

A Taste of Theory

Kim Amyett and Hayley Taylor



Why is teaching literary theory important?

The... questioning
necessary, questioning
what we read.

"The purpose of teaching literary theory at the secondary level is not to turn Adolescents into critical theorists; rather, it is to encourage adolescents to inhabit theories comfortably enough to construct their own readings and learn to appreciate the power of multiple perspectives. Literary theory can help secondary literature classrooms become sites of constructive and transactive activity, where students approach texts with curiosity, authority, and initiative" (7)

Sample Resources

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ktskH0nDuQSMltytF5lu_Xam7kTDpRIRxk3LuN3chM/edit#slide=id.g636f146e8e_0_130

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1b8fuvPDMkrzPnzES5peNHZC9NZm5VvJz/view>

“My Papa’s Waltz”

- Take a few minutes to read the poem on the right.
- Once you’ve read it a few times, ask yourself “What is this poem about?”
- Think of/write down a few words or lines that brought you to that conclusion.
- Re-read the poem. Use your theory card or additional theory questions to interrogate the text: [Theory Cards](#) or [Additional Theory Questions](#)
- Student driven poem/song/theory activity: [S. Plath's "Mushrooms" Model & Student Choice Poem](#)

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother’s countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by di
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

FEMINISM AND FILM



Choose *one* of the following questions to respond to:

1. How do Jeff and Lisa's gender dynamics in *Rear Window* challenge or support feminist assumptions?
2. Was Alfred Hitchcock a feminist? Why or why not?

Support your answer with *text evidence* (dialogue, film techniques, and/or cinematic elements). ***Write in complete sentences and embed your quotes in order to receive full credit!**

[Student Samples from a Class Blog](#)

LITERARY THEORY, RHETORIC & COMPOSITION

Theory & Drama: Othello

Critical approaches to Othello

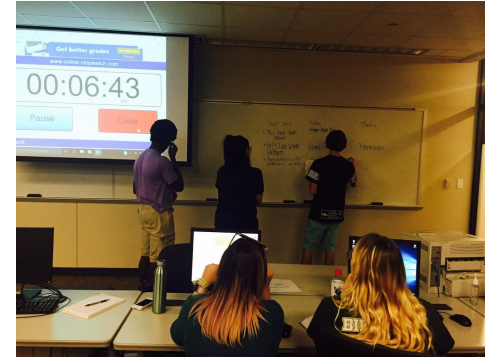
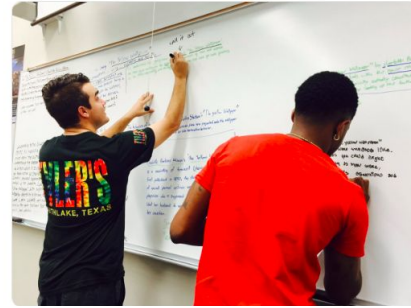
Critical Readings & Approaches to Othello

Psychoanalysis of Othello



Close Reading Workshop with Literary Theories

Student Samples



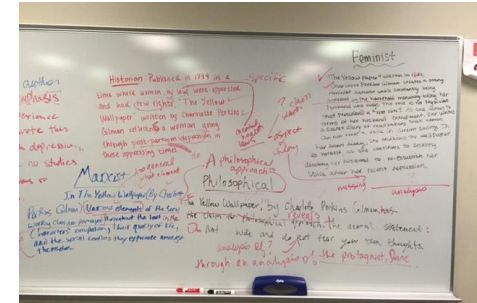
What aspects of the text lend themselves to this particular lens?

Cite specific textual passages that support this reading.

If you look through this lens, what themes or patterns are brought into sharp relief?

If you look through this lens, what questions emerge?

Do you believe in this reading? Why or why not?



1. Introduction
2. TPT Examples (Hayley)
3. Poem example
4. Multigenre/Close Reading examples (Kim)
5. Work time

Literary Theory Workbook

Sample

Formalist Lens

Formalist Lens

What is Formalism?

- Formalism is a school of criticism that was popular from the 1930s until the 1960s. This type of analysis called for a close reading of the text to arrive at meaning. Close reading often calls for annotation to foster active reading.

How do we do it?

