21W.777 The Science Essay
Spring 2009

Leading Class Discussion of Readings

Your aim
Your goal is not to critique this essay; it's to uncover as much meaning and technique as you can, and engage classmates in considering the writer's ideas: What are these ideas? Why might they matter? What would it mean if they were true?

Preliminaries
- Tell or remind the class who the author is (Scientist? Science writer? Novelist? Etc.).
- Note the main contexts in which the author wants us to consider his or her ideas; if you have additional personal contexts, note those as well (e.g.: my family had a summer camping experience exactly like the one described in this essay…; I just read an article for another class on a similar topic…).
- Note the title of the essay and what it leads us to expect.

Getting into the essay
- Note what you think is the writer's main idea, and her or his purpose in writing the essay. Ask the class: Do you agree? Disagree? Do you want to qualify or modify the idea and purpose? You and the class should use evidence from the text to support claims.
- Be ready with 3 elements of the text that you want to bring to our attention— structure, language, metaphors, tone, use of expert testimony, etc., etc.
  - Why are these elements noteworthy?—that is, why do you think they stood out for you?, and
  - How are they linked to meaning in the essay? –you can ask the class to chime in on this.
- Prepare 3 questions related to the content and purpose of the essay that you would like the class to discuss. These may be aspects of the essay that puzzle you, questions that the author raises, points that you disagree with (or think you do), questions that the essay raises for you . . ..

Wrap up
- Do have any final comments, or new questions, either about writing essays or about the ideas posed by the writer?
- I will also chime in here if there's a particular point or two I want to make.