

Observation vs. Insight

ob•ser•va•tion n. the action or process of watching something or someone.

in•sight n. the capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of something or someone.

An English class is not just about “observation”; it is about digging beneath the surface of what we’ve observed in order to discover its deeper meaning. Through such interpretation we make connections between what we’ve read and the purpose behind it or the effect that accompanies it. Making an observation is simply telling me what something *is*. Making an insightful statement is telling *how* and *why* something is. Often, such insights are made with certain transition words: *because of, due to, if/then, perhaps, although, etc.* When we develop insights, we are establishing connections and building a more complex understanding of something.

So how do we go from observation to insight?

Observation

Huck and Jim are floating down the Mississippi River.

Observation + One

The Mississippi River symbolizes freedom.

Insight

The Mississippi River symbolizes two kinds of freedom (spiritual and physical) *because* Huck is escaping a society that wants to confine his behavior (to “civilize” him), *while* Jim is escaping a society that wants to confine him physically (as a slave).

Insight + One

The Mississippi River symbolizes two kinds of freedom (spiritual and physical) *because* Huck is escaping a society that wants to confine his behavior (to “civilize” him), while Jim is escaping a society that wants to confine him physically (as a slave). *Although* Jim may find his freedom in Cairo, Illinois (a free state), Huck will still have to “grow up” no matter where they travel.

While observations are the foundation of an English class, insights are the next step in learning. Whenever we read, write, or discuss something in class, I expect us to form insights. Observation shows me that you were awake. Insight shows me that you were thinking!