

Reading Between the Lines:





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Facts v. Interpretation

To non-critical readers, texts provide facts. Readers gain knowledge by memorizing the statements within a text.

To the critical reader, any single text provides but one portrayal of the facts, one individual's "take" on the subject matter. Critical readers thus recognize not only what a text says, but also how that text portrays the subject matter. They recognize the various ways in which each and every text is the unique creation of a unique author.

A non-critical reader might read a history book to learn the facts of the situation or to discover an accepted interpretation of those events. A critical reader might read the same work to appreciate how a particular perspective on the events and a particular selection of facts can lead to particular understanding.

What a Text Says, Does, and Means:

Non-critical reading is satisfied with recognizing what a text says and restating the key remarks.

Critical reading goes two steps further. Having recognized what a text says, it reflects on what the text does by making such remarks. Is it offering examples? Arguing? Appealing for sympathy? Making a contrast to clarify a point? Finally, critical readers then **infer** what the text, as a whole, **means**, based on the earlier analysis.

These three steps or modes of analysis are reflected in three types of reading and discussion:

- What a text says - restatement
- What a text does - description
- What a text means - interpretation.

Goals of Critical Reading

Textbooks on critical reading commonly ask students to accomplish certain goals:

- to recognize an author's purpose
- to understand tone and persuasive elements
- to recognize bias

Notice that none of these goals actually refers to something on the page. Each requires **inferences** from evidence within the text:

- recognizing purpose involves inferring a basis for choices of content and language
- recognizing tone and persuasive elements involves classifying the nature of language choices
- recognizing bias involves classifying the nature of patterns of choice of content and language

Critical reading is not simply close and careful reading. To read critically, one must actively recognize and analyze evidence upon the page.

Implications For Reading

To non-critical readers, texts provide facts. Knowledge comes from memorizing the statements within a text. To the critical reader, any single text provides but one portrayal of the facts, one individual's "take" on the subject. The content of a text reflects what an author takes as "the facts of the matter." By examining these choices, readers recognize not only what a text says, but also how the text portrays the subject matter.

The first step in an analysis of a text, then, must be to look at the content, at the evidence for an argument, the illustrations used to explain ideas, and the details presented within a description. Not that any particular author/text is necessarily wrong. We simply recognize the degree to which each and every text is the unique creation of a unique author. That uniqueness is defined by choices of content, language and structure.

Critical reading thus relies on an analysis of choices of content, language, and structure.

What to Look For?

Critical readers are consciously aware of the **choice of content**. They look at the content, at the evidence for an argument, the illustrations used to explain ideas, and the details presented within a description. That uniqueness is defined by choices of content, language and structure. . They distinguish between assertions of fact, opinion, and belief. They are aware whether evidence consists of references to published data, anecdotes, or speculation, and they evaluate the persuasiveness of a text accordingly.

Critical readers are aware of **how language is being used**. They notice whether a text refers to someone as a "bean counter" (no respect) or "an academic statistician" (suggesting professionalism), whether some is said to have "asserted a claim" (with confidence, and no need for proof) or "floated a claim" (without backing, as a trial balloon). And they draw inferences from the choice of language they observe.

Critical readers are aware of **the structure of a discussion**, both in terms of the movement of ideas from beginning to end and in terms of the relationship of ideas throughout the discussion. They distinguish between assertions offered as reason or conclusion, cause or effect, evidence or illustration. They recognize patterns of contrast and distinguish whether contrasting ideas are shown to be dissimilar, competing, or contradictory.

All authors confront three areas of choice:

- the choice of content
- the choice of language
- the choice of structure

Choices must be made in each of these areas, and each choice contributes to the thought of the text as a whole.

Book Excerpt: *The Best American Essays Of 2011*

Edited by: Edwidge Danticat

Introduction by Edwidge Danticat

Through recent experiences with both birth and death, I have discovered that we enter and leave life as, among other things, words. Though we might later become daughters and sons, many of us start out as whispers or rumors before ending up with our names scrawled next to our parents' on birth certificates. We also struggle to find, both throughout our lives and at the end, words to pin down how we see and talk about ourselves.

