

Famous Femme Fatales: A Brief Feminist Literature Unit

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Rationale

Love, death, and prejudice are powerful universal themes that appear repeatedly in texts appropriate for high school aged students. These are also concepts that students will be able to connect with on a personal level, and texts that are relevant to students' lives are typically more engaging for them. Further, literary criticism is an important part of the AP Literature and Composition course. Thus, I have created a unit which revolves around these complex themes and requires students to read each of the named texts in a way that examines feminist literary criticism. Being that my class is full of 16 seniors in AP, the controversial content of some of the selected texts is appropriate for a college level course. In addition, scaffolding for each offered type of writing requested in this unit is unnecessary; it is assumed that they come to a class of this caliber with experience in each described type of writing in the unit. However, any student who needs help or clarification may certainly request guidance during class, or they may come after school to work with me individually.

Reading feminist literature, and discovering feminist theory and criticism will surely impact the way in which students read any text from this point forward. As the year progresses, I will introduce other types of criticism, such as Marxist, New Historian, and Reader Response, in an effort to sharpen their analytical and evaluative skills before they take the AP exam at the end of the year. While criticism is not a major element on the exam, the student's ability to scrutinize a passage of foreign, as in not having been read beforehand, literature is at the heart of the multiple choice section and two of the three essays included in this test. In addition,

teaching this unit with a wide variety of genres incorporated will better prepare them for a college level English class. Although this class has a curriculum I designed, rather than the state, it is still important to ensure that any Georgia state standards listed for 12th grade students are met throughout the school year. After reviewing the standards online at this link:

(<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Standards/Georgia%20Performance%20Standards/Grade-Twelve-Writing-et-al.-with-tasks.pdf>), I am confident that nearly every one of them are being met in this single unit. For example, each of these writing and conventions standards are met through the written components in the *Medea* trial, the dialogue journal and the multi-genre writing project:

1. **ELA12W1- The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals a satisfying closure.**
2. **ELA12W2- The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres.**
3. **ELA12W3- The student uses research and technology to support writing.**
4. **ELA12W4- The student practices both timed and process writing and, when applicable, uses the writing process to develop, revise, and evaluate writing.**
5. **ELA12C2 The student demonstrates understanding of manuscript form, realizing that different forms of writing require different formats.**

Further, each of these listening, speaking, and viewing standards are met through the *Medea* trial, the small group and large Fishbowl discussions, and in their multi-genre project presentations:

1. **ELA12LSV1- The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal interactions.**
2. **ELA12LSV2-The student formulates reasoned judgments about written and oral communication in various media genres. The student delivers focused, coherent, and polished presentations that convey a clear and distinct perspective, demonstrate solid reasoning, and combine traditional rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description.**

Each of the anchor and supplemental texts included in this unit are part of a suggested reading list for AP Literature and Composition students, according to the College Board website resources. Further, *The Awakening* is recommended for Honors level American Literature students, which is typically taught in 11th grade, and *Medea* is suggested as possible reading for Honors level 10th grade students, as a supplement for studying the typically taught Greek drama, *Antigone*. All of the poems, the short stories, and the one act play included in the dialectical journal are in their AP textbook, Perrin's *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, 9th edition. The speeches, while not included in any school purchased resource, are not banned due to content, and Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" is often introduced in Social Studies

classes. Gloria Steinem's speech is a modern connection to what we're studying, since each of the other works was published before the Modern and Postmodern literary periods. Therefore, the content of the texts being introduced and studied are more than just appropriate for this class, it is encouraged by the Metro Atlanta counties, the state, and even nationally, when considering the College Board suggestions.

