

## Short Essay: Close Reading *Black Swan Green*

3 pages/750 words  
Double-spaced  
MLA format  
Times New Roman font  
Printed and stapled

You have completed a “distant reading” and a “close reading” of *Hamlet*.

Now choose a brief passage from the novel (about 1 page or less) that struck you when you read the novel. Perhaps it centers on a quote that you chose to write on the board. Begin to analyze its technical features—such as diction, sentence patterns, tone, figurative language, historical references, use of visual image, and/or structure. Does Jason use representative symbolism, such as his internal psyches (maggot, hangman, unborn twin)? Does he juxtapose Jason’s adolescent development with his parents’ divorce or with the Falklands War? What kind of language does Mitchell use to convey the family strain in the Taylors’ house? Write a rough draft in which you investigate these elements of the passage in detail, quoting from the text and developing your point fully. Try to avoid the mechanical structure and narrow range of the five-paragraph essay model. This format, while helpful for certain kinds of writing, will restrict your options here, where you want to explore different possibilities for interpretation. Give yourself room to entertain problems in and even contradictions to your initial assumptions. These will prove useful in the end.

When you have a firm grasp of the specific elements of the passage, write a second draft in which you **propose a thesis**, your idea of what are the effects or implications of Mitchell’s use of language in the passage you chose. Use your new introduction to frame your close reading, introducing a thesis statement, topic sentences, and transitions that structure and develop your idea. Conclude with a thoughtful paragraph that *opens up* your analysis for further reflection. You do not want your conclusion to summarize material that you have already explained well in the paper, nor do you want to suggest that the subject is closed.

You do not need to advance an argument for the whole novel. Your reading will proceed from careful and sustained attention to one small piece of the larger work. Remember that you are writing for people who have read the book as you have and will not need a report on or summary of its content. Present your reading as part of a continuing dialogue among other interested readers.

Give your essay an evocative title. Consider using some of the language from your selected passage in the title itself.

Cite the novel at the end of the essay in a “Work Cited” entry, using MLA format.