When my brothers and I first learned, in the fall of 2004, that our father was dying, one of my brothers bravely asked him a question which led to my father narrating his life to us.

“Pop, have you enjoyed your life?” my brother wanted to know.

Stripped bare of any pretense¹ and fully vulnerable, my father gifted us with his life experiences to do with as we pleased. We could use them, as such statements are often said to do, to inform, instruct, or inspire ourselves, or we could simply revel² in them, or in the fact that he was even sharing them with us, then move on.

Seven years later, we have still not moved on. I can't say that I remember every single word my father uttered on his deathbed, but every story somehow feels like it's still within reach.

Such is the power of the stories we dare tell others about ourselves. They do inform, instruct, and inspire. They might even entertain, but they can also strip us totally bare, reducing (or expanding) the essence of everything we are to words.

Having written both fiction and nonfiction, I sometimes have my choice of the shield that fiction offers, and perhaps bypassing it, when I do, leaves me feeling even more exposed. As most people who take on this task know, along with self-revelation often comes self-questioning of a kind that is perhaps more obvious in some essays than others. When we insert our “I” (our eye) to search deeper into someone, something, or ourselves, we are always risking a yawn or a slap, indifference or disdain. How do we even know that what interests or delights us, alarms or terrifies us, will invoke a raised eyebrow in someone else? Perhaps the craft, the art, in whatever form it takes, is our bridge. We are narrating, after all (as my father was), slivers of moments, fragments of lives, declaring our love and hatred, concerns, and ambivalence, outing our hidden selves, and hoping that what we say will make sense to others. ... “We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” the novelist and essayist Joan Didion famously wrote. We also tell ourselves stories in order not to die. And at any moment these stories can change.

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Vocabulary:

¹Pretense - (noun) A false appearance; an attempt to make something that is not the case appear true

²Revel - (verb) Engage in lively and noisy festivities



What Do You Know About Haiti?

What I Know:

What I Want to Know:

What I've Learned:

Learn more about Haiti's past at <http://bbc.in/haitipast>

Haiti became the world's first black-led republic and the first independent Caribbean state when it threw off French colonial control and slavery in a series of wars in the early 19th century. However, decades of poverty, environmental degradation, violence, instability and dictatorship have left it as the poorest nation in the Americas.

A mostly mountainous country with a tropical climate, Haiti's location, history and culture - epitomized by voodoo - once made it a potential tourist hot spot, but instability and violence, especially since the 1980s, have severely dented that prospect.

OVERVIEW

Haiti achieved notoriety during the brutal dictatorships of the voodoo physician Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude, or "Baby Doc". Tens of thousands of people were killed under their 29-year rule.

Hopes that the election in 1990 of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former priest, would herald a brighter future were dashed when he was overthrown by the military a short time later.

Although economic sanctions and US-led military intervention forced a return to constitutional government in 1994, Haiti's fortunes did not pick up, with allegations of electoral irregularities, ongoing extra-judicial killings, torture and brutality.

A bloody rebellion, and pressure from the US and France, forced Mr Aristide out of the country in 2004.

Since then, an elected leadership has taken over from an interim government and a UN stabilization force has been deployed. But Haiti is still plagued by violent confrontations between rival gangs and political groups and the UN has described the human rights situation as "catastrophic".

Meanwhile, Haiti's most serious underlying social problem, the huge wealth gap between the impoverished Creole-speaking black majority and the French-speaking minority, 1% of whom own nearly half the country's wealth, remains unaddressed.

Many Haitians seek work and a better life in the US or other Caribbean nations, including the neighboring Dominican Republic, which is home to hundreds of thousands of Haitian migrants.

Furthermore, the infrastructure has all but collapsed and drug trafficking has corrupted the judicial system and the police.

Haiti is also ill-equipped to deal with the aftermath of the tropical storms that frequently sweep across the island, with severe deforestation having left it vulnerable to flooding. It also lies in a region prone to earthquakes.

