

## **Gloria Naylor The Writing Life**

*This essay by Gloria Naylor a prizewinning African American novelist and essayist began as a speech at a gala reading event in 1989 at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC*

*sponsored by the PENFaulkner Foundation a prestigious international writers organization*

*Naylor was one of twenty well known writers invited to speak for three minutes on the theme of*

*Beginnings The text appeared in the Washington Post Sunday book review section in February*

*2000 and was published later that year in a collection from Bloomsbury Press entitled Three*

*Minutes or Less: Americas Greatest Writers on the Universal Themes of Life*

This is going to be short okay While I am by birth a native New Yorker Ive often mentioned publicly that I was conceived in Robinsville Miss because for me that conception was the beginning of my writing career It was through my mothers genes that I inherited my passionate love of books But since she was from a sharecropping family who could not afford the luxury of buying books and the public libraries in the South were closed to black Americans she would take her spare Saturday afternoons and hire herself out in someone elses fields to earn the money to send away to book clubs And she made a vow to herself that all of her children would be born in a place where you could be poor and still read

She kept that promise and my earliest preschool memories are of being taken to a low brick building in the Bronx with dark walnut shelves that stretched high over my head shelves that seemed to a 4yearold to almost stretch into eternity

## **John Bean *et al*** **Excerpt from *Reading Rhetorically* brief edition**

However questioning does not necessarily mean just faultfinding and it certainly doesn't mean dismissing an author's ideas wholesale. Rather it entails carefully interrogating a text's claims and evidence and its subtle forms of persuasion so that you can make sound judgments and offer thoughtful responses. Your job in critiquing a text is to be critical. However the term critical means characterized by careful and exact evaluation and judgment not simply by disagreement or harsh judgment. In questioning a text you bring your critical faculties as well as your experience, knowledge, and opinion to bear on it but you do so in a way that treats the author's ideas fairly and makes judgments that can be supported by textual evidence.

This chapter offers you a repertoire of useful strategies to help you question a text and explore your responses to it. At the end of the chapter we show you an analytical paper that student writer Jenny, whose work you followed in Chapter 4, wrote in response to an assignment calling for a rhetorical analysis of Larissa MacFarquhar's article "Who Cares If Johnny Can't Read?" In that paper Jenny uses the questioning strategies described in this chapter to analyze MacFarquhar's argument and methods. Our purpose is to demonstrate how such strategies can enable you to write critical analyses valued by college professors.