

## PART I

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### *On Reading and Writing*

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##### *Critical Reading and Thinking:*

##### *An Approach to Connecting Cultural Contexts*

How do you respond when you read and think about customs, actions, beliefs, or values that seem different from your own? Consider your reactions as you read the following essay, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema,” by anthropologist Horace Miner. Miner examines a people he describes as obsessed with the idea “that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease.”

HORACE MINER

##### *Body Ritual among the Nacirema*

The anthropologist has become so familiar with the diversity of ways in which different peoples behave in similar situations that he is not apt to be surprised by even the most exotic customs. In fact, if all of the logically possible combinations of behavior have not been found somewhere in the world, he is apt to suspect that they must be present in some yet undescribed tribe. This point has, in fact, been expressed with respect to clan organization by Murdock (1949:71). In this light, the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema present such unusual aspects that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behavior can go.

Professor Linton first brought the ritual of the Nacirema to the attention of anthropologists twenty years ago (1936:326), but the culture of this people is still very poorly understood. They are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and Tarahumare of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, although tradition states that they came from the east. According to Nacirema mythology, their nation was originated by a culture hero, Notgnihsaw, who is otherwise known for two great feats of strength—the throwing of a piece of wampum across the river Pa-To-Mac and the chopping down of a cherry tree in which the Spirit of Truth resided.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people’s time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such a concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man’s only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The more powerful individuals in the society have several shrines in their houses and, in fact, the opulence of a house is often referred to in terms of the number of such ritual centers it possesses. Most houses are of wattle and daub construction, but the

shrine rooms of the more wealthy are walled with stone. Poorer families imitate the rich by applying pottery plaques to their shrine walls.

5

While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but are private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm.

The charm is not disposed of after it has served its purpose, but is placed in the charm-box of the household shrine. As these magical materials are specific for certain ills, and the real or imagined maladies of the people are many, the charm-box is usually full to overflowing. The magical packets are so numerous that people forget what their purposes were and fear to use them again. While the natives are very vague on this point, we can only assume that the idea in retaining all the old magical materials is that their presence in the charm-box, before which the body rituals are conducted, will in some way protect the worshipper.

Beneath the charm-box is a small font. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows his head before the charm-box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of ablution. The holy waters are secured from the Water Temple of the community, where the priests conduct elaborate ceremonies to make the liquid ritually pure.

In the hierarchy of magical practitioners, and below the medicine men in prestige, are specialists whose designation is best translated "holy-mouth-men." The Nacirema have an almost pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them. They also believe that a strong relationship exists between oral and moral characteristics. For example, there is a ritual ablution of the mouth for children which is supposed to improve their moral fiber.

10

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

In addition to the private mouth-rite, the people seek out a holy-mouth-man once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, awls, probes, and prods. The use of these objects in the exorcism of the evils of

the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client. The holy-mouth-man opens the client's mouth and, using the above mentioned tools, enlarges any holes which decay may have created in the teeth. Magical materials are put into these holes. If there are no naturally occurring holes in the teeth, large sections of one or more teeth are gouged out so that the supernatural substance can be applied. In the client's view, the purpose of these ministrations is to arrest decay and to draw friends. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth-men year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay. It is to be hoped that, when a thorough study of the Nacirema is made, there will be careful inquiry into the personality structure of these people. One has but to watch the gleam in the eye of a holy-mouth-man, as he jabs an awl into an exposed nerve, to suspect that a certain amount of sadism is involved. If this can be established, a very interesting pattern emerges, for most of the population shows definite masochistic tendencies. It was to these that Professor Linton referred in discussing a distinctive part of the daily body ritual which is performed only by men. This part of the rite involves scraping and lacerating the surface of the face with a sharp instrument. Special women's rites are performed only four times during each lunar month, but what they lack in frequency is made up in barbarity. As part of this ceremony, women bake their heads in small ovens for about an hour. The theoretically interesting point is that what seems to be a preponderantly masochistic people have developed sadistic specialists. The medicine men have an imposing temple, or *latipso*, in every community of any size. The more elaborate ceremonies required to treat very sick patients can only be performed at this temple. These ceremonies involve not only the thaumaturge but a permanent group of vestal maidens who move sedately about the temple chambers in distinctive costume and headdress.

The *latipso* ceremonies are so harsh that it is phenomenal that a fair proportion of the really sick natives who enter the temple ever recover. Small children whose indoctrination is still incomplete have been known to resist attempts to take them to the temple because "that is where you go to die." Despite this fact, sick adults are not only willing but eager to undergo the protracted ritual purification, if they can afford to do so. No matter how ill the supplicant or how grave the emergency, the guardians of many temples will not admit a client if he cannot give a rich gift to the custodian. Even after one has gained admission and survived the ceremonies, the guardians will not permit the neophyte to leave until he makes still another gift.

15

The supplicant entering the temple is first stripped of all his or her clothes. In every-day life the Nacirema avoids exposure of his body and its natural functions. Bathing and excretory acts are performed only in the secrecy of the household shrine, where they are ritualized as part of the body-rites. Psychological shock results from the fact that body secrecy is suddenly lost upon entry into the *latipso*. A man, whose own wife has never seen him in an excretory act, suddenly finds himself naked and assisted by a vestal maiden while he performs his natural functions into a sacred vessel. This sort of ceremonial treatment is necessitated by the fact that the excreta are used by a diviner to ascertain the course and nature of the client's sickness. Female clients, on the other hand, find their naked bodies are subjected to the scrutiny, manipulation, and prodding of the medicine men.

Few supplicants in the temple are well enough to do anything but lie on their hard beds. The daily ceremonies, like the rites of the holy-mouth-men, involve discomfort and torture. With ritual precision, the vestals awaken their miserable charges each dawn and roll them about on their beds of pain while performing ablutions, in the formal movements of which the maidens are highly trained. At other times they insert magic wands in the supplicant's mouth or force him to eat substances which are supposed to be healing. From time to time the medicine men come to their clients and jab magically treated needles into their flesh. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure, and may even kill the neophyte, in no way decreases the people's faith in the medicine men. There remains one other kind of practitioner, known as a "listener." This witch-doctor has the power to exorcise the devils that lodge in the heads of people who have been bewitched. The Nacirema believe that parents bewitch their own children. Mothers are particularly suspected of putting a curse on children while teaching them the secret body rituals. The countermagic of the witch-doctor is unusual in its lack of ritual. The patient simply tells the "listener" all his troubles and fears, beginning with the earliest difficulties he can remember. The memory displayed by the Nacirema in these exorcism sessions is truly remarkable. It is not uncommon for the patient to bemoan the rejection he felt upon being weaned as a babe, and a few individuals even see their troubles going back to the traumatic effects of their own birth.