- Focus your analysis on the work itself. Ignore the author's influence on your own feelings about the work.

ANNOTATE



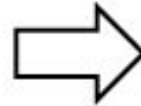
Star passages that reveal a theme



Circle examples of figurative language



Underline words or phrases that relate to the author's purpose



Draw an arrow to point out conflicts



Draw a heart next to symbols

Reader Response Lens

Reader Response Lens

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What is Reader Response Theory?

- Reader Response is all about the reader. This theory is a school of criticism that became popular in the early 1970s as a response to formal criticism. This theory stresses the importance of the reader's interaction with the text to arrive at meaning.

How do we do it?

- Read the text slowly and deliberately and think about your reaction and connection to the work.

Reader Response Lens

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Practice:

Answer one of the questions on the right with a partner or small group about a novel or short story we have read. Record your insights to share with the class.

- Do any of the characters remind you of family or friends?
- Have you experienced any similar events?
- What was your favorite part? Why?
- How would you have handled the main conflict in the story?
- Why do you think the author wrote this story?
- How do you feel about the main characters and their actions?

Myth and Archetypal Lenses

Myth and Archetypal Lenses

What is Archetypal Theory?

- A school of criticism developed from the psychological theories of Carl Jung, who identified the personal unconscious. Archetypes are recurring patterns or images relevant to the human experience. Therefore, archetypal theorists examine texts for commonalities with other stories, themes, or symbols representative of larger patterns in society.

What is Myth Theory?

- A school of criticism developed by Northrop Frye, Myth Theory is similar to archetypal theory in that it uses archetypal themes to categorize literature. The point of this theory is to compare works to other stories within the same categories.

Myth and Archetypal Lenses

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How do we do it?

- Examine texts for commonalities with other stories, themes, or symbols representative of larger patterns in society then compare works within categories.

Practice:

- Review the Archetypes on the following slide. Then, after identifying universal themes or characters in the text, create your own Archetypes.

Universal Theme



FORBIDDEN LOVE

Archetypal Conflict

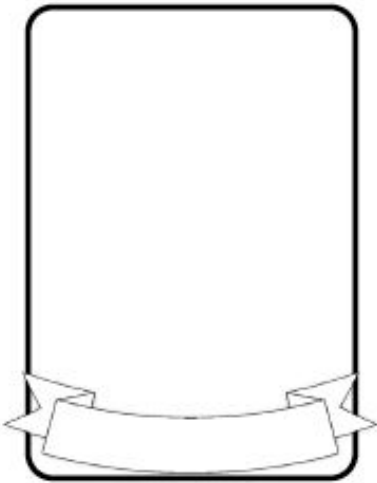
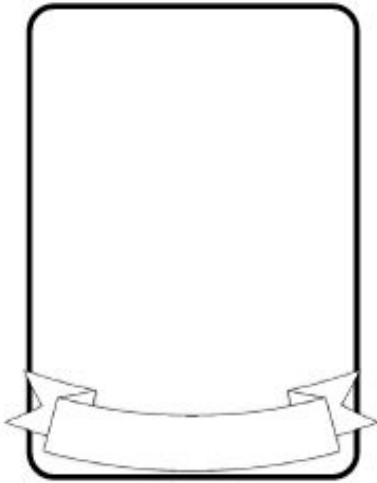
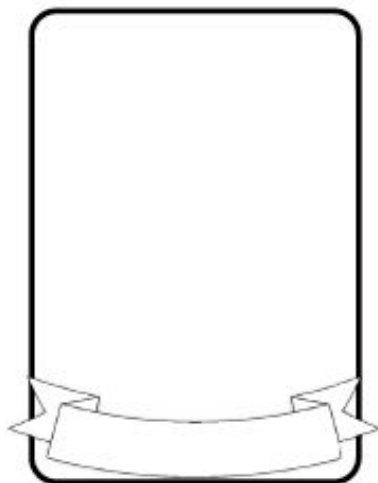


GOOD VS. EVIL

Archetypal Character



THE HEROINE



Deconstruction Lens

Deconstruction Lens

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What is Deconstruction?