Natural disaster struck with full force early in 2010, when the capital Port-au-Prince was hit by a magnitude 7.0 earthquake - the country's worst in 200 years. Tens of thousands of people were killed and much of the capital and its wider area devastated, prompting a major international aid effort.

Two years later, with the country still struggling to recover from the earthquake, an outbreak of cholera added to Haiti's woes.

SOURCE: BBC WORLD SERVICE: Country Profile - Haiti

Materials assembled by: Jennifer Ward, Haverford High School, February 2012

AT A GLANCE



Politics: Democratic rule was restored in 2006, two years after a violent revolt ousted former leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide; bitter divisions persist. Presidential, parliamentary elections were held on 28 November 2010

Economy: Economy in ruins, unemployment chronic, severe deforestation

International: The UN has deployed peacekeepers; international aid is seen as key to recovery

HAITI DISASTERS

- 1770 - Earthquake devastates Port-au-Prince
- 1842 - Quake destroys Cap-Haitien, other cities
- 1935 - Storm kills 2,000
- 1946 - Tsunami kills 1,790
- 1954 - Hurricane Hazel kills hundreds
- 1963 - Hurricane Flora kills 6,000 in Haiti and Cuba
- 1994 - Hurricane Gordon kills hundreds
- 1998 - Hurricane Georges destroys 80% of crops
- 2004 - Floods kill 2,600
- 2004 - Tropical Storm Jeanne kills 1,900
- 2007 - Tropical Storm Noel triggers mudslides, floods
- 2008 - Three hurricanes and tropical storm kill 800
- 2010 - Quake hits Port-au-Prince, killing tens of thousands
- 2010-11 - Cholera outbreak kills nearly 6,000

Sources: AP, US Geological Survey

Beyond the Stereotypes

An interview with Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat

April 8, 2011



Award-winning author and MacArthur “genius grant” recipient Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti and came to the U.S. when she was 12. Her works, including *The Dew Breaker* and her latest, *Create Dangerously*, often deal with the complexities and tensions of life as a new arrival in a strange world. Rafael Pi Roman, from the WNET program “Sunday Arts,” spoke with Danticat recently. Here is part of their conversation.

VIEW VIDEO AT: <http://bit.ly/danticat>

As you watch this video, note how Ms. Danticat responds. Jot some notes about how she answers the following questions:

1. Why do most Americans not know Haiti beyond the stereotypes and traumas?

2. Why has Haiti disappeared from newspaper headlines after such traumatic events a relatively short time ago?

3. What examples/evidence does Ms. Danticat use to support her opinions?

4. What is Ms. Danticat’s assertion about how we treat the poor?

A Year And A Day

by Edwidge Danticat

PUBLISHED IN *THE NEW YORKER*, JANUARY 17, 2011

http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2011/01/17/110117taco_talk_danticat

In the Haitian vodou tradition, it is believed by some that the souls of the newly dead slip into rivers and streams and remain there, under the water, for a year and a day. Then, lured by ritual prayer and song, the souls emerge from the water and the spirits are reborn. These reincarnated spirits go on to occupy trees, and, if you listen closely, you may hear their hushed whispers in the wind. The spirits can also hover over mountain ranges, or in grottoes, or caves, where familiar voices echo our own when we call out their names. The year-and-a-day commemoration is seen, in families that believe in it and practice it, as a tremendous obligation, an honorable duty, in part because it assures a transcendental continuity of the kind that has kept us Haitians, no matter where we live, linked to our ancestors for generations.

By this interpretation of death, one of many in Haiti, more than two hundred thousand souls went *anba dlo*—under the water—after the earthquake last January 12th. Their bodies, however, were elsewhere. Many were never removed from the rubble of their homes, schools, offices, churches, or beauty parlors. Many were picked up by earthmovers on roadsides and dumped into mass graves. Many were burned, like kindling, in bonfires, for fear that they might infect the living.

