



SOAPS: A Critical Reading Guide

By using SOAPS as the basis for analysis, students will discover that text is carefully structured, creating parameters within which students must work in order to determine meaning. Certainly there is room for different viewpoints because each student brings a unique perspective to the piece. But their conclusions must be supported by the details of the text.

Subject

What is the Subject? The general topic, content, and ideas contained in the text. Students should be able to state the subject in a few words or a short phrase.

Occasion

What is the Occasion? The time and place of the piece; the current situation. It is particularly important that students understand the context that encouraged the writing to happen.

Audience

Who is the Audience? The group of readers to whom this piece is directed. The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or a certain people. This is a difficult concept for students. They tend to think that authors just write, not that they write for anyone.

Purpose

What is the Purpose? The reason behind the text. Many students do not even consider this question. Until they do, they will not be able to examine the argument or its logic.

Speaker

Who is the Speaker? The voice which tells the story. When students approach a piece of fiction, they often believe that the author and the speaker of the piece are the same. They fail to realize that in fiction the author may choose to tell the story from any number of different points of view. In fact, the method of narration and the character of the speaker may be crucial to an understanding of the work.

This confusion of author and speaker is particularly common when there is a gender difference. For instance, students see that the author is female and assume that the speaker is female, even though all the facts indicate that the speaker is male. Furthermore, they think that what the speaker believes is what the author believes. This misconception creates problems for students as they try to unravel meaning.