- Deconstruction is a complex literary theory that was developed by Jacques Derrida in 1966. Like Structuralist theories before him, Derrida examined the relationship of words and their meanings within a language system exposing binaries, such as good versus bad, male versus female, rich versus poor, and majority versus minority. However, Deconstruction splits from structuralism by showing that binary pairs create false and unfair favor to one side over the other. Deconstruction asserts that meaning is arbitrary and constantly changing. Therefore, Deconstructionists state that no one can be certain about the meaning of a text. Applying these ideas to literature, Deconstructionists look to highlight the oppositions that exist in the text and reverse it to expose the uncertainty of meaning.

Deconstruction Lens

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How do we do it?

- Identify contradictions and oppositions in the story and decide if one side is favored over the other.

Practice:

- Fold a piece of paper in half and write the oppositions on either side. Stand up the paper like a tent. With a partner on one side and you on the other, conduct a debate about which side is favored or given priority in a text. Use textual evidence to support your side. When you're done, write one insight from your discussion and a short reflection about how meaning breaks down when oppositions are considered.

Psychological Lens

Psychological Lens

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What is Psychoanalytic Theory?

- Psychoanalytic Theory is a school of criticism that began as a psychological theory created by Sigmund Freud and his studies on the human psyche. Identifying a similarity between dreams and literary works, Freud applied his techniques to literature by examining the author's hidden desires or repressed feelings.

How do we do it?

- Relate repressed feelings or wishes and emotionally significant events in the story to the psychological state of the characters or author.

Psychological Theory

Practice:

- Complete a diagnostic examination of a character from a novel, story, or drama. Consider the character's conflicts, dreams, desires, insecurities, fears, etc.

CHARACTER

Eval.

Character Name

☐

Romantic turmoil

☐

Hidden feelings

☐

Unrequited love

☐

Secret desires and dreams

☐

Emotional struggle

☐

Internal conflict within their thoughts and feelings

☐

Repressed feelings

☐

Conflict with another character or situation

☐

Other

Explain in detail the nature of the character's mental state.

Provide a recommendation for the character's future behavior.

Gender Lens

Gender Lens

What are Gender Studies?

- Gender Studies explore the effect that gender has on power and representation. This type of literary analysis is heavily influenced by feminism, a movement to resist patriarchal, male-dominated aspects of society that confined women. Eventually, this movement translated into a literary theory because women wanted to add their conception of themselves, their point of view, and their female characters to the literary canon that had previously been dominated by men in an effort to establish equality. Literary theorists often explore how gender roles and expectations break down.

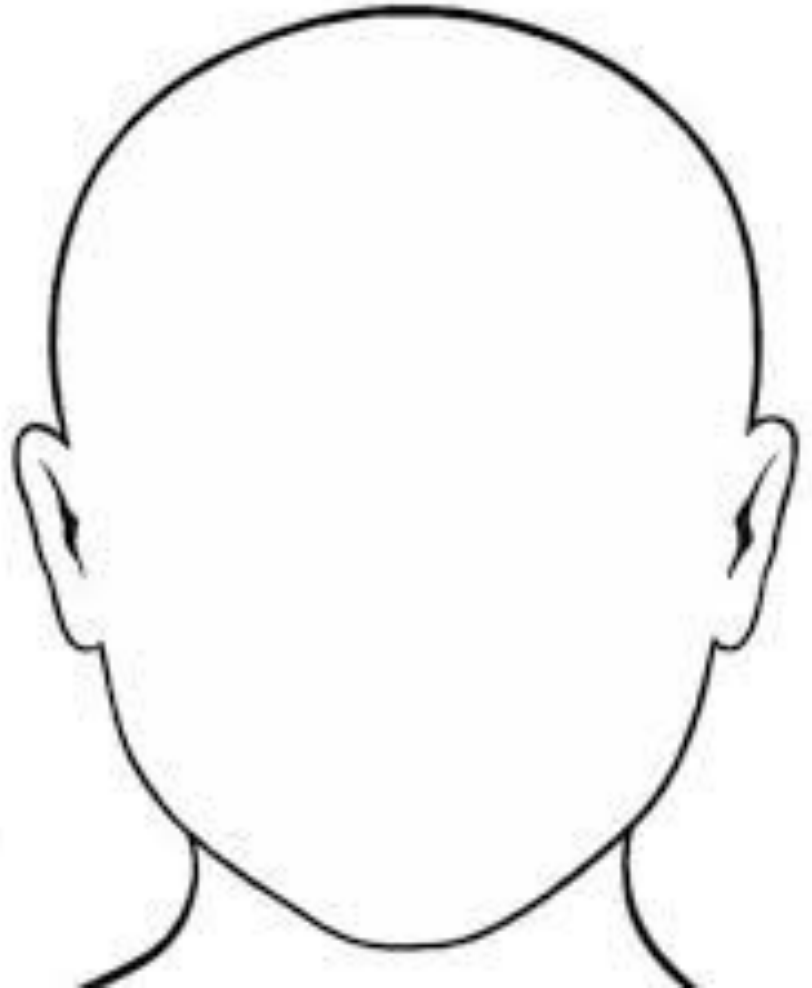
How do we do it?

