How to Read Literature
Like a Professor:
Christ Figures
Why study Jesus in a public school?

- We live in a culture dominated by Christianity.
- To get the most out of European and American lit, you need to be familiar with Old & New Testament.
- If nothing else, you need to know about the namesake of Christianity: Jesus Christ.
There are some basic features that make him who he is:

1. crucified, wounds in the hands, feet, side, & head
2. in agony
3. self-sacrificing
4. good w/children
5. good w/loaves, fishes, water, wine
There are some basic features that make him who he is:

6. 33 years old when last seen
7. employed as a carpenter
8. known to use humble modes of transportation, feet or donkeys preferred
9. believed to have walked on water
10. often portrayed w/arms outstretched
There are some basic features that make him who he is:

11. known to have spent time alone in the wilderness (see 40 & 3 notes)
12. had disciples, 12 at first, but not all were equally devoted
13. very forgiving
14. came to redeem an unworthy world
Example: *Old Man & the Sea*

- old not young
- poor and engaged in a humble profession (fishing)
- hasn’t had luck fishing in awhile so people doubt him
- one boy believes in him (good w/kids & has a disciple)
Example: *Old Man & the Sea*

- old man is good & pure, world is not
- takes a lone fishing trip & sea become his wilderness
- begins to physically suffer
  - hands ripped up in struggle
  - thinks he’s ripped something in his side
- peps himself up w/little sayings
Example: Old Man & the Sea

- fishing struggle lasts 3 days
- his return is like a resurrection
- carries his mast up a hill & it looks like a cross
- collapses on bed w/arms outstretched, wounds facing up
- next morning, all doubters believe & he brings hope
A Christ figure doesn’t have to resemble Christ in every way; otherwise that character would be Christ.

No literary Christ figure can ever be as pure, perfect, or divine as Jesus, so why put them in?
Why authors include Christ figures...

The writer wants to make a certain point...

- Maybe the parallel deepens the sacrifice...
- Maybe the story has to do w/ redemption, hope, or miracles...
- Maybe ironic to make character look smaller, not greater...
- Who knows?? But they’re up to something...
Spiderman
Spiderman (especially #2)

- Good with kids
- Humble modes of transportation (pizza delivery in beginning of movie)
- Self-sacrificing (turned away MJ to protect her)
- Wounds in hand
- AND portrayed with arms outstretched...
Spiderman 2
Neo

- Humble job (Mr. Anderson in the cubicle)
- Name rearranged = “The One”
- Associated with “Trinity”
- Performs miracles (flying, stop bullets)
- Comes to redeem all people
- Sacrifices himself at the end of the 3rd movie
John Coffey

The Green Mile
John Coffey

- Initials = J.C.
- Performed miracles (healed with hands)
- Good with kids
- Self-sacrificing (chose to die)
- In agony (during execution)
Other examples

- Santiago in *The Old Man & the Sea*
- Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*
- Harry Potter
- Optimus Prime in *Transformers 2*