Prosody and the African American Poet: A Case for Close Reading

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Abstract:

Why do close readings? Why bother to ask students to slow down in this frenetic, fast-paced world? Text messages and emails are written so quickly that it is the norm for them to be filled with errors. We rush past thousands of words and images in a typical day, barely noticing what we see. We take in most information passively, and the thinking process is nearly non-existent. It is beneficial for all of us to strengthen this muscle of active engagement in all areas. One place to start is in forcing our students, even momentarily, to slow down and examine reading material more closely.

Close reading is a type of reading where the reader critically engages with the text in order to understand it, question it, evaluate it, and form an opinion about it. This is a method of reading where the reader has to slow down and think along each step of the way (Krause 1).

Not only will this enable students to glean so much more from their reading, but because the process can carry over to other aspects of life. Images bombard us, but we can see so much more if we carefully examine even a few. A student’s entire life can be enriched if they learn to occasionally slow down.

One of my primary purposes as an instructor of English literature is to help my students to understand the intricate literary techniques available to any poet. I believe that through first through the ability to identify, and then to appreciate these techniques, the deeper meanings intended by poetry can be unveiled.