Several modifications are necessary to differentiate instruction in a way that meets the unique needs of high achieving students. These students are typically eager to delve into a text and find relevance for it on multiple levels. Luckily, in an AP classroom, tiered assignments are unnecessary, for they are all functioning at relatively the same level of ability, and my hope is that these approaches to learning about and dissecting literature increase motivation for those who are lacking in that area of typical gifted characteristics. Louise Rosenblatt's (1994) theory of transaction is at the core of this unit, since the mock trial, fishbowl discussions, dialogue journals, and the multi-genre writing project all require students to shape new texts based on their own reactions and prior experiences that affect interpretation and perspectives presented in each form of assessment. The mock trial of Medea's character allows students to experience the judicial process, as well as manipulate circumstance and theory as needed to prove their case. Their prior knowledge of cases such as Susan Smith killing her two young boys in South Carolina, will allow them to make modern connections to the play while arguing for or against Medea's case. The fishbowl discussions provide students the opportunity to actively participate in questioning a controversial text, as well as observe their peers' thought processes. This type

of transaction changes the novels for both the participants and the observers, making each student's journey through the stories slightly different. The online dialogue journals allow students the opportunity to first have a personal interaction with the text, and then broaden their insights with their partner and the teacher. Since the dialogue is ongoing, the transaction process never dies. The texts continue to take new meanings as the conversations evolve. Finally, the multi-genre writing project requires students to synthesize each of the texts, as well as feminist literary criticism, in a way where the themes and ideas transform into an original, creative blend of all the ideas explored throughout the 8 week unit. Clearly, the entire unit is based on Rosenblatt's theory of transaction, which improves student comprehension and encourages individual criticism of these highly acclaimed texts.

As Robert Seney (2009) explains in his article, "Process Skills and the Gifted Learner," there are eight recommended modifications for improving higher level thinking skills: open-endedness, discovery learning, evidence of reasoning, freedom of choice, group interaction, pacing, and a variety of processes. Throughout this unit, each of the formative and summative assessments are designed to address these needs, leaving room for changes as needed to best suit the needs of the students. Each of these suggested strategies are taken into account with the described assessments. For example, an inquiry-based stance is employed during the preparation stages of the mock trial, which directly correlates with discovery learning. Group interactions are employed through the fishbowl discussions, as is open-endedness. The students depict the pace and direction of those discussions, while the teacher participates as an

observer, or tags someone out to pose a Socratic question to the fishes in the bowl. While composing their multi-genre writing projects, freedom of choice is obvious, for they may use any genres they want to construct the final, coherent piece. Similarly, evidence of reasoning is consistently addressed in each assessment, for in the mock trial the play and their research will allow them to draw feasible conclusions, during fishbowl discussions require that students draw upon references in the text to make and support claims, the dialogue journals require specific references to diction and actions in the texts in their analysis, and the multi-genre writing project is research-based and requires a bibliography to direct readers to where to find such evidence. Pacing is employed through the schedule I have devised. First, Medea is read and explored through the mock trial to set the stage for controversy. Then, the Monday, Wednesday, Friday fishbowls of The Awakening allow students a day to digest the texts and form ideas about the topics. Evaluating the supplemental poems, speeches, play, and vignette on Tuesdays and Thursdays will hopefully make connections between texts in a variety of areas, but predominantly those that apply to feminist literary criticism.

Further, Arthur Applebee's (1996) (Applebee, 1996) notions of knowledge- in-action are consistently employed, and serve as the basis for all activities, conversations, and products. At no point are students asked to work independently in class and keep what they discover to themselves; learning should be a social process in which the teacher acts as a facilitator of discovering knowledge, rather than a bank from which students withdraw generic, prescribed responses. Likewise, as Bob Fecho (2004) notes, spending time building a positive classroom

community and rapport with students creates a place where students feel safe to take risks in their learning processes, thereby encouraging them to view each of the texts with a critical eye and a unique point of view. Having already set the stage for such learning experiences to occur, I expect that the fishbowl discussions and dialogue journals will be particularly provocative, like the texts themselves, and evoke wonderful debates between students.

Goals/Rubrics

** I have 16 students in this class, and each activity is catered to an AP or Gifted class this size. However, the activities could easily be modified to fit varying class sizes, as well as for students tracked in or below grade level reading and writing proficiency English courses.