- Analyze the role that gender plays in the story.

Gender Lens

Practice:

- On the blank face, design your character. Then, in the space around your character, explain how the character represents and defies gender expectations.



Social Class Lens

Social Class Lens

What is Social Theory?

- Social class theory is most closely linked to Marxism, a philosophy outlined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. There are two groups in society, “the haves” (Capitalists) and “the have nots” (the working class). The main objective of Marxism is to establish a working class revolt against “the haves” to redistribute the social power. In general, Social Class criticism focuses on the interpretation of the text as either a Capitalist or working class text with particular emphasis on exploitation of different social classes. Social class theory explores who has power, what do they do with that power, and how do these systems affect the powerless?

Social Class Lens

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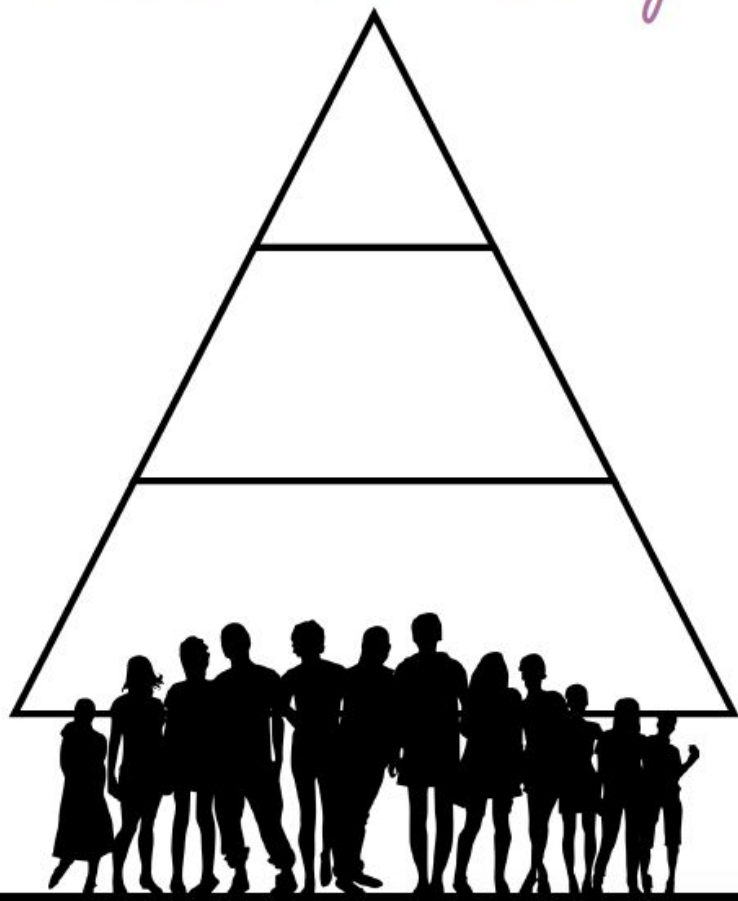
How do we do it?

- Analyze the role of different social classes and analyze the function of power.

Practice:

- Use the chart on the next slide to list the social classes hierarchy in your text and provide a short description of the characteristics of the group.

SOCIAL *hierarchy*



Critical Race Lens

Critical Race Lens

What is Critical Race Theory?