In conclusion, mention must be made of certain practices which have their base in native esthetics but which depend upon the pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions. There are ritual fasts to make fat people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people fat. Still other rites are used to make women's breasts larger if they are small, and smaller if they are large. General dissatisfaction with breast shape is symbolized in the fact that the ideal form is virtually outside the range of human variation. A few women afflicted with almost inhuman hypermammary development are so idolized that they make a handsome living by simply going from village to village and permitting the natives to stare at them for a fee.

Reference has already been made to the fact that excretory functions are ritualized, routinized, and relegated to secrecy. Natural reproductive functions are similarly distorted. Intercourse is taboo as a topic and scheduled as an act. Efforts are made to avoid pregnancy by the use of magical materials or by limiting intercourse to certain phases of the moon. Conception is actually very infrequent. When pregnant, women dress so as to hide their condition. Parturition takes place in secret, without friends or relatives to assist, and the majority of women do not nurse their infants.

20

Our review of the ritual life of the Nacirema has certainly shown them to be magic-ridden people. It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens which they have imposed upon themselves. But even such exotic customs as these take on real meaning when they are viewed with the insight provided by Malinowski when he wrote (1948:70):

Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in the developed civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of civilization.

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MALINOWSKI, BRONISLAW. 1948. *Magic, Science, and Religion*. Glencoe, The Free Press.  
MURDOCK, GEORGE P. 1949. *Social Structure*. New York, The Macmillan Co.  
Most readers encountering Miner's essay for the first time agree with his observation that these practices strike "the uninitiated stranger as revolting." These initial responses change, however, as the reader continues reading the essay and notes such details as the twice yearly visit to the "holy-mouth-man" who engages in "unbelievable ritual torture" by enlarging "any holes which decay may have created in the teeth" and inserting "magical materials" into these holes. It soon becomes clear that Miner has been figuratively pulling the reader's leg (or tooth, perhaps) by describing aspects of modern American ("Nacirema" spelled backward) culture in unfamiliar ways. With his exaggerations and distorted viewpoints, he gently pokes fun at what he sees as the American obsession with health and cleanliness. Perhaps more important, he insists that we pay attention to our tendency to look at customs, actions, beliefs, and values that seem different from our own and quickly judge them as strange, odd, or even "revolting."

#### WHAT IS CULTURE?

The title of Miner's essay, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema," leads us to expect that we will be reading about a culture different from our own. To understand the responses often triggered by this expectation, we need first to recognize what is meant by the word *culture*.

Culture may be defined as the ideas, customs, values, skills, and arts of a specific group of people. Most of us belong not to one cultural group but to several. For instance, our age places us in a culture such as childhood, youth, or middle age. We may be called "baby boomers" or "children of the eighties," and these phrases may evoke certain images and value judgments in other people's minds. In addition, we are all either male or female, and the way various societies treat gender differences has traditionally created cultural distinctions between men and women. We also belong to a cultural group that is determined by the country of our birth or the country where our ancestors were born. Our roots may be Norwegian, Japanese, Native American, Irish American, or African American, or they may be found in a combination of ethnic groups. The selections in this book all look at some aspect of the various cultures that make up the United States.

#### WHY READ AND THINK

##### TO UNDERSTAND CULTURES?

Reading and thinking critically in the context of different cultures are skills essential not only for reading this book but also for fully appreciating many other college courses. In addition, these skills are necessary for working effectively in an increasingly diverse environment and for living with tolerance and understanding of the many groups of people who make up the citizens of the United States—and of the world.

In many other courses—for example, history, sociology, psychology, business, science, literature, art, music, and religion—you will study aspects of other cultures. Similarly, in your future professional life you will almost certainly work with people from different cultural groups who are making significant contributions to your chosen field.

Developing the patterns of thinking encouraged in this book will help you to communicate—to read, to speak, and to write—as a fully aware citizen of the multicultural world in which we live.

#### *Exercise 1*

List all the cultural groups to which you see yourself as belonging. These cultural groups may relate to your age, your ethnic background, your religious preference, your political beliefs, and your current work status.

After making the list, choose one of the cultural groups to which you belong and write a paragraph describing the ideas, customs, values, skills, or arts of the group that you see as positive.

### *Exercise 2*

Write a paragraph or two responding to one of the following topics.

A.

Describe an example of something you read or heard in another class that revealed a cultural perspective different from your own. Explain what new ideas or possibilities were suggested by this perspective.

B.

Describe an incident from a television program or a film you have seen that showed you a cultural perspective different from your own. Explain what new ideas or possibilities were suggested by this perspective.

C.

Describe an event from your workplace that showed you a cultural perspective different from your own. Explain what new ideas or possibilities were suggested by this perspective.

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## STRATEGIES FOR READING AND THINKING ACROSS CULTURES

Reading cross-cultural selections thoughtfully and productively calls for both skill and courage. It requires the skill necessary for understanding and evaluating any complex idea or issue. More important, it asks for the courage to approach each writer's work with a mind that remains open to multiple possibilities and points of view. It demands the willingness to see and acknowledge differences yet also to look for similarities and connections. Most of all, reading across cultures asks the reader to avoid hasty judgments, to discard clichéd responses, and to tolerate ambiguity.

### Reading to Respond

When you first read any work, fiction or nonfiction, one of the best strategies is to skim through, noting your responses as you move quickly from point to point. Being aware of initial responses is particularly important when you read across cultures because when you encounter unfamiliar ideas, images, and values, it's easy to feel overwhelmed with new vocabulary, with unexpected examples, or with evaluations that are different from your own.

During a first reading, try not to censor your responses, whether they be negative, positive, or neutral. On the other hand, no matter how much you may agree or disagree with what you are reading, try expressing some of your reactions in the form of questions or open-ended statements that could lead to, rather than close off, discussion. By working with these structures, you'll keep an honest record of your thoughts and feelings; yet you'll also help yourself to remain alert to many different possibilities and directions.

**MARGINAL NOTES**As an example of initial responses, consider the notes one student, Alyssa Clark, wrote in the margins of her book as she read this excerpt from "What's

American about America?” an essay by black American novelist, poet, and editor Ishmael Reed. The original version of this selection appeared in Reed’s 1983 nonfiction book, *Writin’ Is Fightin’*.