1. Medea- Mock Trial

This is still one of the most controversial plays ever written, with its powerful evocations of women's rights and Medea's choice of infanticide. Consider carefully what you think of its awesome heroine. Pay close attention to how and when she comes to decide to kill her children. Consider her reasoning and note when she wavers. Keeping all of this in mind, I ask you to put Medea on trial for her crimes against humanity; specifically, for murdering Creon, the Corinthian Princess, and her two young sons. Was she temporarily insane? Or was this a premeditated, calculating slaughter of four innocent people?

The jury will be 12 students from Mrs. Rodgers' AP Government class. They have not read the play, which significantly reduces the chance of bias affecting the outcome of the trial.

Each role is responsible for completing a research activity, completing a written component, and participating in the trial with enthusiasm. Further, the storyline of Medea, in my opinion, is begging to be an episode for the Oxygen Channel's infamous show, "Snapped." All participants in the trial are expected to also participate as actors, script writers, and/or directors of the episode, which will be shown during both lunches a few days after the trial. Footage from the reenactment will be the last scenes added to the footage.

Roles:

2 Prosecuting Attorneys- Write questions for direct and cross examinations, prepare witnesses for the stand, and research famous trials where temporary insanity was the defense.

2 Defense Attorneys- Write questions for direct and cross examinations, prepare witnesses for the stand, and research famous trials where temporary insanity was the defense.

1 Judge- Research and execute proper terminology during trial, and write a research paper which demonstrates knowledge of precedence for fair rulings.

1 Bailiff- Research duties and responsibilities of a bailiff, and write a research paper examining cases where a bailiff acted heroically (i.e. the Brian Davis trial in Atlanta), or somehow corrupted the outcome of a trial.

6 Characters– Medea (the defendant); Jason (surviving family of the dead/witness); Nurse (witness); Tutor (witness); Messenger (witness); Aegeus (witness):

She or he should create a life sized, aesthetically pleasing Body Biography, including:

- A review of significant events, choices, and changes involving the character. At least 5 sentences should be incorporated.
- This review should coordinate symbolically with parts of the body outline. For example, what pictures or words would be most appropriate for Medea’s brain? For Jason’s? Also, think carefully about using color (or not) to convey the message you want for your character.
- These visuals should promote lively discussion about the character. Controversy is welcome, so long as it’s well-supported.

Writing:

- Compose a free verse, narrative poem using your Body Biography as inspiration, as well as the TOLDS method delivered in class. (What the character Thinks, what Other characters think of the one you’re discussing, what the character Looks like, actions the character Does that reveals personality, and comments the character Says in the play that reveals his or her true nature).

2 Expert Psychologists– One of you is working for the Prosecutors, the other is working for the defense. Research psychological theories which support what you have been hired to prove, and write an expository essay which informs the reader of the theory your present to the court.

2 Film Makers- These people are responsible for writing the script, as well as filming the episode of “Snapped” for the Oxygen Channel. The episode should include details from the play, as well as background information we learned about in the myth, “The Quest for the Golden Fleece.”

Rubrics:

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Mock Trial

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Information	All information presented in the trial was clear, accurate and thorough.	Most information presented in the trial was clear, accurate and thorough.	Most information presented in the trial was clear and accurate, but was not usually thorough.	Information had several inaccuracies OR was usually not clear.
Rebuttal	All counter-arguments were accurate, relevant and strong.	Most counter-arguments were accurate, relevant, and strong.	Most counter-arguments were accurate and relevant, but several were weak.	Counter-arguments were not accurate and/or relevant
Use of Facts/Statistics	Every major point was well supported with several relevant facts, statistics and/or examples.	Every major point was adequately supported with relevant facts, statistics and/or examples.	Every major point was supported with facts, statistics and/or examples, but the relevance of some was questionable.	Every point was not supported.
Understanding of Topic	The team clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented their information forcefully and convincingly.	The team clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented their information with ease.	The team seemed to understand the main points of the topic and presented those with ease.	The team did not show an adequate understanding of the topic.