- CRT is a literary theory that explores the nature of prejudice, bias, and discrimination relation to race in an effort to act against injustice. Through this exploration, scholars define ways in which dominant culture subjugates members of minority groups through systemic racism. Scholars aim to provide literary and cultural representation of diverse people and advocate for anti-bias education.

How do we do it?

- Seek out diverse voices and experiences through text. Analyze the role of race and power in texts to identify and counter bias.

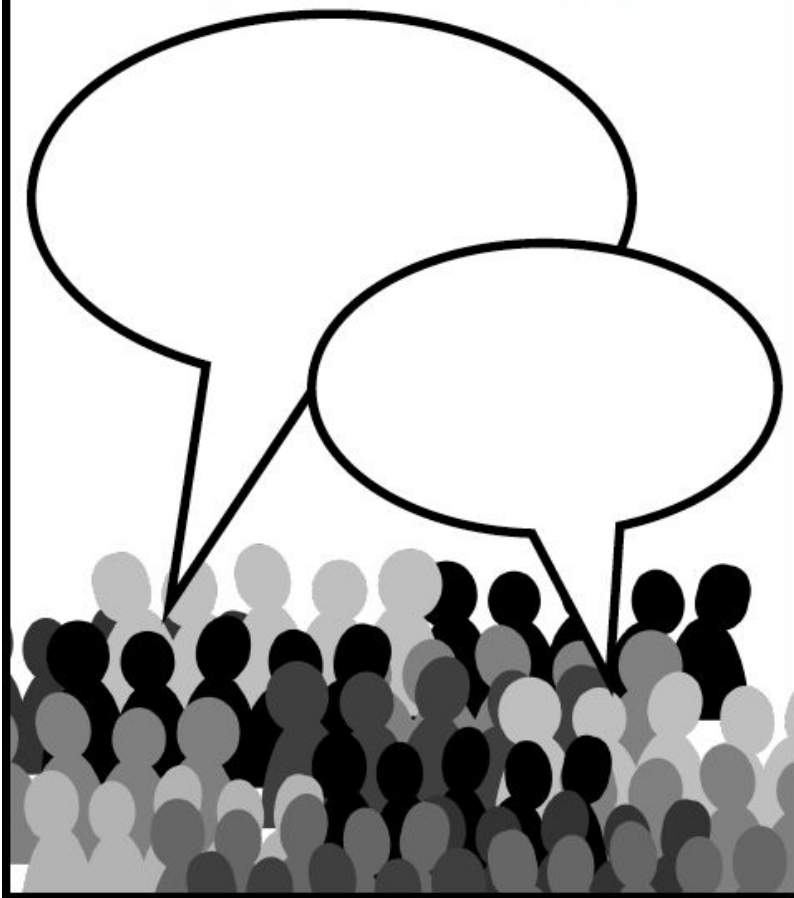
Practice:

- Identify issues related to bias and privilege in your text and record them in the space on the next slide. Then, research diverse voices on this theme or topic and record two insights from your research.

VOICES

from the

crowd



Historical Lens

Historical Lens

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What is Historical Theory?

- Historical theory studies the text in terms of historical themes, time periods, and cultures. The text can either be historically significant for the context or the time period for which it was written can also be relevant. Historical theorists believe that the text is always influenced by history; therefore, the text serves as historical data to be studied to arrive at meaning.

What is Political Theory?

- Political theory is a school of criticism that assumes political movements always influence the text; therefore, political theorists examine the text for support or rejection of particular political movements.

Historical Lens

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How do we do it?

