

from "This is Water"

BY DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

CLOSE READING ACTIVITY

Directions: Please follow each step carefully.

Step One: Please respond to the following prompt: Why do you think it is important to try and see the world from the perspective of those around us? What can we gain from looking beyond our own experiences? Is this as easy as it sounds?

Step Two: Number the paragraphs of the transcript. Hint: There are 17.

Step Three: Watch the [video](#).

Step Four: Respond to the following prompt: What did you notice about this video? What images do you feel strongly illustrated various sections of the text? What is the overall feeling you get after viewing the video?

Step Five: Read the transcript. As you read:

- Circle unfamiliar or powerful words.
- Underline claims (where Foster Wallace states what he believes to be true). Summarize the claim in the margins.
- Box sections of the text which speak to you. In the margins, explain your choices.

Step Six: With a partner, add your thoughts to the quotes on the posters hung around the room. Together, answer and discuss the questions about each quote in your notebooks. Don't forget to give your notebook page a title and a date. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Quote #1: How does Foster Wallace suggest we move past our "default setting"?

Quote #2: What metaphor is Foster Wallace using to describe our selfish view of the world? Do you think this metaphor is appropriate? Create a metaphor of your own to describe our natural selfish state.

Quote #3: In this passage, how does Foster Wallace try to see the world differently...from another perspective?

Quote #4: What is Foster Wallace suggesting we do, in order to change the way we view the world? Describe how you might be able to do this in your own life.

Quote #5: Describe Foster Wallace's view of education. What is his idea of a "real" education? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

Step Seven: Explain the significance of the fish story and title of this speech. What is the connection?

Step Eight: Summarize the main claim made by David Foster Wallace.

Step Nine: Now that you have a thorough understanding of this speech, what will you do? How do you connect this to your own life? What will you take away? What action does this speech make you want to start?

QUOTE #1

From "This is Water" by David Foster Wallace

Please respond below to the following quote. You can summarize it, connect to it, agree or disagree with it, share an example, etc.

"The point is that petty, frustrating crap like this is exactly where the work of choosing is gonna come in. Because the traffic jams and crowded aisles and long checkout lines give me time to think, and if I don't make a conscious decision about how to think and what to pay attention to, I'm gonna be pissed and miserable every time I have to shop. Because my natural default setting is the certainty that situations like this are really all about me. About MY hungriness and MY fatigue and MY desire to just get home, and it's going to seem for all the world like everybody else is just in my way."

QUOTE #2

From "This is Water" by David Foster Wallace

Please respond below to the following quote. You can summarize it, connect to it, agree or disagree with it, share an example, etc.

"If I choose to think this way in a store and on the freeway, fine. Lots of us do. Except thinking this way tends to be so easy and automatic that it doesn't have to be a choice. It is my natural default setting. It's the automatic way that I experience the boring, frustrating, crowded parts of adult life when I'm operating on the automatic, unconscious belief that I am the center of the world, and that my immediate needs and feelings are what should determine the world's priorities."

QUOTE #3

From "This is Water" by David Foster Wallace

Please respond below to the following quote. You can summarize it, connect to it, agree or disagree with it, share an example, etc.

"The thing is that, of course, there are totally different ways to think about these kinds of situations. In this traffic, all these vehicles stopped and idling in my way, it's not impossible that some of these people in SUV's have been in horrible auto accidents in the past, and now find driving so terrifying that their therapist has all but ordered them to get a huge, heavy SUV so they can feel safe enough to drive. Or that the Hummer that just cut me off is maybe being driven by a father whose little child is hurt or sick in the seat next to him, and he's trying to get this kid to the hospital, and he's in a bigger, more legitimate hurry than I am: it is actually I who am in HIS way."

QUOTE #4

From "This is Water" by David Foster Wallace

Please respond below to the following quote. You can summarize it, connect to it, agree or disagree with it, share an example, etc.

"But most days, if you're aware enough to give yourself a choice, you can choose to look differently at this dead-eyed, over-made-up lady who just screamed at her kid in the checkout line. Maybe she's not usually like this. Maybe she's been up three straight nights holding the hand of a husband who is dying of bone cancer. Or maybe this very lady is the low-wage clerk at the motor vehicle department, who just yesterday helped your spouse resolve a horrific, infuriating, red-tape problem through some small act of bureaucratic kindness. Of course, none of this is likely, but it's also not impossible. It just depends what you want to consider. If you're automatically sure that you know what reality is, and you are operating on your default setting, then you, like me, probably won't consider possibilities that aren't annoying and miserable. But if you really learn how to pay attention, then you will know there are other options. It will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that made the stars: love, fellowship, the mystical oneness of all things deep down."

QUOTE #5

From "This is Water" by David Foster Wallace

Please respond below to the following quote. You can summarize it, connect to it, agree or disagree with it, share an example, etc.

"The really important kind of freedom involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day.

That is real freedom. That is being educated, and understanding how to think. The alternative is unconsciousness, the default setting, the rat race, the constant gnawing sense of having had, and lost, some infinite thing.

It is about the real value of a real education, which has almost nothing to do with knowledge, and everything to do with simple awareness; awareness of what is so real and essential, so hidden in plain sight all around us, all the time that we have to keep reminding ourselves over and over:

'This is water.'

'This is water.'"