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

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

1. AUDIENCE EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

*Focus on the* ***emotional response*** *that the text (CD) may elicit in a reader.* Analyze for audience reaction-what emotions/responses might the reader feel/have? Consider how the writer appeals to pathos, logos, and ethos.

**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 an emotion of awe and wonder)**

The grandiose diction describing the moth as a “mighty wraith, a beating essence...alien-skinned” magnifies the strange and powerful beauty contained within this insect. Furthermore, the descriptive imagery commands a sense of awe and respect for this single creature because it makes the reader think of such mystical things as wraiths, forests and aliens.

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’s 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.

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. TONE

Analyze for tone-what attitude of the author toward his/her subject matter do the word choices (diction) suggest? Negative? Positive? Then state tone identification in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ly\_\_\_\_\_\_ format. Watch for tonal 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 attitude of Annie Dillard towards the moth)**

Based on word choice and selection of detail, Dillard’s tone can be described as descriptively appreciative. 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 admired like a fine painting or inspired sculpture

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 (SO WHAT)?

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 and milk it for all it’s worth in the way of connotations and associated meanings.

**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 calls to mind 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: Frankenstien’s monster, which in theory was supposed to be a glorious “birth,” a profound “creation.” However, the monster was imperfect, defective, and abandoned by his creator...just as the narrator in the text runs inside after witnessing the 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.