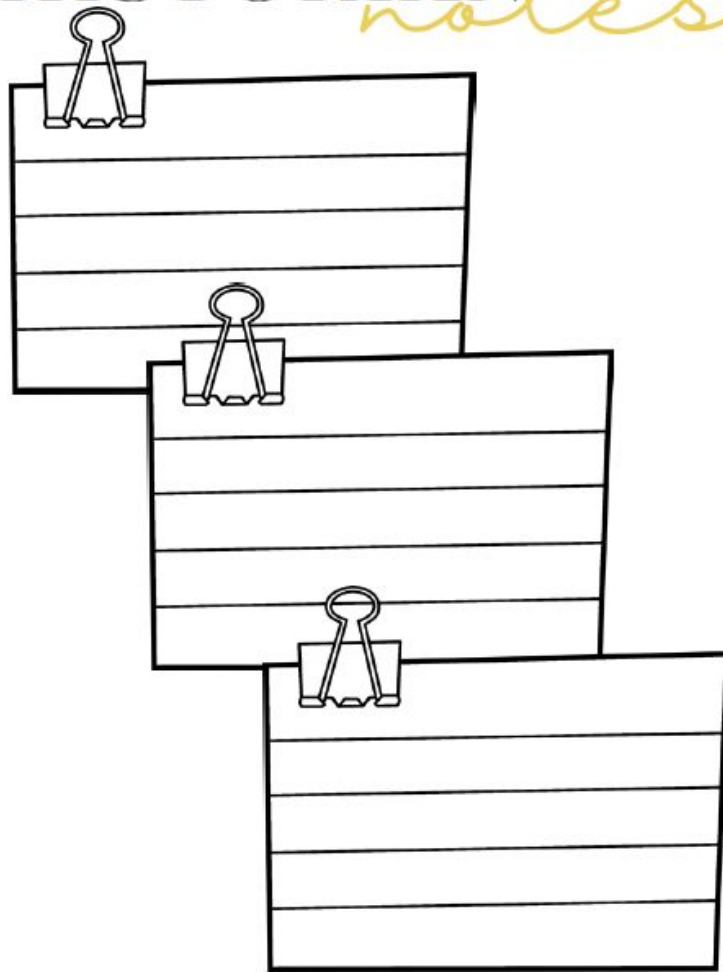
- Examine the text for support or rejection of particular political movements. Study the historical background relevant to the story and explain the significance of this background in the story.

Practice:

- Research the political and historical background of the work like a historian. On the next slide, create notecards to identify the significance of the background to the work.

HISTORIAN

notes



Biographical Lens

Biographical Lens

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What is Biographical Theory?

- Biographical theory assumes that the text is always heavily influenced by the life, thoughts, and feelings of the author. Therefore, it is necessary to study the life of the author in order to truly understand the text. It also assumes that the text is an extension of the author's psychological state at the time it was written.

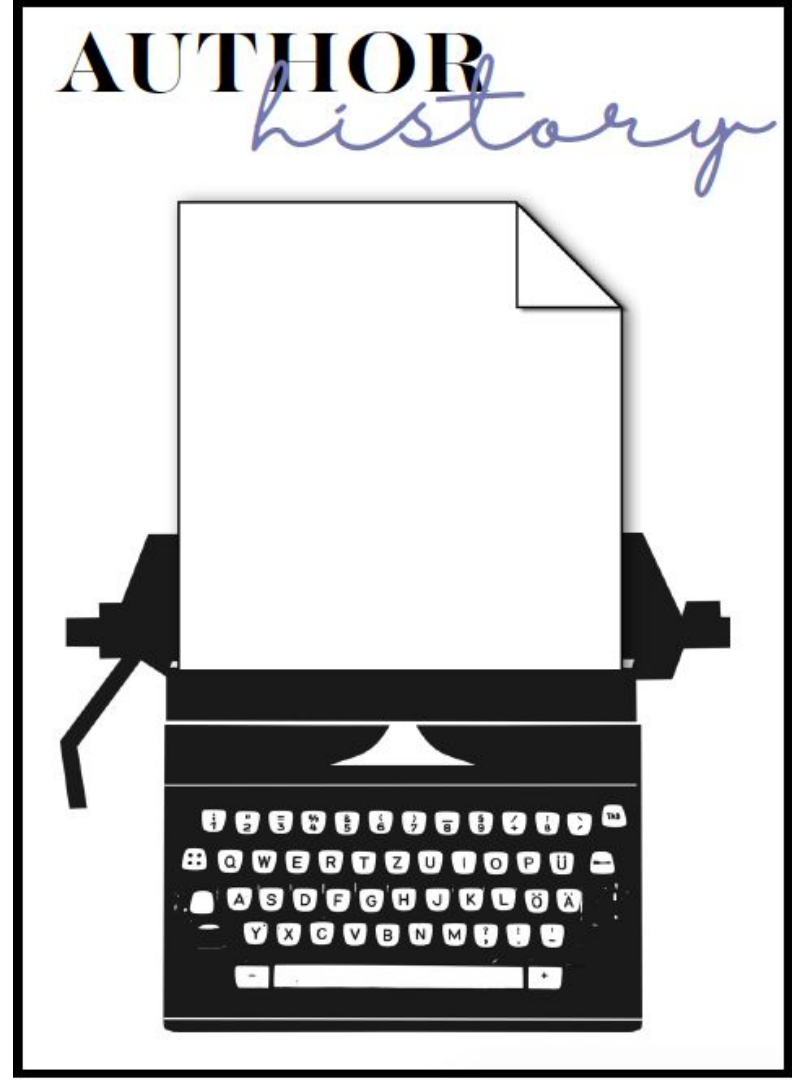
How do we do it?