ISHMAEL REED

From “What’s American about America?”

An item from the *New York Times*, June 23, 1983: “At the annual Lower East Side Jewish Festival yesterday, a Chinese woman ate a pizza slice in front of Ty Thuan Duc’s Vietnamese grocery store. Beside her a Spanish-speaking family patronized a cart with two signs: ‘Italian Ices’ and ‘Kosher by Rabbi Alper.’ And after the pastrami ran out, everybody ate knishes.”

On the day before Memorial Day, 1983, a poet called me to describe a city he had just visited. He said that one section included mosques, built by the Islamic people who dwelled there. Attending his reading, he said, were large numbers of Hispanic people, 40,000 of whom lived in the same city. He was not talking about a fabled city located in some mysterious region of the world. The city he’d visited was Detroit.

A few months before, as I was visiting Texas, I heard the taped voice used to guide passengers to their connections at the Dallas Airport announcing items in both Spanish and English. This trend is likely to continue; after all, for some southwestern states like Texas, where the largest minority is now Mexican-American, Spanish was the first written language and the Spanish style lives on in the western way of life.

Shortly after my Texas trip, I sat in a campus auditorium at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee as a Yale professor—whose original work on the influence of African cultures upon those of the Americas has led to his ostracism from some intellectual circles—walked up and down the aisle like an old-time Southern evangelist, dancing and drumming the top of the lectern, illustrating his points before some Afro-American intellectuals and artists who cheered and applauded his performance. The professor was “white.” After his lecture, he conversed with a group of Milwaukeeans—all of whom spoke Yoruban, though only the professor had ever traveled to Africa.

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One of the artists there told me that his paintings, which included African and Afro-American mythological symbols and imagery, were hanging in the local McDonald’s restaurant. The next day I went to McDonald’s and snapped pictures of smiling youngsters eating hamburgers below paintings that could grace the walls of any of the country’s leading museums. The manager of the local McDonald’s said, “I don’t know what you boys are doing, but I like it,” as he commissioned the local painters to exhibit in his restaurant.

Such blurring of cultural styles occurs in everyday life in the United States to a greater extent than anyone can imagine. The result is what the above-mentioned Yale professor, Robert Thompson, referred to as a cultural bouillabaisse. Yet members of the nation’s present educational and cultural elect still cling to the notion that the United States belongs to some vaguely defined entity they refer to as “Western civilization,” by which they mean, presumably, a civilization created by people of Europe, as if Europe can even be viewed in monolithic terms. Is Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, which includes Turkish marches, a part of Western civilization? Or the late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century French paintings, whose creators were influenced by Japanese art? And what of the

cubists, through whom the influence of African art changed modern painting? Or the surrealists, who were so impressed with the art of the Pacific Northwest Indians that, in their map of North America, Alaska dwarfs the lower forty-eight states in size?

As Alyssa read this article, she jotted in the margin any question or observation that came to mind. While most people don't stop to analyze their responses, it may be helpful to look closely not only at the *content* of Alyssa's notes but also at the *types* of comments and questions she wrote. Notice that many of her marginal observations fall loosely into the following categories:

1. Questions that ask about people (paragraph 1)
2. Questions that ask about places (paragraph 2)
3. Questions that ask about actions (paragraphs 3, 4)
4. Questions that ask about policies, laws, or customs (paragraph 4)
5. Questions that address the writer's style—such as choice of example, vocabulary, sentence structure, or even unusual punctuation (paragraphs 4, 6)
6. Questions or comments that challenge or call for closer examination of the writer's observations, judgments or evaluations, or inferences (paragraphs 5, 6)
7. Comments that affirm or expand on the writer's observations, judgments, evaluations, or inferences (paragraphs 5, 6)

While there are many more ways of responding to reading, this list suggests the wide variety of ways readers react when they encounter a text. As you form your first responses, never be afraid of these early reactions—don't worry that tentative, initial probings will be wrong, silly, or simplistic. Of course, it's true that you may later change your mind and decide to revise or even reject entirely one or more of your original reactions. But these changes—which you'll base on rereading, on writing in response to reading, and, perhaps, on discussions with your fellow classmates and your instructor—represent progress and development. Rather than indicating that your first responses were unworthy or embarrassing, such changes demonstrate your willingness to apply critical thinking and to remain open to new possibilities.

**JOURNAL ENTRIES** Another useful way of responding to reading is to keep a reading journal. Reading journals take many different forms. They may be kept strictly as individual, exploratory writing, or they may be a course requirement. If you write a journal as a class assignment, the instructor may ask you to write a certain number of entries each week and may specify approximately how long these entries should be. The instructor may also suggest topics or approaches to help you determine the focus of the entries.

Whether you are keeping a journal as a requirement or for personal exploration, writing entries in response to your initial readings can be a helpful way of engaging your mind



with the ideas and feelings the writer expresses. Here are several examples of journal entries that students wrote following their first quick reading of Ishmael Reed's "What's American about America?"

1. I like the way the writer, I. Reed, looks at the positive side. His example of the quote from the *New York Times* in the first paragraph, for example. Here you are shown people from five different nationalities all getting along. But, on the other hand, this seems too ideal to me. From what I've seen and from what you see on television all the time on the news, I would think a situation like this festival would be a place for fights or at least name-calling. Frank Pagiano

2. He (Reed) just describes all these other people who live in these places, but he doesn't talk about the regular Americans. What I don't understand is why he keeps saying "Islamic" or "Hispanic" or "Vietnamese." Aren't these people American? And why does he put quotes when he says "white"? Does he think only white people are real Americans? I can't really figure out his point which he says in his title: "What's American about America?" Lee Ann Jamross

3. When I read about hearing the announcements in Spanish and English, my reaction was, Why should the announcements be in both languages, because this is the U.S. and English is our language. Why should we have to have another language? I know in some places the ballots and other papers like that have to be printed in Spanish and my question is, Why? Stan O'Brien

4. The airport description made me think of traveling in other countries. My family is military and we've lived in Germany, Italy, and Japan. At the civilian airports in major cities, the announcements are in many different languages. And English is always one which I am glad for, because when I am traveling I don't know the language of the country if it's not English. What I noticed was that in most other countries people know more than one language, and I think this is a good idea because it gives you more possibilities of ways to communicate. I think it would be a good idea in this country if we were more aware of other languages and maybe started to learn them in the early grades instead of one or two years in high school. Danya Mielewski

5. "Bouillabaisse." I circled this word as one I didn't know, and I had to look it up because it seemed to me to be important in regard to what the paragraph was saying. Well, it means "a chowder made with several kinds of fish and shellfish, vegetables, and seasoning." At first I thought, well, this is like the "melting pot" which you hear as a way to describe this country. But then I thought, no, because in a melting pot everything just goes together and becomes one big mass and you can't tell the different parts. But in this "bouillabaisse," which Reed says Robert Thompson calls America, you would still see all the parts (like the different kinds of fish and the different vegetables). So they would still be themselves, but they would be working together to make something different, too (which would be the chowder). So I'm thinking if America is like this. Do all the different groups stay separate in some ways but work together in others? William Ferguson

As you can see from these journal entries, readers respond very differently to what they read. The following list briefly evaluates and comments on each of the entries.

