**NEW AND IMPROVED CM STRETCHERS FOR RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY**

***UPDATED APRIL 2020 (Text used: excerpt from An American Childhood by Annie Dillard)***

1. **AUDIENCE RESPONSE**

**NOTE**: AUDIENCE CAN BE **YOU PERSONALLY** AS THE READER OF THE TEXT AND/OR **THE INTENDED AUDIENCE** FOR WHOM THE TEXT WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN (OR SPOKEN.) IT’S POSSIBLE THAT YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE MAY BE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE RESPONSE IN THE ORIGINAL INTENDED AUDIENCE. For example, in Jonathan Edwards’s fiery 18th century sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” your personal reaction may be one of curious amusement; whereas the original audience most likely found the sermon to be quite daunting or even frightening.

*Identify the intended audience of the text, then think about the* ***emotions AND beliefs of the audience. Since this text is from a published autobiographical novel, then we can assume that the intended audience is a broad base of potential adult readers.*** Analyze for audience/reader reaction-what emotions/responses might they feel/have after reading the text? Consider how the writer appeals to pathos (emotions), logos (reason/logic), and ethos (his/her own credibility and trustworthiness) to be persuasive and achieve their purpose(s).

**CD:** *“The Polyphemus moth in the picture looked like a mighty wraith, a beating essence of the hardwood forest, alien-skinned and brown, with spread, blind eyes.”*

**CMs: (Connecting the powerful description of the moth to reader response)**

The grandiose diction describing the moth as a “mighty wraith, a beating essence...alien-skinned” magnifies the strange and powerful beauty of this insect. In this writer’s childhood memory, the moth’s appearance in the picture is compared to a ghost and an alien, which emphasizes the imaginative and impressionable mind of a child and connects adult readers to their own experiences growing up, especially those that changed their lives or perspectives in a powerful, even haunting way.

1. **UNIVERSAL CONNECTIONS**

Analyze for bigger picture-what larger ideas/issues/connections/concepts might the text suggest/evoke?

**CD:** *“The moth was receding down the driveway, dragging on. I went; I ran inside.”*

**CMs: (Making a universal connection about man’s repeated intrusion into and destruction of nature)**

The pathetic movement of the moth and the author’s subsequent running away bring to mind the universal truth that man’s intrusion into nature frequently results in destruction. Even though the harm was unintentional, caused by a well-meaning but ignorant teacher in the pursuit of educational experiences for her students, the harm was nonetheless permanent and devastating. Extending the universal application further, one must remember that man is supposed to be the earth’s steward and protector so that the planet can continue to sustain man’s life on it. This stewardship is explained not only in Biblical verse in the Old Testament story of Eden but also in the past and current protocols of science where climate change, species extinction, and overpopulation threaten the life or the planet and all its inhabitants.

1. **SYMBOLISM**

Analyze for symbolism-what symbolic meanings might a particular object in the text suggest/develop?

**CD:** *“She put it, still heaving and banging, in the ubiquitous Mason jar.”*

**CMs: (Analyze a particular object (or person, or image for its possible symbolic meanings)**

A Mason jar is a commonly found clear glass jar, usually used in canning quarts of fresh fruits and vegetables after the summer and fall harvests. Nothing special about it, except when it is used as the cramped prison for the moth who, as a result of its confinement, fails to stretch its wings at a critical time, resulting in permanent disfigurement. Symbolically, the Mason jar represents any situation in which one is suppressed and subjugated. So many Mason jars exist: poverty, hunger, abuse, neglect, violence, racism, hatred, apathy, oppression. If these jars are not removed in time, then lifelong pain and damage may be the heart-breaking result.

1. **DICTION REVEALS WRITER/SPEAKER’S ATTITUDES & BELIEFS (TONE) AS WELL AS WRITER PURPOSE**

What can you tell about the writer/speaker of the text by the word choices (diction) and the impact, connotations, and emphasis of certain words/phrases? Analyze for tone-what attitude of the writer/speaker toward his/her subject matter do the word choices suggest—negative or positive or neutral? Then choose specific words to identify tone, such as harshly critical, or passionately pleading, or optimistically cautious, etc. Watch for tonal shifts in the text. What is the persuasive impact of these shifts?

**CD:** *“The moth’s enormous wings are velveted in a rich, warm brown, and edged in bands of blue and pink delicate as a watercolor wash. A startling “eyespot,” immense, and deep blue melding to an almost translucent yellow, luxuriates in the center of each hind wing.”*

**CMs: (Analyze diction to ascertain the attitudes and beliefs of Annie Dillard towards the moth)**

Based on word choice and selection of detail, Dillard’s tone can be described as descriptively admiring. Multiple references to rich colors, an elegant texture (velvet), and such artistic words as “watercolor wash” and “melding,” it is clear that Dillard sees the moth as a magnificent creation, something to be studied and appreciated like a fine painting or inspired sculpture.