- Study the life of the author in order to understand the text.

Biographical Lens

Practice:

- Research the life of the author in relation to the text. On the typewriter, record notes about the author's life. Outside the image, write connections from the story to your notes.



Ecological Lens

Ecological Lens

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What is Ecocritical Theory?

- Ecocriticism is a literary theory that explores the relationship between nature and humanity. In an attempt to preserve the natural world, ecocritics use the text as a way to explore how humans represent, interact, and affect the natural world.

How do we do it?

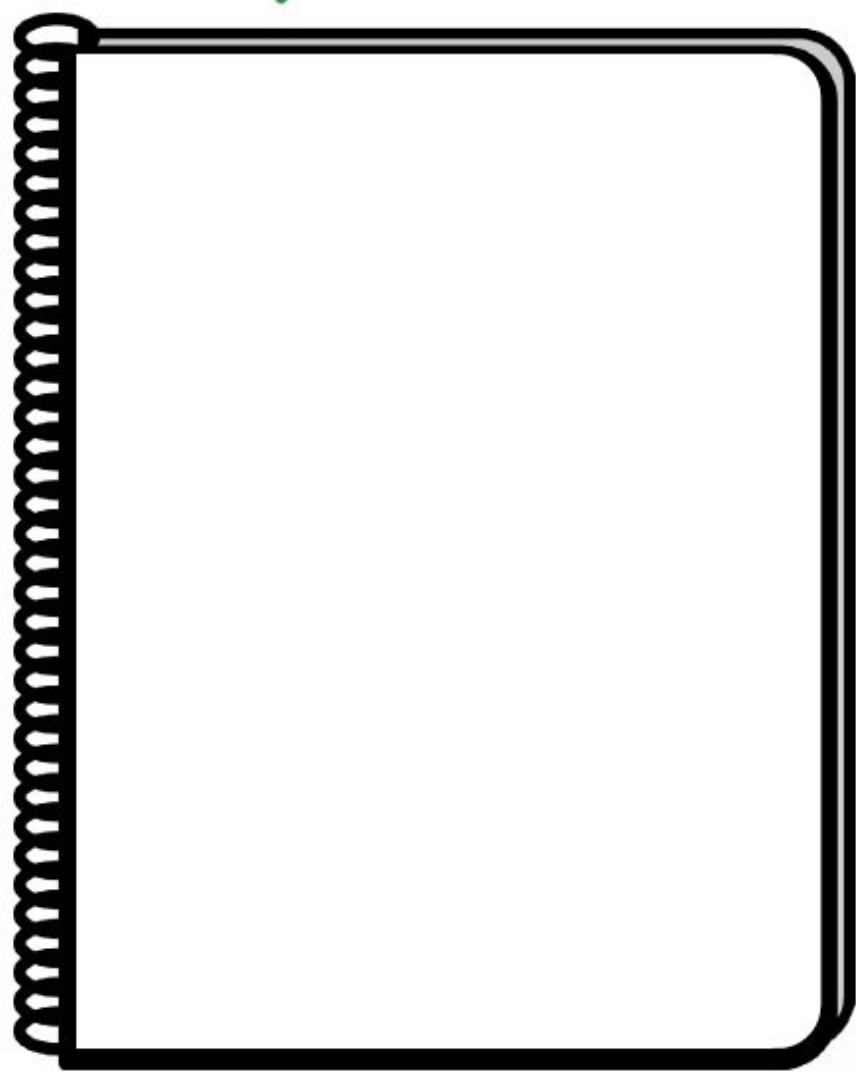
- Analyze the relationship between the text and the natural world.

