**Close Reading Of Jeung’s “I Did Not Get My Spaghetti-Os”**

1. Identify the author and title. Where was it published (if it was)? Identify the genre (in other words, is this a peer-reviewed journal article? A newspaper article? A poem? Note that the piece you're working on might not be one of the three genre examples listed here).

# Stevie Jeung wrote ‘“I Did Not Get My Spaghetti-O’s”: Death Row Consumption in the Popular Media” for her American Studies class at UC Davis. It was later published in the university’s *Prized Writing*, a collection of the best undergraduate essays. It’s an undergraduate research paper.

# Note: although it was published in an edited collection, it is not a peer-reviewed journal article and is not a scholarly source; it’s just a great example of student writing.

1. State, in your own words, the author’s MAIN point.

Jeung argues that the criminal justice system (the State) encourages the media’s and citizens’ obsession with the last meal to foster support for the death penalty.

1. What **question** is the main point answering?

Why do we obsess about last meals, and why does the criminal justice system encourage that obsession?

Note: some students have argued that Jeung’s question is merely “are we obsessed with the last meal,” but her essay goes beyond merely informing us that we are. She’s making an argument about why.

1. Identify three to four other important claims the author makes.

Jeung claims that popular culture examples show we expect a last meal to accompany executions. She claims Americans have long been interested in executions. She claims there are many possible reasons for Americans to focus on last meals.

1. What is the purpose of the essay? (to persuade, to inform, to entertain, to explore (remember that exploration is rare)) —how do you know?

Since Jeung is asking *why* we do this, her answer is a causal argument. Of course, she has to inform us about many things to make this argument, but the ultimate purpose is to put forth reasons *why* this happens.

Note: Some students have said the purpose is to explore because her teacher uses that word in his description, but “explore” is a word we often use as a synonym for “discuss,” “evaluate,” “analyze,” etc.

Other students have insisted this essay’s purpose is to inform because Jeung doesn’t tell us whether she thinks the death penalty is right or wrong or whether we should continue to have last meals. Those students are misunderstanding how arguments work—they are expecting an evaluation or proposal thesis, but forgetting about the other ways to persuade.

1. Describe the essay’s intended audience: to whom do you think the author is writing, and what clues in the essay aided you in identifying this audience? (There is no such thing as “general” for this question.) (Think about how the author uses pronouns for both this question and for # 7.)

Jeung uses “we” in reference to Americans, so she’s expecting that her readers are. Ultimately, she was writing this for her American studies teacher and her classmates.

1. Describe the author’s language and tone. Give a few examples from the text.

This is neither overly formal nor overly casual, as Jeung uses first and second person, but she still writes using an appropriate register for her teacher and fellow college students. Her tone in many parts of the essay is humorous, as she inserts puns. For example, she starts one paragraph with “The public, however, has its own incentives for gobbling it all up, so to speak.”

1. Identify at least five warrants.

Jeung assumes the audience has some familiarity with American popular culture (since not all references are explained fully), that the audience reads English (at least at a 11th grade level, since the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is an 11.9), that the audience understands that Spaghetti-Os and spaghetti are fundamentally different, that the audience in 2007-8 would know important American historical figures like Bill Clinton and Timothy McVeigh (again, since she didn’t explain who they are), that the audience would not necessarily know what *The Green Mile* was, since she explained it.

1. What kind of evidence does the essay rely on most?

Jeung uses a combination of popular culture and media examples to defend her claims about our obsession. She also uses information from credible newspapers, justice system publications, books, and a peer-reviewed journal article. In other words, the evidence comes from a variety of outside resources.

1. Is this a forensic, epideictic, or deliberative argument?

Jeung is not arguing for a change in the future. Instead, she’s asking why we’ve allowed/encouraged this; thus, this is a forensic argument.

Note: Epideictic is also called ceremonial rhetoric. Most of the arguments you’ll read and write are concerned with what we have observed (forensic) or what we want to happen (deliberative).

1. If the purpose of the argument is to persuade, overall, is this an argument of fact, definition, evaluation, a proposal, or a causal argument? Are any other argument styles used for minor claims or evidence? (Hint: think about the central question the text is answering. If it's "what's happened," then it's likely an argument of fact. If it's "should we do x," it's probably a proposal. If it's "why did/does this happen" or "what will this cause," then it's probably a causal argument.

As stated in #5, Jeung is asking (and answering) why, so this is causal.

1. Where do you see logos, ethos, and pathos operating in the text? Which does the author rely on the most? What emotions are being called upon for the pathos to work?

Jeung uses logic to determine the possible reasons for our obsession. She cites factual information to support her position and relies on logos the most. Ethos is present in the credible sources she uses and in the research she has obviously done. (Being published in *Prized Writing* gives this further ethos.) Pathos is present in her humorous moments and in the morbid curiosity she assumes she share about this practice.

1. Identify at least two places where the author engages a counter-argument. If the author does not engage in counter-argument, detail certain counter-arguments the author could have/should have engaged. (If the piece is informative, then where does it bring up all sides/concerns?)

Jeung notes that her fictional examples are just that—fictional. She also cites Bob Greene, who believes convicts should not get a last meal, in her paragraph about why the state would encourage them to.

1. How is the essay organized? Why do you think it is organized the way it is? (This question requires you to look at how the writer opens and closes the argument, where they put their main point, how they organize their evidence, where they do counter-argument, etc.)

Jeung’s title includes a quote we find at the end of the paper, which brings the essay full circle. She opens with an intriguing list of characters, both real and fictional, and their last meals. She first talks about the media’s obsession, giving examples, and then discusses the way the American public has extended it with cookbooks and other items. She puts the history of executions in America and how last meals work in real prisons before she moves onto discussing why the State and the American public allow and encourage the practice. She then comes back to her point about media with an extended discussion of the last meal in *The Sopranos* and ends with the quote from a convict that appeared in the title. She deals with counter-arguments they come up in her main argument. Her organization strategy is smart, since she starts with examples instead of historical background or generalities. It’s also clever to fully defend the claim that we’re obsessed with this before posing her question about why.

1. Is there anything about the essay that confuses you? Any questions that remain unanswered? Be specific.
2. What rhetorical strategies were the most important for this piece to succeed?

These last two questions are going to be different with every reader.