**A WORD ABOUT AUTHOR EXIGENCE:** THINK ABOUT EXIGENCE AS THE “TRIGGER” OR “MOTIVATION” THAT PROMPTS THE WRITERS/SPEAKERS TO CREATE THEIR TEXTS. In the case of the letter from Abigail Adams to her young son, John Quincy Adams, the exigence comes from Abigail’s understanding that her son is hesitant and perhaps nervous about traveling abroad and from her own desire to comfort, instruct, and advise her son. You can write about exigence when you are analyzing the writer/speaker, their rhetorical choices and purpose, and their intended audience.

1. **THEME** **IT UP**

You may also identify one or more overarching or themes to potentially add greater focus and purpose to your essay when you analyze the meaning of the work as a whole.

**CD:** *“...urgent through the swaddling of many years, against the curve of my palm.”*

**CMs: (Creating an insightful theme about the sheer will to live)**

As the narrator holds the warm and thumping pupa in her hand, she is struck by the force of the life within trying urgently to emerge from its confines and be “born.” The sheer will of the moth to not only be “born” but also “transformed” into a full-fledged adult Polyphemus moth echoes the truth of all life, humans included: that the struggles to live, to spread our wings, to experience our intended potential is arguably the most fierce and motivating impulse of our existence.

1. **MULTIPLE INTERPS** **OF EVIDENCE (KEEP ASKING SO WHAT? AFTER YOUR CMS)**

Analyze for multiple interpretations-what possible meanings (even contradictory ones) might the text support? Keep asking “So what?” after your commentary to dig deeper and more sophisticated analysis.

**CD:** *“A startling “eyespot,” immense, and deep blue melding to an almost translucent yellow, luxuriates in the center of each hind wing.”*

**CMs: (Offering possible ways to interpret the quote)**

Dillard’s attention to detail in describing the moths “eyespot” focuses the reader’s attention on the unique design of the moth’s wing, a design given to the moth by nature herself to frighten and thus thwart the moth’s natural predators. Upon further reflection, Dillard’s description of the “eyespot” early on in the passage may be the foreshadowing of a powerful irony: the “eyespot” cannot protect the moth from its human foes.

1. **WORD ISOLATION**

Rather than always speaking of the author’s diction as a whole, hyper-focus on a word or phrase and milk it for all it’s worth in the way of implied, associated meanings (connotations).

**CD:** *“He was a monster in a Mason jar.”*

**CMs: (Hyper-focusing on the connotations of one word)**

Dillard’s use of “monster” is a potent and effective word choice because, even though the word is generic, it conjures up images of all monsters, from mythology, from literature, from film, and from the reader’s own experiences. In addition, the word “monster,” in the context of Dillard’s text, calls to mind one particular monster: Frankenstein’s monster, who in theory was supposed to be a glorious “birth,” a profound “creation,” a miracle of science. However, the monster was imperfect, defective, and abandoned by his creator...just like the narrator in the text describes her childhood self running inside after witnessing the deformed moth dragging itself down the driveway—a tortured result of human interference in nature.

1. **FILTERS (CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE TEXT)**

Examining the texts through a specific “filter” or “lens” to interpret it from that specific point of view; e.g. **Naturalism** (God and Nature are indifferent or hostile toward mankind; people are animals in struggle for survival); **Romanticism** (man is godlike and can draw inspiration and power from Nature); **Post-Modernism** (no right or wrong; the quest is making sense out of senselessness of modern life); **Social Criticism** (what and how is the author criticizing society’s values and traditions); **Psychological** (what does the text reveal about the human mind and behavior); **Feminism** (how does the text treat women’s concerns, history, and issues). **NOTE: you can also “make up” a filter that suits the text, such as a “Biblical” filter or an “American” filter or a “Republican” filter, etc.**

**CD:** *“He couldn’t spread his wings. There was no room. The chemical that coated his wings like varnish, stiffening them permanently, dried, and hardened his wings as they were.”*

**CMs: (Social Criticism Filter):** From a standpoint of social criticism, Dillard’s detailed observations force the readers to question the relationship between man and nature. Such a relationship, if it is to prove symbiotic and naturally beneficial, must include precautions for safety and a great deal of respect. Dillard is suggesting that anything less than this results in irreparable damage. Furthermore, even damage on a small scale, such as one moth, sets a dangerous precedent for our future as inhabitants on earth; indeed, we must give nature enough “room” to thrive.