1.

Frank Pagiano identifies one particular detail that he admires in the essay and then explains his reasons. His comment goes on, however, to show some reservations he feels about the accuracy of this detail.

2.

In her entry, Lee Ann Jamross asks many questions about the terms Reed uses to describe groups of people. Her final questions raise points concerning definition: she wonders exactly how Reed defines “Americans.”

3.

Stan O’Brien’s initial response is to challenge an assumption Reed makes. O’Brien doesn’t flatly reject Reed’s point about the Spanish language announcements, but the tone of his questions show that he is not entirely convinced.

4.

Taking a viewpoint quite different from Stan O’Brien’s, Danya Mielewski addresses the same issue: the use of more than one language within the United States. Mielewski uses personal examples as a way of exploring the ideas that were inspired by Reed’s essay.

5.

William Ferguson focuses on one unfamiliar word in Reed’s essay. Because this word seemed central to the meaning of the paragraph in which it occurred, and because he couldn’t figure out the meaning of the word from the context in which it was used, Ferguson used a dictionary to help him get started. After finding the dictionary definition, he spent time pondering the implications of the comparison Robert Thompson (cited by Reed) makes between the American culture and the chowder called bouillabaisse. By looking at language closely and by refusing to be discouraged or put off by a word he didn’t know, Ferguson discovered an idea he considered worth pursuing.

These five entries suggest ways of writing journal entries as initial responses to reading. Notice that many of the entries focus on questions and that most of them keep possibilities open rather than seeking one simple, easy answer. These entries also reflect the way early responses draw heavily on the reader’s own experiences and knowledge. In addition, note that two of the sample entries (3 and 4) disagree with each other, yet each asks thoughtful questions and raises important issues. The point here is that there is no one “correct” way to respond to any piece of reading. In addition, when these students returned to Reed’s essay to read it for a second or third time, many of them changed or modified their initial responses. Points that may have seemed puzzling during the first reading became clear during the second; issues that seemed straightforward revealed previously unnoted complexities; opinions that seemed convincing now appeared unsupported by sufficient evidence. The richness in reading—and particularly in reading across cultures—lies in the diversity and the possibilities it offers.

### *Exercise 3*

Read the following article written by Lynda Gorov, a staff writer for the *Boston Globe*. “Classes Clashing,” which appeared in the *Globe* on July 13, 1999, addresses some of the problems that arise when affordable housing becomes difficult to find.

As you read, make notes in the margins to record your responses. Then write a journal entry expanding on at least one of those responses.

LYNDA GOROV

*Classes Clashing*

One morning not long ago, aspiring musician Jason Bowman awoke to discover he was yuppie scum.

The words were spray-painted right there on the outside of the loft building where he lives and works in San Francisco's Mission district: Get Out Yuppie Scum. Bowman, 26, said he tried not to take the message personally and made no plans to move.

"I don't make enough money to qualify for the yuppie label, although I'd sure like to," said Bowman, whose computer-based dance band is called Memory Man. "But anything that looks new and shiny is a target, and I guess my building qualifies as one of them."

Other targets include sushi bars and sport-utility vehicles, anything that stands out as too upscale, too ostentatious, for one of San Francisco's last working-class neighborhoods.

To longtime locals, they symbolize the Silicon Valley cash and stock market profits that are pricing them out of their homes. Every BMW, every coffee bar, stands as a reminder of the squeeze on affordable apartments.

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Although many regret the vandalism, not even city officials dispute that a class struggle is taking place in the still-gritty, heavily Hispanic Mission district on the east side of the city. Similar battles have been fought, and mostly lost, across San Francisco, which now boasts some of the priciest real estate in the nation. Mission renters worry that their neighborhood is next, leaving them with no place to live in a city that claims to celebrate diversity of all kinds. It stands as a kind of emblem of the underside of the economic upsurge in cities across America—the ever starker divide between those who own and those who don't.

"People in the middle are being squeezed, and the people at the bottom are being squashed," said Richard Marquez, a tenant activist with the neighborhood group Mission Agenda and Eviction Defense Network. "But we could still turn the tide in the Mission."

Until their leader was arrested, in the hours before dawn, allegedly covered with wallpaper paste, project members spent six months plastering the Mission with flyers encouraging the bombing of "yuppie" bars and restaurants. The flyers urged people to strike out at newcomers by breaking windows, slashing tires, and scratching paint on yuppie cars, specifically Lexuses, Porsches, Jaguars and SUVs. Spray-painting their newly remodeled live-work spaces was offered as another alternative. "Trash them all," the flyers said. . . .

On the advice of legal counsel, unemployed temp worker Kevin Keating declined to claim credit for the anti-yuppie crusade. But few doubt he was behind the flyers signed Nestor Makhno, the name of a Ukrainian anarchist who killed landlords during the Russian Revolution. In mid-May, police raided his apartment and arrested Keating, 38. No charges have been filed, but police said the investigation continues.

"If the language in the posters was any less provocative, nobody would have paid attention," said Keating, who has lived in the Mission for 11 years and pays \$800 a month for what he described as a large single room with low ceilings. "But what we really need is a large organization of all of us together to preserve the neighborhood for the working class."

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Seated in the Atlas Cafe, which, like many of the newer neighborhood establishments, used to have a Spanish name and serve a Hispanic clientele, Keating clearly relished the outcry his alleged handiwork has caused. But threatening posters aside, the rush of

money into the Mission may be impossible to stop. Even at \$500,000, lofts in the neighborhood are relatively inexpensive by San Francisco standards. At \$350,000, a two-bedroom fixer-upper is considered a steal. . . .

