Speaking assignments in the field of literary studies usually demand an argument about a particular literary text. These arguments involve interpretation and are thesis-driven. Thesis statements formulate the main argument of your presentation, and should be clearly, carefully defined in the introductory remarks. In the latter, one should also state why this particular thesis is relevant to the field of study. More particularly, one should situate one’s own argument in relation to the knowledge already existent in the field of literary studies. Making this relationship explicit will help the audience to understand why the talk is important and will help the audience to understand the particular literary text in a new way.

Once the basic topic and thesis have been elaborated, one should follow up with evidence used to support the thesis. In a literary research speech, these pieces of evidence can take many different forms, but one unique to the field is close reading, or intensive scrutiny of particular textual passages. The point is to develop an argument about the text by going directly to it, highlighting within it elements which a reader might normally miss, as, for example, demonstrating how the form or style of a particular passage supports or contradicts its express content. In the context of a speech, close reading exercises will be much more compelling if they are complemented by a visual aid. One may, for example, use Power Point to project the text onto a screen so that the audience can follow along as the speaker “deconstructs” a particular passage. In the case of poetry, the use of this sort of visual aid is particularly effective if the audience can literally see the speaker dissect the passage,

The basics of speaking are, for the most part, consistent across disciplines. Knowing the expectations of a discipline is an important part of adapting to your audience, however. The papers in the “Speaking, in my opinion…” series do not represent an official statement from the department. They do, however, give you an introduction to different faculty opinions on effective speaking.
using a stylus to physically draw connections between one part of the pas-
sage and another.

Once the thesis has been sufficiently supported with textual and other
critical evidence, one should offer a conclusion that restates the
thesis and that reiterates how the main points of an argument confirm
it. One should also restate how the thesis and argument contribute to the
field of study, or to the critical knowledge of a particular literary text. Last,
one should leave the audience with suggestions for further investiga-
tion. How does your argument open new avenues of research? By pos-
ing these sorts of questions at the end of your talk, the audience will leave
with a sense of their own stakes in the topic, potentially thinking of ways
that they may build on the work which the speaker has just done.