“In Haiti, people never really die,” my grandmothers said when I was a child, which seemed strange, because in Haiti people were always dying. They died in disasters both natural and man-made. They died from political violence. They died of infections that would have been easily treated elsewhere. They even died of chagrin, of broken hearts. But what I didn’t fully understand was that in Haiti people’s spirits never really die. This has been proved true in the stories we have seen and read during the past year, of boundless suffering endured with grace and dignity: mothers have spent nights standing knee-deep in mud, cradling their babies in their arms, while rain pounded the tarpaulin above their heads; amputees have learned to walk, and even dance, on their new prostheses within hours of getting them; rape victims have created organizations to protect other rape victims; people have tried, in any way they could, to reclaim a shadow of their past lives.

My grandmothers were also talking about souls, which never really die, even when the visual and verbal manifestations of their transition—the tombstones and mausoleums, the elaborate wakes and church services, the *desounen* prayers that encourage the body to surrender the spirit, the mourning rituals of all religions—become a luxury, like so much else in Haiti, like a home, like bread, like clean water.

In the year since the earthquake, Haiti has lost some thirty-five hundred people to cholera, an epidemic that is born out of water. The epidemic could potentially take more lives than the earthquake itself. And with the contagion of cholera comes a stigma that follows one even in death. People cannot touch a loved one who has died of cholera. No ritual bath is possible, no last dressing of the body. There are only more mass graves.

In the emerging lore and reality of cholera, water, this fragile veil between life and death for so many Haitians, has become a feared poison. Even as the election stalemate lingers, the rice farmers in Haiti’s Artibonite Valley—the country’s breadbasket—are refusing to step into the bacteria-infected waters of their paddies, setting the stage for potential food shortages and more possible death ahead, this time from hunger. In the precarious dance for survival, in which we long to honor the dead while still harboring the fear of joining them, will our rivers and streams even be trusted to shelter and then return souls?

A year ago, watching the crumbled buildings and crushed bodies that were shown around the clock on American television, I thought that I was witnessing the darkest moment in the history of the country where I was born and where most of my family members still live. Then I heard one of the survivors say, either on radio or on television, that during the earthquake it was as if the earth had become liquid, like water. That’s when I began to imagine them, all these thousands and thousands of souls, slipping into the country’s rivers and streams, then waiting out their year and a day before re-emerging and reclaiming their places among us. And, briefly, I was hopeful.

My hope came not only from the possibility of their and our communal rebirth but from the extra day that would follow the close of what has certainly been a terrible year. That extra day guarantees nothing, except that it will lead us into the following year, and the one after that, and the one after that.

Reading Between the Lines

Adapted from Trent Lorcher's lesson at www.brighthubeducation.com and Dan Kurland's www.criticalreading.com

Inferences

My cousin used to hold his three fingers up and tell me to read between the lines. I had no idea what he meant until I had a teacher mention that reading between the lines is another expression for making inferences. Some call it making an educated guess.

Inferences are not random. While they may come about mysteriously with a sudden jump of recognition, a sense of "Ah ha!," inferences are very orderly. Inferences may be guesses, but they are educated guesses based on supporting evidence. The evidence seems to require that we reach a specific conclusion.

Evidence is said to *imply*; readers *infer*. However, inferences and assumptions are not the same thing. An **assumption** is what I think. An assumption is a synthesis of my experiences as well as my knowledge which I can rightfully debate. **Inferring** is figuring out what an author wants me to think. An inference should be based mainly on references in the text that lead me to a conclusion.

- When making inferences, you are making a logical guess using evidence from the text, your own knowledge, and common sense.
- Making inferences also involves finding deeper meanings in events and situations, meanings that are not explicit.
- When you make an inference about the future, it is a prediction.
- Developing skills in making inferences and making predictions is a critical aspect of becoming a master of words and of literature.

Strategies for Making Inferences

1. Look for details that reveal important aspects of setting, plot, and character.
2. Use common sense and prior knowledge to make connections.
3. Analyze a character's actions and words to determine his or her values.
4. Pay attention to how the narrator or characters make inferences.
5. Analyze your thought process and determine whether or not you are using faulty logic or jumping to conclusions.