Citywide, the median sale price for a three-bedroom house was \$361,410 in 1998; a two-bedroom apartment typically rented for \$2,008. In a city where more than two-thirds of the residents rent, the vacancy rate was a minuscule 1 percent. As city planner Charlotte Barham explained, even many middle-class people can no longer afford to buy a first home.

“Clearly you don’t want to force everyone who doesn’t make \$100,000 a year out of San Francisco,” said Paul Zeger, president of Pacific Marketing Association, which sells properties throughout the Bay Area and sold 45 Mission units costing \$220,000 to \$695,000 in a single weekend. “But if you shut down the forces of growth, things are going to go down and down and down for the city.”

For now, at least, the young urban professionals who bear the sobriquet “yuppie” appear to have the upper hand in the Mission. Every renter seems to know someone who has been evicted by a landlord who wants to move into the newly hot neighborhood or convert his building to condominiums—often unlawfully, activists claimed.

15

At the same time, rental vacancies are almost nonexistent; over a two-week period last year, Ted Gullicksen, manager of the San Francisco Tenants Union, said he saw only one Mission rental advertised in local newspapers, although as many as 80 percent of neighborhood residents are renters.

“There is actually a downside to prosperity,” said P. J. Johnston, spokesman for Mayor Willie Brown’s reelection campaign. “We’re in the midst of one now. It’s a draw for people who want to live in this city, and it’s driving up real estate and housing prices.” . . .

Keating, along with the housing activists who tend to oppose his tactics, said they know they can’t save everything in the Mission. Their more modest goal is to save what they can, and preserve as much of the vibrant, economically and racially diverse neighborhood as possible. Otherwise San Francisco will lose some of its soul, they said, with the Mission becoming just another bedroom community for Silicon Valley commuters.

“Gentrification has hit the neighborhood hard, but there are still things worth fighting for,” said James Tracy, an organizer with the Eviction Defense Network. “It’s going to be too late shortly. It’s not too late now.”

#### Reading to Understand

After you explore your initial responses to something you have read, the next step is to return to the selection and reread carefully to be certain you have an accurate understanding of what the writer is saying and how he or she is saying it. It is easy, during the first reading, to skip over essential points, to miss important evidence, or to be overwhelmed by the emotions the piece arouses.

Writing down and talking about initial responses and then returning to the text before you make firm evaluations are essential parts of critical thinking. While these steps are part of any careful, thoughtful reading, they are particularly important for reading across cultures. When we read something written from a cultural viewpoint that is different from our own, we may jump to unwarranted conclusions or fail to see the point the author is making.

One way to delay the rush to judgment as you read and reread is to look for the author's main idea as well as for the points that support that idea. Until you fully understand what the writer is saying, it's impossible to move from an initial response to a logical and carefully thought out evaluation of those ideas.

**SUMMARIZING TO IDENTIFY IDEAS**A useful strategy for gaining a clear sense of what the author is saying is to try writing a summary of the selection. When you summarize, you move from your own initial responses to an objective view of the writer's ideas. In a summary, you briefly restate in your own words the author's main idea or ideas and, often, the most important supporting points. Useful summaries usually share the following qualities:

1. They clearly identify the author's main point or points.
2. They identify the most important supporting points.
3. They make clear the relationship between the main point and the supporting points.
4. They condense these points without omitting essential ideas.
5. They are stated primarily in your own words. If you use any of the author's words, they should be enclosed in quotation marks and properly documented.
6. They focus on the author's ideas and feelings and do not include your own observations or evaluations.

Here are sample paragraphs written by three different students who read "Classes Clashing" and were asked to write a summary of what they had read. As you read these paragraphs, consider which one best demonstrates the qualities just listed for summaries, and note your reasons for making this judgment. Then compare your observations with the analysis of the summaries that follows the samples.

A. Jason Bowman, who lives in San Francisco, found words painted on the building he lives in calling him "Yuppie Scum," but he does not agree because he does not make that much money. He is not the only one to have this kind of thing happen. Other targets include sushi bars, sport-utility vehicles, and anything too upscale or ostentatious. This is because people in the Mission district in San Francisco are having a class struggle between Hispanics and whites. The problem is that people without much money are put in a situation where they cannot afford to get housing. San Francisco prefers street theater to politics and has a group called the "Yuppie Eradication Project." This project wants to scare internet money-makers. For six months, flyers have appeared in the Mission district. Kevin Keating is a leader of this. He was seated in the Atlas Cafe, and he said that the issue is about changing the way a neighborhood feels and looks and whether poor people are welcome there. Prices of rent have gone way up. Many people have been evicted. Keating wants to fight to keep the Mission district for all people, not just yuppies.

B. The central idea of this article is that the people who live in the Mission district do not want yuppies moving in because it forces the original tenants out of their buildings.

Because of this, some of the original people are organizing and even painting graffiti to try to get yuppies and their cars and businesses out. But I don't see that these people should get very much sympathy because they should not be doing things that damage property. Also, it's not the fault of the yuppies that they are moving into this neighborhood. They have earned money, so why shouldn't they spend it however they want? Maybe the people who are protesting should just try to get better jobs.

C. In "Classes Clashing," Lynda Gorov begins with a series of examples that lead to her central point. A conflict taking place between the original residents of a neighborhood and the more well-to-do residents who are now moving in represents a struggle that is taking place all across America. Gorov describes the Mission district in San Francisco as a place that currently "celebrates diversity," but she notes that original residents, many of whom are Hispanic, are worried about the changes they see. One of their main concerns is the increasing cost of rental units and real estate, but they are also worried about the flavor of the neighborhood changing when they see their shops and restaurants replaced by sushi bars and their streets crowded with BMWs and sport utility vehicles. Some original tenants have organized and have even engaged in such activities as writing negative graffiti in order to fight to preserve this "vibrant, economically and racially diverse neighborhood" to whatever extent they can before it is too late.

Example A does not fit the definition of a summary. First, this sample does not clearly identify the central point, and it does not differentiate between main ideas and supporting ideas. Instead, it simply plows through the essay chronologically, picking up details here and there. Some of the details are important points—for example, "The problem is that people without much money are put in a situation where they cannot afford to get housing." Yet the same paragraph that gives this information begins with three sentences talking about James Bowman, whose situation is simply used as an opening example. In addition, this paragraph contains a sentence stating that "San Francisco prefers street theater to politics," which is both a misreading and an insignificant detail that should not appear in a summary. Finally, several sentences take words directly from the article without enclosing them in quotation marks or providing correct documentation. For instance, note the third from last sentence, which takes the words "changing the way a neighborhood feels and looks and whether poor people are welcome there" directly from the quotation of Keating's words.