Compositions:

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Organization	Information is very organized with well-constructed paragraphs and subheadings.	Information is organized with well-constructed paragraphs.	Information is organized, but paragraphs are not well-constructed.	The information appears to be disorganized. 8)
Amount of Information	All topics are addressed and all questions answered with at least 2 sentences about each.	All topics are addressed and most questions answered with at least 2 sentences about each.	All topics are addressed, and most questions answered with 1 sentence about each.	One or more topics were not addressed.
Quality of Information	Information clearly relates to the main topic. It includes several supporting details and/or examples.	Information clearly relates to the main topic. It provides 1-2 supporting details and/or examples.	Information clearly relates to the main topic. No details and/or examples are given.	Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic.
Sources	All sources (information and graphics) are accurately documented in the desired format.	All sources (information and graphics) are accurately documented, but a few are not in the desired format.	All sources (information and graphics) are accurately documented, but many are not in the desired format.	Some sources are not accurately documented.
Paragraph Construction	All paragraphs include introductory sentence, explanations or details, and concluding sentence.	Most paragraphs include introductory sentence, explanations or details, and concluding sentence.	Paragraphs included related information but were typically not constructed well.	Paragraphing structure was not clear and sentences were not typically related within the paragraphs.
Mechanics	No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	A few grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.

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Format	All MLA formatting requirements were followed (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins, correct heading, header, title font and spacing, and works cited page).	Most MLA formatting requirements were followed (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins, correct heading, header, title font and spacing, and works cited page).	Some MLA formatting requirements were followed but others were incorrect or missing.	MLA formatting requirements were not followed.
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Body Biography

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Visual Symbols	Symbols are truly representative of the character.	Symbols given but one is weak or one symbol missing.	Symbols given but are weak or are not representative of the character.	Symbols missing.
3 Quotes	Three relevant quotes.	Two relevant quotes.	One relevant quote.	Quotes missing.
5 Sentences	Sentences are relevant, showing why character is represented through textual evidence.	Sentences are somewhat relevant, some textual evidence used.	Sentences vaguely relevant, few textual references included.	Sentences irrelevant, no textual references.
Poem	Poem follows guidelines and is relevant to character.	Poem mostly follows guidelines, mostly relevant to character.	Poem vaguely follows guidelines, lacks relevance to character.	Poem does not follow guidelines, does not refer to character.
Neatness	Body biography is neat and is quality work.	Lacks some neatness, retains some quality.	Lacks neatness and quality.	Biography is sloppy and/or unreadable.

2. The Awakening - Fishbowl Discussions

The Awakening, by Kate Chopin, is like Medea, in the sense that it is also incredibly controversial. The notion that a woman would rather drown herself than continue fulfilling the traditional role of wife and mother in a loveless marriage did not sit well with many people at the turn of the 20th Century, and it is still considered a provocative piece today. This book is perfect for healthy debates and discussions related to the themes of feminist literature we've been talking about in class. In groups of four, you are to rotate turns for randomly drawn sets of chapters from a fishbowl. You will know which chapters you are responsible for facilitating before we begin studying the novel, and the discussions will occur every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for one and a half weeks. Each group will participate in the fishbowl once for a class work grade, and jump into at least two other discussions, take notes, and write a synthesis journal entry ("aha" moments, lingering questions, the value of this activity for your comprehension of the text) for a participation grade.

How do these discussions work? Well, as the name implies, each group will rotate turns sitting inside the figurative "fishbowl" in the center of the room, while the rest of us sit in a circle around them and attentively listen and take notes as they converse. Next, students viewing the discussion are encouraged to tag one of the discussants and replace him or her when they have something valuable to add to the topic, or perhaps a critical question to pose that's related to what they are talking about. The discussions should last at least 30 minutes, and should reflect careful scrutinizing of the text. Simply relaying a summary of the plot won't do; I want you to analyze and evaluate characters, themes, symbols, motifs, and any other literary devices you identify. Further, I would like for your discussions to make connections with Medea, by synthesizing similarities and differences according to feminist literary criticism studied in class. Please use the rubric as a guide for expectations of preparedness and quality.

