CLOSE READING NOTES

{The following information should help you discover many jewels in the S.A.S. summer reading assignments for your Language Arts courses, and allow you to produce notes that will convince your instructor that you did indeed actively read the assigned material. Here’s to some happy reading!  -L. Welch}

Preface
What do you think of when you hear a Language Arts instructor say: “Be sure to take good close reading notes?” Most students nod and give a nervous smile but few, if any, ever ask, “What do you mean by close reading notes?” After reading the information below, you should have a better idea of what constitutes close reading notes.

Close Reading
This technique could also be called active reading. Sophisticated texts tend to be very dense and hard to navigate. The student must counter the temptation to let his/her mind wander (a deadly disease for the serious student) by staying engaged with the text. This demands note taking. “But what should I write down,” the serious student asks? Well, one thing you can skip writing down are notes involving plot. The plot in most works of fiction, and even non-fiction, is fairly easy to glean and can be noted later in a plot précis. Notes regarding plot make the student feel like serious note taking is happening, but upon closer inspection, the notes about plot are thin and will do little to assist the student with exams or essay assignments.

Abstract vs. Concrete
Sophisticated writing often times deals with subject matter that cannot be easily understood so the writer will use a literary device to transmit a clearer understanding of the abstract concept. Consider the following: The King is an eagle, or the King is like an eagle. The reader understands that the King is neither an eagle or even like one for that matter, but the writer needs the reader to understand the power that comes with being a King, so a metaphor or simile is used by the writer to help the reader understand the power, perhaps the majesty, that a King possesses. The abstract concept of power has certainly been given a more concrete place in the story being read. The student now has a wonderful close reading note to jot down in his/her notebook. It should also be noted that the student is finally starting to engage in critical thinking, a wonderful by-product of the close reading process.

A Suggested Road Map
Now that we have revealed some of the simple secrets associated with sophisticated writing, here are some suggested areas where the active reader may discover “good close reading notes.”

$ Anything that helps identify the PURPOSE, and or, MAIN IDEA of the work!

$ The Five (5) Basic Elements of Fiction (i.e. Theme, Character, Point of View, Setting, & Plot/Conflict.).

$ Literary Devices (e.g. simile, metaphor, symbol, etc.) not only help make the abstract concrete, but will most times lead you directly to the Purpose or Main Idea of the work. Don’t simply identify the device but wrap your note around why the author would choose to use the selected device.

$ Conflict (i.e. man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. nature, etc.) is essential in any great piece of literature and forces the reader to think critically about the work. Your note should not only identify the conflict, but also try to explain how this conflict gives meaning to the work as a whole!

$ Questions are always important to jot down as you read. You may not have an answer for the question but jot it down anyway, because as you continue to read an answer to the question may come to you. This technique will force you to do some critical thinking, and that is the central purpose of close reading notes!