

READER-WRITER NOTEBOOK/JOURNAL – 21W.731 SPRING 2004

RESPONDING TO ESSAYS/CREATIVE NONFICTION

The purpose of the notebook/journal is to help you to “read as a writer,” paying careful attention to the ways in which authors craft their pieces to address an intended audience(s). Each class you usually will submit one short journal entry (approx. 1-1 1/2 typed pg., double-spaced) on an assigned reading. Some journal assignments will be given out in class. However, in other journal entries, you can choose how to focus on one or more aspects of the writer’s craft. These entries will help prepare you for class discussions as well as your own writing. Sometimes I will ask one or two students to distribute copies of a journal assignment(s) to the class to stimulate discussion.

Here are some general questions to consider in reading essays for class. In writing (unassigned) journal entries, you will probably only focus on a few of these questions. However, thinking about all of them will help you prepare for class. Later in the term, I will distribute a response guideline sheet for the short stories that we read.

What is/are the potential meanings of the title? How does the writer introduce the essay?

What is the general tone of the piece –persuasive, angry, informative/neutral, ironic, humorous? What kind of language(s) does the writer use—direct and simple, colloquial, abstract /“high academic”, personal/confessional, humorous? Does the tone shift over the course of the essay? What’s the effect(s) on you as a reader? What is your impression of the writer/narrator?

How vividly does the writer draw upon memories of personal experience or the experiences of others? In what ways does the writer employ the tools of fiction (setting, character, dialogue)? How does the writer use imagery, symbol and metaphor?

What sections, paragraphs, words or sentences seem especially significant? Why? How does the writer use repetition—of words, phrases, sentences or passages—in the piece?

What’s the central point of the piece?

How does the writer end the essay? What do the introduction and conclusion as “bookends” of the piece suggest about how to read the essay?

How do you see this essay as connecting with other readings (for the course or outside), experiences you’ve had, and issues that you’ve thought about?

What have you learned **as a writer** from this piece? Are there any narrative techniques that you are working with (or would like to work with) in your own writing?