Practice

Take a look at the two cartoons below. What is happening in each? What **inferences** can you make about the artist's intent? What **evidence** can you cite to support your inferences?

SBK

Quickie Quiz: Find the Difference....



Reading Between the Lines

“The Missing Peace”

A short story by Edwidge Danticat
 Taken from her collection titled *Krik? Krak!*
 Find the story online at <http://bit.ly/missingpeace>

Reading extension:
 Check out this film adaptation of Danticat’s short story
<http://vimeo.com/26077229>

Important Definitions:

- Inference- making a judgment about something based the information presented
- Assumption- making a judgment about something based on previous experience

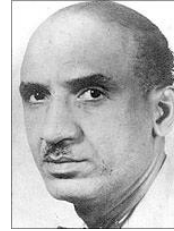
Inference Question	It says (Text clues)	I know (Background knowledge)	So I infer (My inference answer)
How does the narrator’s grandmother treat her? Some clues can be found on pages 106-108, 109			
Miss Gallant, the visitor, tells Lamort, “They say a girl becomes a woman when she loses her mother,” she said. “You, child, were born a woman.” Why does the visitor say this? Some clues can be found on pages 114-116			
What is the significance of the purple blanket? Some clues can be found on pages 112, 114			
What does the title mean? Some clues can be found on pages 118-119			

Betrayal by Léon Laleau

This haunted heart that doesn't fit
My language or the clothes I wear
Chafes within the grip of
Borrowed feelings, European ways,
Do you feel my pain,
This anguish like none other
From taming with the words of France
This heart that came to me from Senegal?



Marie Thérèse Colimon-Hall (1918 - 1997), born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, began her writing career as a playwright and published five plays between 1949 and 1960. In 1974 she published her first and most well-known novel, *Fils de Misère*. She also wrote essays, short stories, and children's literature. Colimon's keen observations of the Haitian people's struggle against [poverty](#) gave a particularly poignancy to her work, as demonstrated by *Fils de Misère*. In *Les Chants des sirènes*, her collection of short stories, she explored the painful impact of the Haitian [diaspora](#) on both the individuals in exile and the Haitian community.



Leon Laleau, born August 3, 1892 and who died in September 1979, was a Haitian writer, politician, and diplomat. Laleau is recognized "as one of the most brilliant writers of his time." He received several international awards, such as the Edgar Allan Poe Prize in 1962.

Born in Port-au-Prince, Laleau held two degrees, one in law and another in letters and sciences. As a politician, he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of National Education, Agriculture, and Public Works. He served in numerous diplomatic positions, such as Chief of Diplomatic Missions in Rome, London, Paris, Santiago, and Lima and Special Mission Ambassador to Panama, Cuba, the United Nations, and UNESCO. He was a signer of the 24 July 1934 accord which ended the United States' occupation of Haiti.

Encounter by Marie Thérèse Colimon-Hall

I'd say: 'How are you?'
And you: 'Fine, thanks.'
I'd say: 'We don't see you anymore.'
And you: 'I'm very busy.'

A pause...I'd begin again very softly
'Tell me...'And you, not hearing
My mumbled words
Would go right on unsuspecting
Oh, (politely) you don't have your big straw hat anymore!
But...No, not anymore. I'd answer
And you, do you still like sugared almonds?
--Listen to that tune from the house opposite.

Then we would each go off across the city
Carrying in our hearts, full with silent sobs,
The bitter burden of unspoken words
And the empty pride of having kept our pain.

Tourist by Félix Morisseau-Leroy

Tourist, don't take my picture
Don't take my picture, tourist
I'm too ugly
Too dirty
Too skinny
Don't take my picture, white man
Mr. Eastman won't be happy
I'm too ugly
Your camera will break
I'm too dirty
Too black
Whites like you won't be content
I'm too ugly
I'm gonna crack your Kodak
Don't take my picture, tourist
Leave me be, white man
Don't take a picture of my burro
My burro's load's too heavy
And he's too small
And he has no food here
Don't take a picture of my animal
Tourist, don't take a picture of the house
My house is of straw
Don't take a picture of my hut
My hut's made of earth
The house already smashed up
Go shoot a picture of the Palace
Or the Bicentennial grounds
Don't take a picture of my garden
I have no plow
No truck
No tractor
Don't take a picture of my tree
Tourist, I'm barefoot
My clothes are torn as well
Poor people don't look at whites
But look at my hair, tourist
Your Kodak's not used to my color
Your barber's not used to my hair
Tourist, don't take my picture
You don't understand my position
You don't understand anything
About my business, tourist
"Gimme fie cents"
And then, be on your way, tourist.

