Learning About “Stuff”

Learning about things that go on in the world outside of Ashland High School is an idea that I have been emphasizing in class. This knowledge will help you on the AP exam; it is also just a good thing to do for yourself. In order to learn more “stuff” you are going to complete a reading assignment and précis weekly. This is an ongoing assignment that you must turn in to me every Friday morning until the exam, regardless of whether or not we have class.

The Assignment
Here is what you are going to do every two weeks:
1. Head to library section designated for this assignment. Ms. Gallant has set aside several magazines and books for you to use. Browse this section for something that interests you. YOU decide on the topic
2. Choose an article or essay and read it. The article should have some sort of argument. Please do not use a simply factual article. They should be of substantial length- at least two pages.
3. Make a copy of the article or essay (copies are 20 cents in the library). Annotate it.
4. Write a précis about the article. You must include the full bibliographical citation at the top of the page, above the précis. This means you must know how to cite a source as if it were on a works cited page. You may use any of the books that I have or that are in the library or you may look on the Purdue Online Writing Lab website for help on the format. Please do not trust Citation Machine or any of those types of websites. They have led students astray in the past.
5. Turn in both the annotated copy of the article and the précis on Friday morning before 7:30 am. You may slide these under the door if I am not in my room.

The Précis

A précis is a highly structured four sentence paragraph that will help you engage with the reading and think about the text rhetorically. It will also help you practice focusing on what language does, instead of focusing on what the author says. Each of the four sentences requires specific information. Students are encouraged to use brief quotations in order to convey the author’s style and tone.

A précis is set up like this:

First Sentence: This introduces the article and the author’s thesis. It includes the name of author, genre and title of work (place the date published in parenthesis, like this), a concise, rhetorically appropriate verb (claims, argues, suggests, asserts, implies, etc. USE YOUR HELPFUL WORKSHEET!) followed by a “that” phrase in which the thesis of the work is stated.
Examples:
- In the novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, a novel by Mark Twain, Twain argues that racism in the South is ridiculous and deserving of criticism.

Second Sentence: This sentence is less structured than the first, but just as important to your précis. An explanation of how the author goes about supporting his/her thesis. This should include the rhetorical mode(s) the author uses in the same order in which they appear in the essay. Brevity here is
imperative. DO NOT restate the detail of the work, but explain the rhetorical methods used by the writer.

Examples:
- The author develops this assertion first, by applying the techniques of satire to two poems, second, by providing definitions and third, by explaining the history of each approach.
- "The author develops this idea by comparing and contrasting the lives of these two Civil War heroes" (Czapski)
- "Turkle supports her assertion by juxtaposing theories of cyberspace and identity formation with older understanding of identity found in psychology, sociology and philosophy" (Turkle)

Third Sentence: This is a statement of the author's purpose followed by an "in order to" clause in which you explain what the author wants the audience to do or feel as a result of reading the work. So, you should include the purpose (to inform, to persuade, to entertain, etc) but also include the author's motive (which is the "in order to" phrase)! Please do not use the thesis that you already mentioned as the purpose; EVERY author's purpose is to put forth a thesis.

Examples:
- Her purpose is to show readers that theories on psychology do not change based on the study, but that the study adds to our knowledge and adds to our understanding of depression and its causes in order to encourage her audience to rethink our reaction to those suffering with depression or mental illness.
- "Her two pronged purpose is to respond to critics and to encourage minority writers to develop their own voice." (Czapski)
- "The author's purpose is to make the reader question a practice that is a trademark of the U. S. education system and decide whether it is conducive to creating a 'smarter' student" (Leyva).

Fourth Sentence: This sentence explains the author's intended audience and how the author positions him or herself with that audience. In other words, you need to explain the relationship that the author establishes with his or her audience. This sentence may also report the author's tone.

Examples:
- "She establishes a formal tone for educators, politicians, and other concerned parents who have children in high school. Although she is writing to an adult audience, her message extends to her peers—high school students."
- While Dr. King's intended audience is obviously the black community as a whole, he also tries to get in touch with anyone prejudiced against, black or not; also included are those of the period that had the power to or wanted to stop the decline of society by ending the hatred cultivated by the differences between people of the world so that world would change to be a superior place. (From Preble's Literature Lounge)
- "Turkle's tone assumes a highly educated audience who is familiar with theories not only of cyberspace and identity, but sociology and psychology as well." (Turkle)
- Although at times her writing seems didactic, Hooks ultimately establishes a companionable relationship with her audience of both critics and women who seek to improve the effectiveness of their own writing.

Some Sources:
Précis Examples:

Toni Morrison, in her essay "Disturbing Nurses and the Kindness of Sharks," implies that racism in the United States has affected the craft and process of American novelists. Morrison supports her implication by describing how Ernest Hemingway writes about black characters in his novels and short stories. Her purpose is to make her readers aware of the cruel reality of racism underlying some of the greatest works of American literature in order to help them examine the far-reaching effects racism has not only on those discriminated against but also on those who discriminate. She establishes a formal and highly analytical tone with her audience of racially mixed (but probably mainly white), theoretically sophisticated readers and critical interpreters of American literature.

from http://www.wam.umd.edu/~sapinoso/precis.htm

In her article "Who Cares if Johnny Can't Read?" (1997), Larissa MacFarquhar asserts that Americans are reading more than ever despite claims to the contrary and that it is time to reconsider why we value reading so much, especially certain kinds of 'high culture' reading. MacFarquhar supports her claims about American reading habits with facts and statistics that compare past and present reading practices, and she challenges common assumptions by raising questions about reading's intrinsic value. Her purpose is to dispel certain myths about reading in order to raise new and more important questions about the value of reading and other media in our culture. She seems to have a young, hip, somewhat irreverent audience in mind because her tone is sarcastic, and she suggests that the ideas she opposes are old-fashioned positions.


Sandra M. Gilbert, professor of English at the University of California, Davis, in her essay "Plain Jane's Progress" (1977), suggests that Charlotte Brontë intended Jane Eyre to resemble John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress in that Jane's pilgrimage through a series of events based on the enclosure and escape motif eventually lead toward the equality that Brontë herself sought. Gilbert supports this conclusion by using the structure of the novel to highlight the places Jane has been confined, the changes she undergoes during the process of escape, and the individuals and experiences that lead to her maturation concluding that "this marriage of true minds at Ferndean - this is the way" (501). Her purpose is to help readers see the role of women in Victorian England in order to help them understand the uniqueness and daring of Brontë's work. She establishes a formal relationship with her audience of literary scholars interested in feminist criticism who are familiar with the work of Brontë, Bunyan, Lord Byron and others and are intrigued by feminist theory as it relates to Victorian literature.

from http://www.winthrop.edu/english/core/success/preciss.htm