

Sally Student

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Professor Christensen

Summary Essay

Introduction Summary

“Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths” is an introductory preface to the seventh edition textbook *Rereading America*, published in 2007 by Bedford/St. Martin’s Press and edited by Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle. The opening section is divided into sections that gradually lead the reader to an understanding of how he or she must think in order to properly deal with the upcoming chapters. It gives an overview of what to expect from these chapters, and it provides a few tips on the concept of active reading that are necessary when navigating through its contents. The goal of the editors is to develop readers’ understanding, right up front, of what it actually means to think critically, and what impediments they may face as they attempt to read the selections throughout the compilation.

The editors define critical thinking as a conscious effort to actively question, analyze, and think about ideas and concepts. They use a simple example of looking at the book’s title, *Rereading America*, to illustrate their point about how difficult it will be for the reader to initially learn how to critically think. The point that the editors are trying to make is that many concepts may initially appear to not require any type of critical examination or analysis because those concepts have already become common

Comment: Notice here that the student has given the summary her own title rather than copying the title of the work she is summarizing. Note that her title is NOT bolded, italicized, all caps, underlined, or a different size font than the rest of the paper text

Comment: Note here that she has given us the title of the **chapter or section** she will be summarizing, and she has placed it in **quotation marks**, just as all chapters/sections/stories, etc. from books, journals, newspapers, etc. should always be

Note also that she gives us the complete reference information on the text in which the Introduction can be found, including for us the book title and its publishing information. Notice that the **book title** is **italicized**, as all book, journal, newspaper, etc. titles should always be

Note here that she provides complete information about who authored the text – in this case a group of 3 editors

Comment: In the rest of the paragraph, the student gives us an overview of the major themes covered in the first section of the text, and she also provides some explanation about how the Introduction is physically laid out and how it is written

Notice her verb tense: although the book was obviously written in *the past*, all of her verbs are clearly in the present tense – this is the standard academic convention for this kind of writing. **STAY IN THE PRESENT TENSE WHEN YOU DISCUSS AN AUTHOR’S WORK.**

Comment: Notice that she keeps her writing somewhat removed from herself by focusing on the writing, on what the editors do in the selection. Nowhere in this summary will you find her discussing her own subjective opinion about what she has read, nor will you find her advancing any kind of subjective claim or argument about how the Introduction is written. All she is doing here is working slowly through the text and reporting to us exactly what she sees there.

Comment: Here, again, we see the student working hard to distill for us what she believes to be the primary message or theme or idea in the section she is looking at. Importantly, she is not trying to cover *everything* in the selection, only the most important features that give the selection its major outlines.

knowledge to the reader. They point out the need to look past everything that we believe in—everything that we have absorbed from our cultural surroundings since birth—in order to question our beliefs and then compare those beliefs, with an open and receptive mind, with different ones around us. The editors show us how our society is supported by the rules that govern us, the rules that were created and passed down to us through our shared cultural histories.

Comment: Notice her **point of view** here: she refers to the collective audience she imagines would read the Introduction as “we” – this is acceptable, as long as she keeps her “we” references general enough to include ALL of us.

The authors compare our current myths with the ancient Greek mythologies that guided the Greeks through everyday life and gave the Greeks a cultural basis for how to interpret the world and guide themselves through it. They use an example of gender roles which have been deeply ingrained into our consciousness to show us about how difficult it may be to break through our set ways of thinking in order to properly question our cultural constructions, mores, values, and beliefs. The editors exemplify how cultural myths can hinder our thoughts and shackle them to a set way of thinking with the story of how some students in sample classroom would not accept the professor’s opposing interpretation of a poem that he had had them read. They describe how these cultural myths oversimplify and reduce the complex events that occur in our lives to “either/or” decisions so that we may more easily deal with problems. The editors believe that this simplification is a necessity, but it can also be a road block to proper critical thinking – that we as a collective American culture are so set on reaching workable conclusions and “settling scores” that we often fail to properly analyze those decisions and question their ramifications, whatever those may be. The authors tell us of the importance of questioning all the contradictions in our cultural myths in order for us to begin to break free of the confines of our stifled thoughts and patterns of behavior.

Comment: And here again we see her keeping the focus on what the editors are doing, and what the editors seem to be saying. She is not evaluating the truth or falsity of the text, just telling us what it says.

Comment: Here she makes her summary work a lot stronger by pointing toward a *specific set of details* (rather than just restating big generalities about) in the text that elucidate a particularly important point in the selection.

After gaining an understanding of how the reader must re-examine him or herself in order to begin the process of actively and openly absorbing new modes of thought, the introduction presents the reader with a brief explanation of the book's structure; this is followed by information and tricks to use when applying active reading skills. The book is split up into seven chapters that individually deal with common themes in American culture. The chapters are set up to give readers experience in questioning their own cultural myths and eventually becoming more avid critical thinkers themselves. The editors note their criteria for choosing the stories that went into composing each chapter and how some of these stories may enlighten, offend, or collaborate with a given reader's personal beliefs. The editors suggest that readers practice imagining an open dialogue with the author of each piece, and they provide some tips to follow when actively reading these pieces — strategies like pre-reading and prewriting; annotating texts with personal comments, opinions, and questions; and keeping a reading journal to provide the reader a place to express his or her thoughts and emotions in response to a reading in a safer, more unstructured and uninhibited way. Finally, the editors close with a remark on how to “read” visual images with the same kind of critical eye they discussed earlier in relation to the written texts included in the collection.

Comment: In this paragraph the student shifts her discussion to the last major section of the Introduction, again working very hard to lay out the structure and the thematic focus of the section – she tells us here exactly what the section is about and how it is written and laid out

Comment: The student closes with a remark about the last section, and again she does it *without* attempting to evaluate the text in any fashion or advance her opinion about it.

Notice again that she keeps her language in the present tense, and she writes from the 3rd person point of view, talking only about the “the text” and “the editors” without making any mention of “I” or “you” or any other unclear or nonspecific pronoun reference