Fishbowl Discussion

CATEGORY	1	2	3	4
Participation	Does not ask or answer any questions	Asks one question but does not answer any questions.	Asks one question and answers one question.	Asks one or more questions (level three and follow-up) and answers one or more questions.
Respectfulness	Frequently interrupts others; no eye contact; criticizes others' ideas.	Occasionally interrupts others or criticizes their ideas; infrequent eye contact.	Waits for others to finish before talking; uses empathetic listening; does not build on others' ideas.	Waits for others to finish before talking; uses empathetic listening; acknowledges and builds on others' ideas.
Preparedness	Has no level three questions or follow-up questions available	Has one question available, but not level three.	Has a level three question, but no follow-ups.	Has a level three question and two follow-ups.
Organization	Does not use any of the prompts for "Sharing Ideas and Justifying Opinions."	Uses one prompt from "Sharing Ideas and Justifying Opinions." Follow-up questions do not relate to students' responses.	Uses two or more prompts from "Sharing Ideas..." Follow-up questions relate to students' responses.	Uses several clarification and "Sharing Ideas..." prompts; follow-up questions encourage other students to respond further.
Enthusiasm	Asks question or responds only when begged by group members to participate	Asks a question without using eye contact. Does not ask any clarification questions.	Asks questions using eye contact, but does not ask any clarification questions.	Asks questions using eye contact, and poses clarification questions to encourage others to respond.

3. Dialogue Journal

On Tuesdays and Thursdays in this unit, we will enhance our study of feminist literature in the three anchor texts, Medea and The Awakening with supplemental readings. You will be studying poetry, as well as a one act play, short stories, and speeches dealing with feminist issues and the women's rights movement. In groups of four, you will participate in online discussions via the class Wiki, "Ms. Keathley's AP Lang Thang." These discussions will revolve around each of the texts we read and study together in class; they are listed below. I will be a part of each group's journal, in that I will read and reply to your comments, as well as leave some of my own. There is a rubric at the end of this sheet to set expectations for quality in these discussions.

Poems: "Sting," by Sylvia Plath, "Phenomenal Woman," by Maya Angelou, "Ego Tripping," by Nikki Giovanni, "I'm 'Wife'- I've Finished That," by Emily Dickinson, "Women," by Alice Walker, "Barbie Doll," by Marge Piercy, and "The Mother," by Gwendolyn Brooks.

Short Stories: Kate Chopin's, "Story of an Hour."

One Act: Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*.

Speeches: Sojourner Truth's (1851) "Ain't I a Woman," and Gloria Steinem's (2002) speech to the Commonwealth Club.

Collaborative Work Skills : Online Dialogue Journaling

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Contributions	Routinely provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A definite leader who contributes a lot of effort.	Usually provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A strong group member who tries hard!	Sometimes provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A satisfactory group member who does what is required.	Rarely provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. May refuse to participate.
Attitude	Never is publicly critical of the project or the work of others. Always has a positive attitude about the task(s).	Rarely is publicly critical of the project or the work of others. Often has a positive attitude about the task(s).	Occasionally is publicly critical of the project or the work of other members of the group. Usually has a positive attitude about the task(s).	Often is publicly critical of the project or the work of other members of the group. Often has a negative attitude about the task(s).
Monitors Group Effectiveness	Routinely monitors the effectiveness of the group, and makes suggestions to make it more effective.	Routinely monitors the effectiveness of the group and works to make the group more effective.	Occasionally monitors the effectiveness of the group and works to make the group more effective.	Rarely monitors the effectiveness of the group and does not work to make it more effective.
Focus on the task	Consistently stays focused on the task and what needs to be done. Very self-directed.	Focuses on the task and what needs to be done most of the time. Other group members can count on this person.	Focuses on the task and what needs to be done some of the time. Other group members must sometimes nag and prod, to keep this person on-task.	Rarely focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Lets others do the work.
Time-management	Routinely uses time well throughout the project to ensure things get done on time. Group does not have to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person's procrastination.	Usually uses time well throughout the project, but may have procrastinated on one thing. Group does not have to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person's procrastination.	Tends to procrastinate, but always gets things done by the deadlines. Group does not have to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person's procrastination.	Rarely gets things done by the deadlines AND group has to adjust deadlines or work responsibilities because of this person's inadequate time management.

