

Close Reading Activity

The following is a close reading activity designed for a graduate course in the history of Christian theology and practice at Duke Divinity school.

The activity is designed to be conducted during class time in a seminar setting.

Objectives:

1. SWBAT articulate a clear and precise definition of Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *epectasy*.
2. SWBAT perform slow and recursive reading strategies with guidance.
3. SWBAT analyze a short, complex passage deeply and independently by examining its specific vocabulary, sentence structure, and organizational patterns to convey meaning.

An exemplar follows the student materials page.

The Life of Moses II.227, 230

“Once having set foot upon the ladder...he [Moses] continually climbed to the step above and never ceased to rise higher, because he always found a step higher than the one he had attained... although lifted up through such lofty experiences, he is still unsatisfied in his desire for more. He still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God's true being...”

Directions:

1. Read through once. Read a second time and underline a line or phrase that strikes you.
2. Read through again and circle at least 6 descriptive words (adjectives, adverbs) that are most striking to you. Describe in a word or a short phrase what sense, feeling, or impression these convey:

3. Read through again and underline the actions described (verbs, participles)
 - a. compare & contrast the actions: are there different groups of meaning?
what "categories" might these fall into?

- b. color or otherwise label the verbs based on category
4. In your own words, what is this passage describing?

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never ending ascent

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(1) obtaining/ having (2) lacking/desiring

- b. color or otherwise label the verbs based on category
4. In your own words, what is this passage describing?

Nyssa describes Moses as undergoing a process in which he is simultaneously satisfied and unsatisfied by the extent to which he experiences God: he constantly ascends, but even so, he constantly feels a desire for more because he wants to experience God in God's divine essence which transcends human finitude.