Activity One: Close Reading and Annotating a Text

1. Annotate as you read for patterns, repetition, and shifts. Mark the text as follows:
   - Circle patterns and repetitions
   - Indicate shifts with a *

2. Which of the following tone words best represents the author’s attitude about her subject? Select a tone word from the list below for each paragraph and note the word in the right-hand margin. Underline evidence in the text to support your choices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accusing</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Condescending</th>
<th>Factual</th>
<th>Passionate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agitated</td>
<td>Bitter</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amused</td>
<td>Candid</td>
<td>Earnest</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Scornful</td>
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It’s Not What You Watch

Concern about the effects of television on children has centered almost exclusively upon the content of the programs children watch. Researchers devise complex and ingenious experiments to determine whether watching violent programs makes children more aggressive, or whether watching exemplary programs encourages “prosocial” behavior, as social scientists put it. Studies are conducted to discover whether television commercials make children greedy and materialistic or, as some have suggested, generous and spiritual. Investigators seek to discover whether television stereotypes affect children’s ways of thinking, causing them to become prejudiced, or open-minded, or whatever.

The very nature of the television experience apart from the program content is rarely considered. Perhaps the ever-changing array of sights and sounds coming out of the machine—the wild variety of images meeting the eye and the barrage of human and inhuman sounds reaching the ear—fosters the illusion of a varied experience. It is easy to overlook a deceptively simple fact: one is always watching television rather than having any other experience.

Whether the program is Sesame Street or Batman, Reading Rainbow or The Flintstones, there’s a similarity of experience about all television watching. Certain specific physiological mechanisms of the eyes, ears, and brain respond to the stimuli emanating from the television screen regardless of the cognitive content of the programs. It is a one-way transaction that requires the taking in of particular sensory material in a particular way, no matter what the material might be. There is indeed, no other experience in a child’s life that permits quite so much intake while demanding so little outflow.

A Strange and Wonderful Quiet

Because television is so wonderfully available as a child amuser and child defuser, capable of rendering a volatile three-year-old harmless at the flick of a switch, parents grow to depend upon it in the course of their daily lives. But as time goes on, television’s role changes. From a simple source
of entertainment provided by parents when they need a break from child care, television gradually becomes a powerful and disruptive presence in family life. Yet in spite of their increasing resentment at television’s various intrusions, and despite their considerable guilt at not being able to control their children’s viewing, parents do not take steps to extricate themselves from television’s domination. They can no longer cope without it.

In 1948 Jack Gould, the first television critic of The New York Times, described the impact of the new medium on American families: “Children’s hours on television admittedly are an insidious narcotic for the parent. With the tots fanned out on the floor in front of the receiver, a strange if wonderful quiet seems at hand…”

At first glance it may appear that Gould’s pen had slipped. Surely it was the strangely quiet children who were narcotized by the television set, not the parents. But indeed he had found the heart of the problem before the problem had fully materialized, long before anyone dreamed that one day children would spend more of their waking hours watching television than engaging in any other single activity. It is, in fact, the parents for whom television is an irresistible narcotic, not through their own viewing (although frequently this, too, is the case) but at a remove, through their children, fanned out in front of the receiver, strangely quiet. Surely there can be no more insidious drug than one that you must administer to others in order to achieve an effect for yourself.

Activity Two: Reading for Meaning

1. Winn repeats the word *children* in the opening paragraph several times. What impact might the repetition of this word have on the readers?

2. To juxtapose is to place close together for comparison or contrast. In lines 6 through 9, Winn uses two instances of juxtaposition. What is she comparing or contrasting?

3. How is this juxtaposition given greater impact by including it in the paragraph in which *children* is repeated?
4. In the second paragraph, Winn argues that television fosters “the illusion of a varied experience.” An *illusion* is a deceptive appearance or impression. What does the use of this word say about viewers of television?

5. The caption that precedes the fourth paragraph uses *strange* and *wonderful* to describe quiet. How does Winn’s argument in the fourth paragraph support her assertion that the effects of television are both strange and wonderful? What other adjectives does she use in this paragraph to describe television’s effects?

6. Winn repeats some form of the word narcotic in the final two paragraphs. How does this repetition signal a shift in her tone?
The Plug-In Drug: Understanding Argumentation

Activity One: Determine the Argument
Paraphrase, in one sentence, the arguments from the passage.

1. Winn’s Argument—It is easy to overlook a deceptively simple fact: one is always watching television rather than having any other experience.
   Paraphrase:

2. Winn’s Argument—There is indeed, no other experience in a child’s life that permits quite so much intake while demanding so little outflow.
   Paraphrase:

3. Winn’s Argument—Yet in spite of their increasing resentment at television’s various intrusions, and despite their considerable guilt at not being able to control their children’s viewing, parents do not take steps to extricate themselves from television’s domination. They can no longer cope without it.
   Paraphrase:

4. Winn’s Argument—It is, in fact, the parents for whom television is an irresistible narcotic, not through their own viewing (although frequently this, too, is the case) but at a remove, through their children, fanned out in front of the receiver, strangely quiet. Surely there can be no more insidious drug than one that you must administer to others in order to achieve an effect for yourself.
   Paraphrase:

Activity Two: Student Response
Create an argument statement that responds to Winn’s primary argument.

Marie Winn’s argument that ________________________________ is ________________________________ since ________________________________.
   (identify whether argument is valid) (explain why/why not Winn’s argument is valid)