This example demonstrates two problems that can arise from failing to read carefully: (1) not establishing a clear overview of the author's ideas and (2) not understanding how the author uses details, reasons, and examples to support those ideas.

Example B is not really a summary at all. Instead, it is a response. While responding freely to a text is essential, a different process is required for summarizing. Without summarizing (or using a similar clarifying strategy), the reader never moves beyond initial responses to carefully considered judgments.

The writer of Example B starts off with two sentences that might well begin a summary, as they do suggest Gorov's main idea. The rest of Example B, however, expresses opinions and asks questions. Although it's important to react and respond to what you read throughout the reading process, it's also essential to be able to set aside those responses at some point and look objectively at what the author is saying. You cannot move on to evaluate the author's ideas—or to evaluate your own responses to those ideas—until you understand the main and supporting points clearly.

Example C is a useful summary of “Classes Clashing.” In the opening sentences, the writer provides a context by mentioning both the author’s name and the title of the article and by suggesting the author’s central point. Notice that the student does not waste time detailing the opening anecdote about Jason Bowman. Many articles and essays begin with a short story or a series of examples that lead to the main point, which may not be stated until several paragraphs into the piece. This is the case with “Classes Clashing,” and the writer of Example C has recognized Gorov’s structure. This student has read through the entire article and has seen how the parts of the piece fit together. Rather than writing a summary that simply moves chronologically through the essay, the student provides an overview of what happens throughout (see sentence 2) and then offers examples that develop this overview.

This student correctly uses quotation marks to identify words taken directly from Gorov’s article and refrains from giving opinions or making evaluations. The act of writing the summary, then, accomplishes at least two goals: (1) It allows the student writer to understand clearly what Gorov is saying, and (2) it provides time to think and thus to avoid the rush to unconsidered judgments.

#### *Exercise 4*

Reread the excerpt from Ishmael Reed’s “What’s American about America?” Then read the following summaries of that excerpt. Applying the criteria given on pages 17–18, and following the process used in the evaluations on pages 19–20, state which summary you believe demonstrates the clearest understanding of Reed’s observations, and explain the reasons for your choice.

A. In Ishmael Reed’s article “What’s American about America?” he seems to wonder about all the different kinds of people in this country. He lists a lot of examples of the different kinds of people, like Italian, Islamic, and Spanish. He is saying that announcements on speakers at airports should be in Spanish, too. Also, he wants professors to talk about other cultures, even if they’re white. But maybe if a professor was white, he wouldn’t be as much of an expert on another culture, so I would say that this point is a problem.

B. Ishmael Reed in his article “What’s American about America?” tells about an item he read in the *New York Times* that describes a festival attended by people of many different nationalities. He also tells about a poet who talked to Hispanic people in Detroit who were Islamic. While in Texas, Reed heard an airport announcement in both Spanish and English; and when he returned, he listened to a Yale professor whose original work on African cultures led to his ostracism from some intellectual circles. This professor was a white man.

Reed also went to a McDonald’s and took pictures of kids eating hamburgers. Then he talks about a cultural bouillabaisse and about Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, the cubists, and the surrealists.

C. In this excerpt from his essay “What’s American about America?” Ishmael Reed gives a series of examples that illustrate the question he asks in the title. This question suggests that it is difficult, if not impossible, to give any one single definition of “American.” Instead, as the examples show, America is made up of many different kinds of people from many different backgrounds. Some of the groups he mentions are religious, for example, Jewish and Islamic. Other groups relate to the country where these people or their ancestors came from, for example, Chinese, African, and Hispanic. All the examples

lead to the final paragraph, where Reed quotes Yale professor Robert Thompson, who calls the United States “a cultural bouillabaisse” (p. 9). This comparison reinforces the main idea by showing that American culture is like a soup made of many different ingredients, where each ingredient stays separate yet also combines in an interesting way with the other ingredients.

#### *Exercise 5*

Choose a selection from chapters 4 to 12 of this book, read it carefully, and then write a summary. As you write, keep in mind the examples you have just read as well as the qualities of a strong summary listed on pages 17–18.

**READING TO UNDERSTAND INFERENCES** When you make inferences, you use hints or suggestions to understand more completely what a writer or speaker is saying. For example, if you show your uncle the hiking boots you have decided to buy, he might note that the high tops of the boots will be uncomfortable on summer hikes. While your uncle has not stated that you should reconsider your decision, you can infer that meaning from his comment. In other words, you have to go beyond an understanding of his literal statement and recognize the implications of what he has said.

In a similar manner, to understand fully what you are reading, you need to do more than identify the author’s main points and supporting points. You need to delve more deeply so that you can recognize ideas, feelings, and values that are not directly stated but are, instead, implied.

When you make inferences, you use hints or suggestions in the material you read to understand more completely what the writer is saying. For instance, in the excerpt from “What’s American about America?” Ishmael Reed mentions listening to a Yale professor speak on “the influence of African cultures upon those of the Americas.” Nowhere in that paragraph does Reed directly state his attitude toward the professor or toward those he describes as disapproving of the professor. Yet the words and images he chooses allow the reader to infer that Reed admires the speaker and scorns those who fail to see the worth of his work. For example, he shows us the professor “dancing and drumming the top of the lectern.” These activities would be interpreted by many readers as lively, energetic (and, therefore, positive) actions—as opposed to the negative “ostracism” the professor encounters from some “intellectual circles.” We can infer that these “intellectual circles” who shun the professor are probably white. Certainly, they are not black, since in the next sentence we are told that he is “cheered and applauded” by “Afro-American intellectuals and artists.” From these details, the reader can infer Reed’s disapproval of the white intellectuals’ response, his affirmation of the Afro-American intellectuals’ responses, and his admiration for the professor.

When you read to make inferences, you “read between the lines” to see what the writer suggests as well as what he or she actually states. As you develop your ability to make inferences, keep in mind the following suggestions:

1. Notice the writer’s choice of words and be sensitive to the *connotation* (the emotional associations of the words) as well as the *denotation* (the dictionary definition of the words).
- 2.



Notice the examples the writer chooses to describe an individual or a place or to explain a point. Consider the responses these examples evoke from readers.

3.

Notice any value judgments the writer makes and consider whether these stated judgments help you to understand the writer's attitude toward other topics he or she discusses.

4.

Notice any biases the writer reveals and consider how these views might relate to what he or she discusses.

