it became easier to do the analysis of the text.

I'm sure I have given quite a number of convincing arguments in favour of close reading as it is a necessary thing if you want to develop knowledge of a foreign language and to raise your cultural level.

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Julia Jarantseva

The technique of close reading presupposes a careful, sustained interpretation of a passage of text. Nowadays it's considered to be a critical skill needed not only for school but also for life. Why is it thought to be so important?

It's a general truth that there's power in words. According to the first chapter of Genesis, the whole universe (including human beings) was created by the word of God (1:3 "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light"; 1:26 "And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"). No wonder each writer chooses precisely every single word in order to convey meaning. Words are some sort of tools to uncover one or another meaning. Close reading allows students to peer into texts, perceive them from different perspectives.

Moreover, it promotes the development of critical thinking which enables people to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. Contemporary society lacks critical thinkers who understand the logical connections between ideas, who are able to identify arguments and reflect on the justification of their own beliefs and values.

Summarizing all the above mentioned, it's possible to come to the conclusion that students need close reading to succeed not only in their subjects. Knowing how to read closely just any text (from advertisements to political news) makes it possible to reveal the underneath meaning of it and in some cases even to escape the unacceptable pressure.