

Talk Back to the Authors/Texts

Assigned: Week 1

Due: Midnight the night before the class during which we will discuss the readings

Task: Write 12 short response papers (200-300 words/1 single spaced page) on one reading assigned for the coming class period. Post your response online and bring your responses to class.

Why?

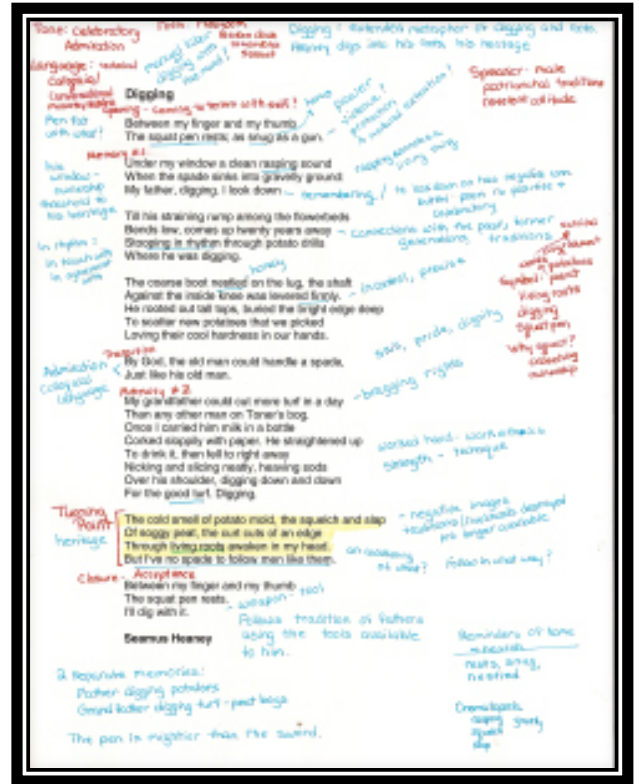
The study of rhetoric can be seen as attempts to reflect upon and understand the process by which communities are generated and maintained by the persuasive use of symbols—linguistic, visual, and material. By studying women’s rhetorics specifically, we are reflecting upon (among other things)

communities created and maintained by and for women. “Reflecting upon” does not limit itself to the act of merely thinking – reflecting is an active process, as is reading. In this activity, you will be taking an active role in our group understanding of the texts we explore, just as you will be claiming an active role in our classroom community.

bell hooks encourages us to “talk back” to authority figures, and our readings function (partially) as our authority figures in this class. Question them, interrogate them, act on them and with them – [I encourage you to read them actively, highlighting and jotting notes in the margins.](#)

[<http://tinyurl.com/mj1jzvz>] From these questions and responses you formulate as you read (i.e., your interaction with the text), you can pull some very insightful writing, in my experience (if you would like a refresher on active reading, I’ll be happy to help).

The purpose of the “Backtalking” papers is to encourage you as a reader to critically engage with the readings and to help you develop the habit of **constant questioning**. Simply because something is written down, or is presented to you as true by an authority figure (such as a teacher) does not mean that it is unassailable or perfect. As a matter of fact, [here’s](#) an example of the role I envision for you as a critically engaged student. We all began life as that kid questioning everything; however, through our time in the educational



system, our natural curiosity is trained out of us. I want you to work on getting it back. Asking “why?” is not rude – it’s intellectual work and it’s worthwhile.

Some questions you might consider as you work through these assignments are: What is the author saying through her work? Why? Does her work stir you especially, or are you particularly resistant to it? Why? What does the work say, how does it express it, and why do you react to it the way that you do? What connections can you make with other texts we have read (or that you have some experience with in other classes)? Why? What terms or concepts are new, fascinating, troubling, questionable? Why? **Finally, always include in your paper a brief discussion of how this reading can help you to “act effectively in the world,” as Karen Kohrs Campbell puts it.**

Logistics: Your responses should be 200-300 words in length. You are free to choose the readings you wish to respond to; however, once we have passed that week’s readings, they are no longer possible for you to return to for “Talking Back” purposes. They are due by midnight the night prior to class.

Identify 12 class readings for the purposes of this exercise, compose your responses to them, and submit them to our class website “Doc Sharing” section. I would suggest that you make your choices in readings for response based on a number of factors: Did the reading stir a larger than normal amount of questions for you? Do you find your thoughts returning to the reading? Does this reading cause you to think of other authors in other classes you are taking? Or other authors in this class?

Finally, do take into account your personal calendar requirements (i.e., other things you have going on in your life) as well as how interested you are in the readings. You may want to schedule your choices in readings around other assignments in this class and other classes as well. Please consult the Reading Calendar for the days these papers can be submitted (nearly all of them, to be honest 😊).

These writings will perform a number of functions: firstly, they will (hopefully) help you to continue to develop the critical questioning skills that you have ostensibly already begun to use as a college student. Secondly, they will help you (and me) to see areas of greater understanding as well as areas where understanding and comprehension is not as extensive (and thus is in need of more discussion and unpacking). Thirdly, writing to find out what you know and what you think is an exercise that will help you in all your classes (as well as in general). An exercise such as talking back to your textbooks will assist you in

developing a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the things you have read.