#### *Exercise 6*

Reread Lynda Gorov's article "Classes Clashing," noting carefully her choice of words and details as she describes the conflict in San Francisco's Mission district. Note also the examples she chooses and the people she interviews to illustrate the central idea of the article.

Then list the inferences you can make about Gorov's attitude toward the conflict. With which group does her sympathy seem to lie? Does she portray the newcomers to the Mission district more sympathetically than the older residents? Does she emphasize the plight of the older residents? Or does she present the concerns of both groups equally? Next, write a brief paragraph discussing the inferences you can make about Gorov's views of this clash of classes. Remember to go beyond what is actually stated and consider what is implied.

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#### Reading to Evaluate

While the process of reading is highly complex and varies widely from individual to individual, most effective critical reading moves through the two stages just described—responding and understanding—to a third stage: evaluating.

To evaluate what you read (and your responses to what you read), you need to think carefully both about what the author states and implies and about the way you initially react to those statements and inferences. When you are reading selections written by people with varied cultural backgrounds, you have to work diligently to establish intelligent, fair criteria (standards) by which to evaluate what you have read. Then you use these criteria to make sensible, balanced judgments that you can explain in speaking or writing.

**ESTABLISHING CRITERIA** When you make judgments about anything, you begin by establishing your criteria. For example, suppose you want to buy a new pair of shoes. Before you even begin looking, you start making a list of criteria in your head. These criteria are, of course, affected by many circumstances and, obviously, do not remain exactly the same for every pair of shoes you buy. For instance, if you are buying shoes to wear on a job that requires you to stand on your feet for eight hours a day, your criteria might include comfortable fit, sturdy material, cushioned innersoles, and low cost. On the other hand, if you are buying shoes to wear as part of a wedding party, your criteria might change to include a formal style, a specific color, comfortable fit, and low cost. Notice that while some of the criteria change to suit the specific circumstances, other criteria (comfortable fit and low cost) remain the same.

As you develop criteria to evaluate what you read, you'll find that the process is similar. Some criteria will remain important to you no matter what you are reading. Other criteria

may need to be established to fit the particular selection. For instance, if you are reading an essay written by someone from a culture very different from your own, you may find that to make a fair judgment, you have to revise or even discard some of your old standards. You may need to look at this writing in an entirely new way.

As you develop criteria for evaluating what you read, keep the following suggestions in mind:

1.

*Consider the author.* What do you know about the author? (In this book, the headnotes that precede each piece give some information about the author.) Do the author's credentials give you confidence in his or her knowledge of the topic? Do you have any reason to expect bias in the selection?

2.

*Consider the audience.* For whom was the author originally writing? (In this book, the headnote often provides this information by telling you where the selection was first published.) To what extent do you believe the author would have been successful in communicating with this audience? For instance, how well does he or she seem to consider both *who* the readers are (their age, sex, ethnic background, political philosophy, religious beliefs, occupation, economic status) and *what they might already know* (level of education, experience with the topic, preconceptions about the topic).

To what extent do you believe this author is successful in communicating with you and your fellow students as an audience? (Consider the same aspects related to audience analysis that are listed in the previous paragraph.)

3.

*Consider the author's purpose.* While it's usually not possible to determine one specific reason for an author's writing any given selection, keep in mind that there are three broad aims for writing:

a.

*Writing to express emotions, ideas, incidents, observations.* When authors write expressively, they are usually describing something, often by telling a true story about a situation they have experienced or observed. Their purpose is to create a picture made of words that will show the reader a new way of looking at some aspect of life.

b.

*Writing to explain.* When authors write to explain, they convey information and, often, prove a point about the subjects they explore. To accomplish their purpose, they may analyze, evaluate, synthesize, describe a process, make a comparison, define an unfamiliar concept, or explain the causes and effects of an action or decision—or they may use a combination of two or more of these strategies.

c.

*Writing to persuade.* When authors write to persuade, they offer evidence or make emotional appeals designed to convince the reader to acknowledge and accept as true the idea they are promoting. Often, in addition to urging readers to accept a certain idea, the author also hopes to move them to take certain actions.

Identifying the author's aim allows you to establish criteria to determine how well he or she has achieved it.

4.

*Consider the author's use of details, reasons, and examples.* After you have identified the author's intended audience and purpose, you need to look carefully at the way he or she works to communicate to the audience and, thus, accomplish the aim. Depending on the audience and aim you have identified, you may want to consider either or both of the following:

a.

*Use of evidence.* Does the author provide evidence that convincingly supports the points he or she is making? For instance, if statistics are used, are they clearly explained and do they come from sources you believe to be reliable? If the author quotes experts, are these individuals' qualifications mentioned so that you can determine their reliability?

b.

*Use of emotional appeals.* Does the author use examples, anecdotes (brief stories), or specific words that appeal particularly strongly to the readers' emotions? If so, do these emotional appeals help the writer to communicate effectively, or are these appeals a hindrance? Many readers find that emotional appeals enhance a writer's efforts when the appeals seem honest. When emotional appeals seem manipulative, many readers resent them. There are no easy tests to separate an "honest" use of emotion from a "manipulative" use. You'll need to establish your own reading sensibilities to make such judgments.

5.

*Consider the values represented.* In addition to evaluating how effectively the author communicates with the audience, you may also assess the values suggested by the author's statements. For example, you might read a selection that succeeds in communicating the author's viewpoint, yet you might disagree with it.

When you make judgments about an author's values, you also think about and explore your own values, which serve as your criteria for evaluating the writer. As you read selections by writers who may share some, but not all, of your own values, you'll often need to rethink both the views the author holds and the views you hold. This rethinking is the most challenging—and, often, disturbing—part of reading critically. It is challenging because it requires you to examine what you believe to be true about the way humans should interact with each other, with their institutions, and with their environment. It can be disturbing because as you read the thoughts and feelings of writers with views different from your own, you may find yourself questioning some of your own beliefs and ideals. The process may be less distressing if you consider that changing an opinion or belief—or, conversely, affirming in a new way an old belief or opinion—is an essential part of becoming an educated man or woman. If you were to pass through college entirely untouched by what you read or heard, you would be wasting a great deal of time and money.

USING CRITERIA TO EVALUATE: JOURNAL ENTRIES Once you have thought about the criteria you are using to evaluate a selection, you need to apply them. Writing journal entries is one way to do this.

