

Sample Close Reading

Essay thesis:

The *Sejarah Melayu*'s battle sequences are traumatizing.

Evidence supporting thesis:

"The earth was a sea of blood" in Chapter 2, page 19.

Close reading strategies:

- 1) Moving from description (e.g. "The sentence is short") to analysis (e.g. "The shortness matters because it gives the sentence a forceful impact comparable to a blow from a blunt instrument").
- 2) Taking sentence apart word by word ("earth," "sea," "blood").

Sample 200-word body paragraph applying these strategies:

The trauma of battle is condensed in the chillingly brief sentence "The earth was a sea of blood." The sentence's brevity—containing as it does only three elemental nouns—gives it a forceful impact comparable to a blow from a blunt instrument. The first noun, "earth," evokes a sense of scale, contributing to the battle sequence's traumatizing effect because destruction from the warfare being described is made to seem so vast and so all-encompassing that there can be no possible escape from it. Shifting from the first noun to the second, "sea," creates an unsettling vertigo, as it makes soil seem to be mutating into water in real time: the reader may think that they are standing on solid ground at the beginning of the sentence, but the ground's transformation into liquid ocean by the middle makes the reader feel as though they have lost their footing, and are now adrift in a massive body of water. The image of a sea of "blood" is especially disturbing because of the insidious way in which it disrupts the reader's expectations. We expect a sea to be blue, but picturing a sea that is in fact blood-red feels to the reader as though they have fallen into a warped alternate reality in which everything is unfamiliar. The overall result is one of intense disorientation and confusion, a mental foggy emblematic of experiencing trauma.