Boat People by Félix Morisseau-Leroy

We are all in a drowning boat
Happened before at St. Domingue
We are the ones called boat people
We all died long ago
What else can frighten us ?
Let them call us boat people
We fight a long time with poverty
On our islands, the sea, everywhere
We never say we are not boat people
In Africa they chased us with dogs
Chained our feet, piled us on
Who then called us boat people?
Half the cargo perished
The rest sold at Bossal Market
It's them who call us boat people
We stamp our feet down, the earth shakes
Up to Louisiana, down to Venezuela
Who would come and call us boat people?
A bad season in our country
The hungry dog eats thorns
They didn't call us boat people yet
We looked for jobs and freedom
And they piled us on again: Cargo—Direct to Miami
They start to call us boat people
We run from the rain at Fort Dimanche
But land in the river at the Krome Detention
Center
It's them who call us boat people
Miami heat eats away our hearts
Chicago cold explodes our stomach
Boat people boat people boat people
Except for the Indians—
What American didn't get here somehow
But they only want to call us boat people
We don't bring drugs in our bags
But courage and strength to work
Boat people—Yes, that's all right, boat people
We don't come to make trouble
We come with all respect
It's them who call us boat people
We have no need to yell or scream
But all boat people are equal, the same
All boat people are boat people
One day we'll stand up, put down our feet
As we did at St. Domingue
They'll know who these boat people really are
That day, be it Christopher Columbus
Or Henry Kissinger—
They will know us
We who simply call ourselves
People

Poetry Analysis

T.P.C.A.S.T.T. is an abbreviation for a style of poetry analysis. Each of the letters stands for a step in the analysis process. You will use this format and our knowledge of glossing and critical reading strategies to analyze a poem in your packet. Plan to write between 3-4 sentences on each particular element using the TPCASTT method.

- **TITLE** -- Examine the title *before* reading the poem. Is the title significant? How does the title prepare readers for what is to come in the poem? What might the poem be about?

- **PARAPHRASE** -- Translate the poem into your own words. **Resist the urge to jump to interpretation.** A failure to understand what happens literally inevitably leads to an interpretive misunderstanding. In the space below, rewrite each line in your own words. You are paraphrasing, not summarizing. Your paraphrase should look like the original poem (not in paragraph form). If you need more space, please use a separate sheet of paper.

- **CONNOTATION** - Connotations are the associations and implications that a word or phrase implies other than simply the dictionary definition. Examine the poem for meaning beyond the literal. Look for: imagery, symbolism, irony, understatement, oxymoron, allusions, effect of sound devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme). **What specific literary devices are used in the poem and what effect do they have on the meaning?**

- **ATTITUDE** -- Tone: Examine the speaker's attitude. Look for words that reveal the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the poem. Is the speaker angered, passionate, melancholic? Why? How do you know?

- **SHIFTS** -- Note shifts in attitude. Look for: occasion of poem (time and place), key words (ex. but, yet), punctuation (dashes, periods, colons), stanza divisions, changes in line and/or stanza length, irony (sometimes irony hides shifts), effect of structure on meaning. Where does the speaker's voice change or shift? Why?

- **TITLE** -- Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level. How does the title of the poem enhance the meaning of the poem? Does it mean something different than what you originally thought?

- **THEME** -- First list what the poem is about (subjects); then determine what the poet is saying about each of those subjects (theme). Write one or two well articulated theme statements for your poem. Remember, theme must be expressed as a complete sentence.