An explanation of journal writing and several models of journal entries appear on pages 12–14. While these samples show students' responses rather than evaluations, the process is basically the same. You simply sit down and put on paper the evaluations that come to your mind as you are considering your criteria. In a journal entry, you are not worrying

about formal aspects of writing such as organization, style, and mechanics; instead, you are using writing as a way of thinking. Here are two sample journal entries evaluating “Classes Clashing” by Lynda Gorov (pages 15–17).

As I read Lynda Gorov’s article, I noticed that she used several quotations to explain to the reader exactly what is going on in the Mission district in San Francisco. I thought that having these direct quotations made the situation come to life. These events are happening to real people and affecting individual lives. I also noticed that she began with a quotation from Jason Bowman, a musician who has just moved into the Mission district, and ends with a quotation from James Tracy, who works for the older residents of the district who are now being evicted. I thought beginning with a sympathetic quote for one point of view and ending with a sympathetic quote for the other point of view provided a kind of balance that really made you think about how complex this problem really is. Barbara St. Lawrence

What I noticed was that Lynda Gorov provided some hard data such as the dollar amounts of the cost of loft apartments in the Mission district and the average prices for houses and rental apartments in the city of San Francisco in general. She also stated that more than two thirds of the residents of the city rent and that the percent of vacant apartments is only one percent. I found these numbers very convincing as Gorov described the issues that created this conflict. I believe that statistics can show an overview of how most people, not just the few mentioned in the article, are affected. Mark Nyguen

These journal entries look at Gorov’s article in markedly different ways, yet both make evaluations. Barbara St. Lawrence bases her evaluation on the power of anecdotal evidence and personal quotations to make the story seem more immediate and powerful because she has shown how the lives of individuals are affected. Mark Nyguen, on the other hand, looks at Gorov’s use of numbers and statistics. He values the broad overview this data provides and finds by Gorov’s use of such evidence that the problem is indeed pressing and complex. While both of these writers find Gorov’s article compelling, they do so for very different reasons. Just as there is no one correct response to a reading selection, there is no one correct evaluation. Evaluations differ according to the criteria used and the way those criteria are applied.

USING CRITERIA TO EVALUATE: DISCUSSIONS Discussing what you have read with others is another way to explore your responses and to develop evaluations. An instructor may ask you to participate in class discussions or small-group discussions, or you may form your own group with other students to talk about what you have read. The great advantage to discussion is that it provides multiple viewpoints and keeps your responses and evaluations fluid. That is, you often find yourself developing new ideas or revising old ideas in reaction to what you hear. As an example of the way discussions can help readers to discover and explore ideas, consider the following transcript. It records the comments and questions of several students who had read and written journal entries responding to Ishmael Reed’s “What’s American about America?”

*Frank:* He’s just not realistic—he doesn’t—I don’t think—he doesn’t see the bad side to all this together stuff. To me, this fiesta or festival—whatever—couldn’t happen today.  
*Lee Ann:* But that’s just one example. He doesn’t—well, I don’t think he’s saying that this happens all the time because here in—in this paragraph here (paragraph 5)—he

shows about the “ostracism,” as he says, of the white professor. So he does see that conflict and that’s realistic, I think.

*Stan:* He’s realistic about the so-called intellectual circle—and you can see they’re white—or they’re not black, anyway because of paragraph 4, about the “Afro-American intellectuals.” But he’s not realistic about expecting announcements to be in two languages.

*Danya:* Everybody keeps saying “realistic” but what exactly do you mean? Does it have to be something that really happens all the time? Does it have to be something like—what I’m wondering is—like an actual current fact everywhere to be worth reading about it? Is that what it has to be for it to be realistic? I mean, it could be like the “I Have a Dream” which they play all the time on Martin Luther King’s birthday. Which is something that is what you hope for but it may not be happening everywhere—or maybe it’s going to happen in the future.

*William:* But if it’s like a dream—so it isn’t realistic—then what about all the examples he gives? They’re supposed to be real, as far as I can see. I mean, he doesn’t—there’s no place where he says, “I wish this would happen.”

*Lee Ann:* Well, maybe not a dream like future fantasy or something but like looking at the best possible case—in his opinion that is. So like maybe “idealistic” is the word instead of “realistic” or “dream.”

In this short sample discussion, the participants express their own ideas, and, in addition, they listen carefully to what others have to say. Not only do they state opinions, but they also ask questions and indicate an openness to change. For example, they start out working with the idea of “realism” as a possible way to describe (and perhaps evaluate) the essay. As the discussion moves along, they explore the possibility of seeing Reed’s ideas as a “dream” and then move to considering “idealistic” as perhaps a better description. The discussion is by no means finished; it’s easy to see that there are many different directions it could take. Also, note that a discussion like this need not have as its goal finding one consensual “answer.” Groups working together do not always have to agree. In fact, rather than insisting on compromise and closure, the most fruitful discussions usually value the way multiple voices open fresh possibilities and raise new questions.

When you discuss what you read with others, keep the following suggestions in mind:

1.  
Before the discussion, read thoughtfully and carefully, making notes that record your questions and observations.
2.  
When you come to the discussion, bring notes, summaries, journal entries—anything you’ve written that may help you participate in the discussion.
3.  
Respect your own ideas and come prepared to support them with specific references to what you have read.
4.  
Respect the ideas of others and listen with full attention, rather than planning what you are going to say next while others are speaking.
- 5.

Remember that disagreeing with what someone else says or offering a different viewpoint is a legitimate—and useful—part of discussion.

6.

Ask for clarification whenever you are not sure what a person means (for example, if someone uses a term like *courage*, *duty*, or *patriotic*, you might want to ask for a definition).

7.

Encourage quiet participants to enter into the conversation—perhaps by asking them their opinion on a specific point.

#### *Exercise 7*

Read a selection from chapters 4 to 12. As you read, make notes in the margins, and then write a journal entry describing an initial response to the selection.

Next, reread the selection carefully, identifying the main idea and the primary supporting ideas. Then write a summary of no more than two paragraphs showing that you understand the main and supporting ideas.

Finally, consider ways to evaluate what you have read. If possible, discuss the selection with other students. Then write a journal entry that evaluates some aspect of the selection. As you do this exercise, keep in mind the following summary of the critical-reading process, remembering that the strategies do not always proceed in this exact order. For example, many readers make inferences as they first read and respond. And most readers develop new responses throughout the reading process, not just when they first encounter a text.

#### *Summary: Critical-Reading Process*

1.

Initial responding

2.

Second responding (responding to responses)

3.

Clarifying meaning (summarizing, making inferences)

4.

Evaluating (establishing criteria, forming judgments)

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