

colorful close reading

a method for poetry
by Heather Larson



① experience

(Habakkuk 2)

9 "Woe to him who builds his realm by

unjust gain

to set his nest on high,

to escape the clutches of ruin!

10 You have plotted the ruin of many peoples,

shaming your own house and forfeiting your

life.

11 The stones of the wall will cry out,

and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

12 "Woe to him who builds a city with

bloodshed

and establishes a town by crime!

13 Has not the LORD Almighty determined

that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire,

that the nations exhaust themselves for

nothing?

14 For the earth will be filled with the

knowledge of the glory

of the LORD,

as the waters cover the

sea.

Careful planning,
advancement

shift in tone
here

② find patterns

Work/Building
builds a realm
sets nest on high
plots
labors
exhausts self

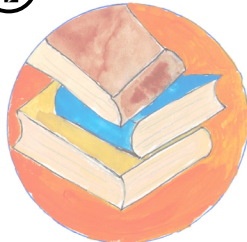
Evil Methods
unjust gain
ruin of people
bloodshed/crime

getting
worse + worse?

③ analyze

Your work will
turn on you, and
will be destroyed.
Only God's glory
matters + will last.

④ find context



⑤ apply

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What would it be like to be in this scene?

What confuses me? (write notes in the margin)

What would the author most want me to remember?

② find patterns

What words are repeated? (circle/highlight and connect with lines)

What words are closely related? (e.g. 'red,' 'blue,' and 'yellow')

Are there opposites or contrasts?

What are all the nouns? verbs? characters? places? sounds? sights? smells?

(choose whichever seems most relevant in this poem)

What does the passage sound like? How does it flow, where are shifts?

What emotions does it communicate? (read it aloud, dramatically)

③ analyze

What are the repeated elements supposed to make me feel or know?

Is there a progression in the closely related words?

(e.g. they're getting closer to home, or more and more frightening)

How does the flow of the poem reinforce/change the meaning?

How does the sound of the poem reinforce/change the meaning?

(e.g. all the long "oo" sounds make it feel sleepy)

How would I divide this poem into sections?

④ find context

What is the form of this poem? (e.g. sonnet, psalm)

How is that form usually used?

How would this poem have been received originally? (oral presentation, handwritten manuscript, published in a magazine, sung) How does my knowledge of the presentation or audience affect the meaning of the passage?

Are there obviously "loaded" terms for which I need some cultural context?

When I compare this poem to others in the same genre, do I find surprises?

(e.g. most lament psalms end in a certain way, but this one doesn't)

When I compare this passage to others in the same cultural context, are there any meanings implied by juxtaposition? (e.g. this culture often used the word "milk" in passages about death, so it carries that connotation)

⑤ apply

Do I agree or disagree with the poet?

Has it changed me in any way?

Do I want to change my life in any way in response?

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