

Sample Passage: *Sejarah Melayu*, Chapter 2, pages 18-20

“When all had foregathered, Raja Chulin set out to repel Raja Shulan. His army was as a sea at full tide, the elephants and horses were like islands in the sea, the banners and pennons were like a forest, the weapons were serried row upon row and the hair-pendants on the javelins looked like a field of lalang in blossom. When they had advanced some ten miles, the army of Raja Shulan was encountered and battle was joined. The din was unimaginable. Those who had elephants pitted them against those of their adversaries, those who had horses made them bite the foe’s horses, those who had bows plucked the strings of their bows, those who had lances thrust with their lances, those who had spears thrust with their spears and those who had swords hacked with their swords. Weapons fell thick and fast like heavy rain. Even had it thundered in the heavens the sound would not have been heard for the battle cries of the warriors and only the clash of weapon upon weapon would have been heard. So thick was the dust of conflict that the light of day was darkened as by an eclipse of the sun, and such was the confusion that friend could not be told from foe. Attackers were themselves attacked, here and there men even stabbed their own friends. The dead lay thick on either side, men, elephants and horses. The earth was a sea of blood. And when the cloud of dust lifted, there they were still fighting desperately, neither side yielding an inch. Raja Chulin then brought in his elephant to the attack and charged the countless host of Raja Shulan, leaving a trail of heaped corpses wherever he charged. Such was the carnage in their ranks that the men of Kalinga gave ground. When he saw this, Raja Shulan rushed into the fray, hurling a challenge at Raja Chulin. He was mounted on an elephant of prodigious size that was moreover in season and stood eight cubits at the shoulder. But the elephant of Raja Chulin was no coward, and the two elephants met and fought, with a crash like that of a thunderbolt splitting a hill, while the clash of tusk on tusk sounded like peal on peal of thunder. Neither elephant would own defeat. And Raja Chulin stood up on his elephant poising his spear which he then hurled at Raja Shulan: and it passed clean through the howdah, projecting a finger span on the far side of it. Whereupon Raja Shulan shot an arrow and transfixing Raja Chulin through the chest so that he fell from his elephant and died. And when the men of Raja Chulin saw that he had been killed, they all of them broke and fled, hotly pursued by the men of Kalinga who slew any that fell into their hands. The men of Kalinga then entered the fort at Klenggiu and sacked it, gaining more booty than man could count. Now Raja Chulin had a very beautiful daughter called Onang Kiu. She was offered to Raja Shulan, who took her as consort. He then returned crowned with victory, and when he reached Kalinga he built himself a very great city. Its fort was of black stone with walls seven fathoms thick and nine fathoms high, and so skilled were the masons that not an interstice was to be seen, it was as though the masonry had been poured into place. The gate was of hammered gold, with studs of gold bejewelled. As for the extent of the fort, there were seven mountains within its compass; and in the midst of the city was a lake, so large that it looked like a sea and if an elephant stood on the far shore it could not be seen from the near shore. Into this lake the king released fish of every sort, and in the middle of it stood an island of great height, over which vapour constantly hovered as though the summit was wrapped in dewy mist. And on this island he planted trees of all kinds, and every sort of flower and fruit-tree that exists in this world was to be found there. It was to this island that the king resorted for pleasure. And by the side of this island he made a great forest into which he released wild beasts of every kind; and when he wished to go hunting or to noose elephants, it was to this forest that he went. When the city was completed, Raja Shulan gave it the name of Bija-nagara.”

Close Reading Literature

“Close reading” is the careful and sustained explication and interpretation of a brief passage in a text, paying meticulous attention to the particular (individual words, images, rhetorical and narrative devices, word order, the order of sentences, how ideas unfold within individual sentences) and its relationship to the general (the narrative arc, argument, or atmosphere of the whole text). The purpose of close reading is to pay acute attention to not just *what* the writer is saying explicitly but also *how* they are saying it. When close-reading a passage, the following foci can offer you a variety of ways to begin engaging it, but this list is far from exhaustive.

1) First impressions:

2) Diction (e.g. choice of words, in what order, how they look on the page, how they sound):

3) Imagery (e.g. metaphors, similes):

4) Patterns (e.g. repetitions, circularities):

5) Gaps (e.g. anything missing or left unsaid):

6) Point of view (e.g. from whose perspective the passage is being told, and to whom):

7) Characters (e.g. what impressions we get of the people, and why):

- 8) Setting (e.g. where does this passage occur, is the location made specific or vague):

- 9) Time (e.g. whether there is anything unusual about the passing of time):

- 10) Emotional tone of passage (e.g. joyful, wrathful, sorrowful):

- 11) Senses (e.g. whether the passage appeals to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell):

- 12) Rhythms of sentence structures (e.g. all short, all long, or varied in complexity):

- 13) Punctuation (e.g. lots of dashes or semicolons instead of full stops):

- 14) Dialogue:

- 15) Allusions (e.g. references to other parts of the text, or to anything beyond the text):

- 16) Contradictions or inconsistencies (e.g. within the passage, or against other parts of the text):

Sample Passage, Continued

Brainstorm some keywords that seem important in the sample *Sejarah Melayu* Raja Chulin-Raja Shulan battle passage (e.g. “majesty”):

Pick one keyword from the above list, and brainstorm some questions incorporating it that begin with who / why / what / where / when / how (e.g. “how is the rajas’ majesty conveyed to the reader?”):

Pick one question from the list you have brainstormed, and come up with a one-sentence answer to it, your essay's working thesis (e.g. "I argue that the raja's majesty is conveyed through dominance over nature"):

Finally, based on your 16-category close reading of the sample passage, develop a few sub-points you would make in your body paragraphs to support your essay's working thesis:

Note: A full sample paper based on this Sejarah Melayu passage is available on the Yale-NUS Writers' Centre website > Resources > LH1 Essay 2: Sample 2.