Stretching your cms! NOTE: Strategy examples drawn from “***October***” poems

1. A stick is never just a stick.

Don’t focus on the literal object but on the **concept** or **emotion** it may represent.

*E.g.* The “bare sycamore” is really an outward expression of the speaker’s inner hopelessness.

**(1 CM)**

1. Theme it up!

Identify a theme associated with the word or image, then derive implications from the theme, rather than directly from the image.

You may also identify an overarching or “universal” theme to potentially add greater focus and purpose to your essay. You can “theme it up” whether or not “theme” is actually mentioned in the prompt.

*E.g.* The “bare sycamore” is part of a pervasive sense of Death; Soto’s speaker appears to have mixed feelings about Death, viewing it as both fearful and abrupt as well as vindication and necessary for ultimate renewal. **(2 CMs)**

1. Analyze your analysis. Keep asking yourself the question, “So what?!”

Question, even contradict your own statements, report and give an explanation for tensions or complications in your logic or your discoveries.

*E.g.* The speaker’s plea “for the grapes’ sake” reveals his anxiety about Fall’s transition. However, the predominant “hushed…mild…” diction seems more consistent with a mellow, peaceful tone; hence, the speaker’s anxious pleadings may, in fact, be merely playful. **(2 CMs)**

1. Word Isolation.

Rather than always speaking of the author’s diction as a whole, hyper focus on a word and milk it for all it’s worth in the way of connotations and meanings.

*E.g.* Macbeth: “stars hide your fires…” the stars’ “fires” may symbolize, not only the illumination or detection of his crime, but also the destruction that will result from it. Macbeth’s fear of detection reveals his lingering belief in moral absolutes, or the actual existence of right and wrong and the inevitability of consequence. **(2 expansive CMs)**

5. Critical Approaches (all filters) and Defense Mechanisms (psychological filter)