4. Multi-genre Writing Project

The Awakening, *Medea*, and the supplemental materials studied in this unit should be incorporated in a multi-genre writing project. You may opt to work alone, or you may collaborate with a partner. In this assignment, you are to compose 8-10 different genres of writing that, all together, tell a coherent and creative story that synthesizes elements of at least 5 texts studied in the unit, as well as evidence from the feminist literary criticism research activities completed in class during our criticism unit at the beginning of the semester. I have left the links from your web-quest regarding feminist theory up on the class Wiki. Be bold and daring in your writing; there is no precise way to complete this assignment, for each of you will interpret the texts differently and will likely cater to your strengths as writers. Please see the examples from some of my former students on the Wiki. Although their topics were different, you should be able to grasp the general idea. This is a research-based composition, so please make sure you include a bibliography at the end of your piece. Most importantly, however, please adhere to Dereck Jensen's important rule of writing: Don't Bore the Reader! Good luck, and have fun!

Multigenre Writing Project

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Coherence	Information is organized with a variety of well-constructed genres of writing, and each piece compliments the others while depicting a single story with a clear message.	Information is organized with well-constructed writing, but the fluency from one piece to the next is choppy in 1-2 places.	Information is organized, but writing is not well-constructed, and the fluency is choppy in 3-4 places.	The information appears to be disorganized, and little to no effort for fluency is evidenced.
Amount of Information	All topics are addressed and all questions answered with at least 8 texts referenced and 10-12 genres employed.	All topics are addressed and most questions answered with at least 7 texts referenced, and 8-9 genres employed.	All topics are addressed, and most questions answered with 6 texts referenced, and 6-7 genres employed.	Less than 6 texts were referenced, and less than 6 genres were employed.

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Quality of Information	Information clearly relates to the main topic. It includes several supporting details and/or examples from each text.	Information clearly relates to the main topic. It provides at least 2 supporting details and/or examples from each text.	Information clearly relates to the main topic. Only 1 example from each text is referenced.	Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic.
Sources	All sources (information and graphics) are accurately documented in the bibliography.	Most sources (information and graphics) are accurately documented, but a few are not in the bibliography.	Some sources (information and graphics) are accurately documented, but many are not in the bibliography.	Several sources are not accurately documented in the bibliography.
Mechanics	No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	A few grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.
Presentation/Creativity	The presentation is enthusiastic and engaging, the format is creative and unique, and high levels of creative thinking is obviously used.	The presentation is pretty engaging, but the format is somewhat generic, and the story is a bit cliché.	The presentation was flat and not engaging, the story is incomplete or a rip off of a movie or show, and the format demonstrates little effort to be unique.	Little to no effort was made to complete this project with care.

Peer Editing and Revision Guide

I have also included a Peer Conference sheet, to which I refer often in the eight week unit plan agenda. This sheet is a graphic organizer to help guide the conversations in the conferences, but it is also a mechanism to help them remember the suggestions they receive from their peers. During student-teacher conferences, I do not use this sheet. Instead, students come prepared with up to five questions about specific sections or elements of their paper for me to comment on. I will not read the whole multi-genre writing project; if students do not come prepared, it is their loss.

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Peer Conferences

Author's Name: _____

Title of Work: _____

Partner's Name: _____

1) Bless—Find positive things about my piece. Sing some praises, please!

2) Press—Give my writing cool criticism. What would you change if this was your piece? Raise questions, cite passages where the writing is unclear, vague, or unfocused.

3) Address—Please address the following specific concerns I have about my piece. The writer lists what he/she wants the reader to address: Bring some aspect of the work into focus, such as sentence structure, details, tone, transitions, etc... Keep the comments directed to the writer's request.

4) Express—Tell me how this piece makes you feel or what it reminds you of from your own life. Respond to the work. Have a dialogue with what is being said, rather than how it is said.