Ecological Lens

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Practice:

- Take “field notes” as a literary explorer to identify connections between the text and the natural world. Just as an explorer, your notes should be written like a journal. Include the date, text evidence, and your reflections.



Postcolonial Lens

Postcolonial Lens

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What is Postcolonial Theory?

- Postcolonial theory is a school of criticism that expresses the relationship between colonized people and the colonizer, in which the colonizer rationalizes Imperialism and Colonialism by identifying the colonized as the “other”. The theory aims to highlight these relationships in an attempt to rid or inform the colonizer of prejudices.

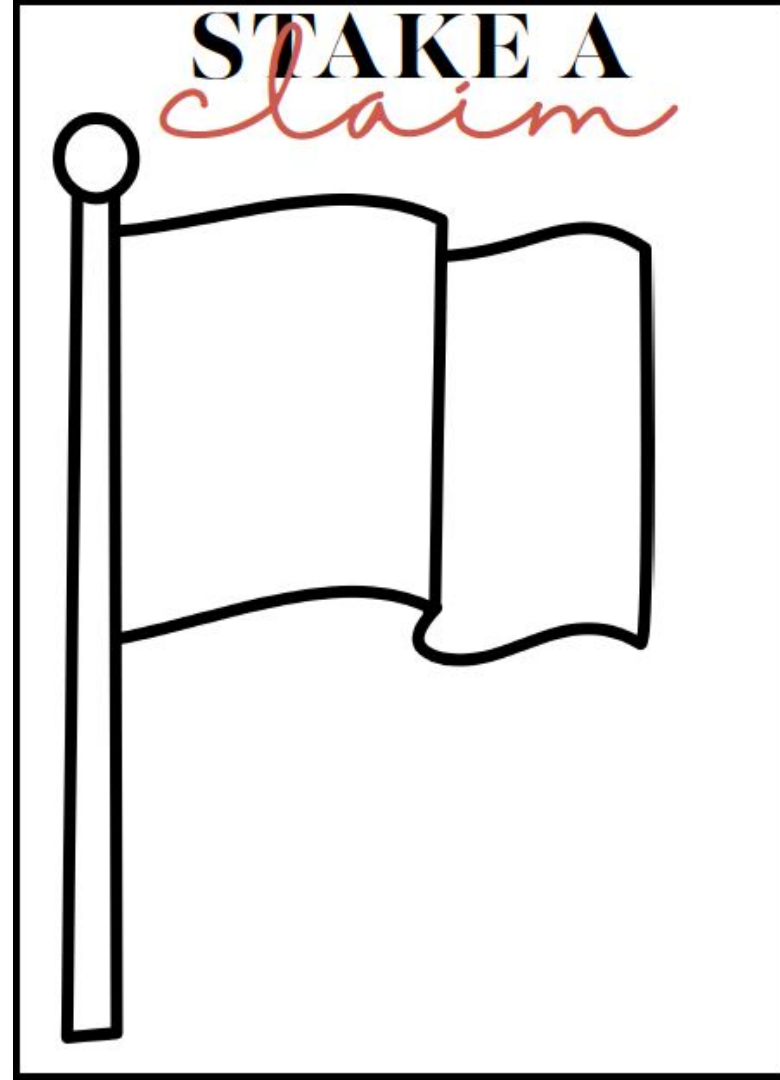
How do we do it?

- Define the dominant and subjugated groups in the story and determine how certain groups are dominated through colonization.

Postcolonial Lens

Practice:

- During the Age of Colonization, explorers would take a flag to claim land that was already occupied by indigenous people. Use the flag to mark colonizers and the open space around the flag to give quotes from your text to demonstrate ways the colonizers subjugated native people.



Disability Studies Lens

Disability Studies Lens

What are Disability Studies?

- Disability studies are a type of social lens that explores the meaning of what is considered normal and abnormal in relation to physical and mental capabilities. When applied to literature, it looks at representation and discrimination. Critics strive to show that “normal” is a subjective concept.

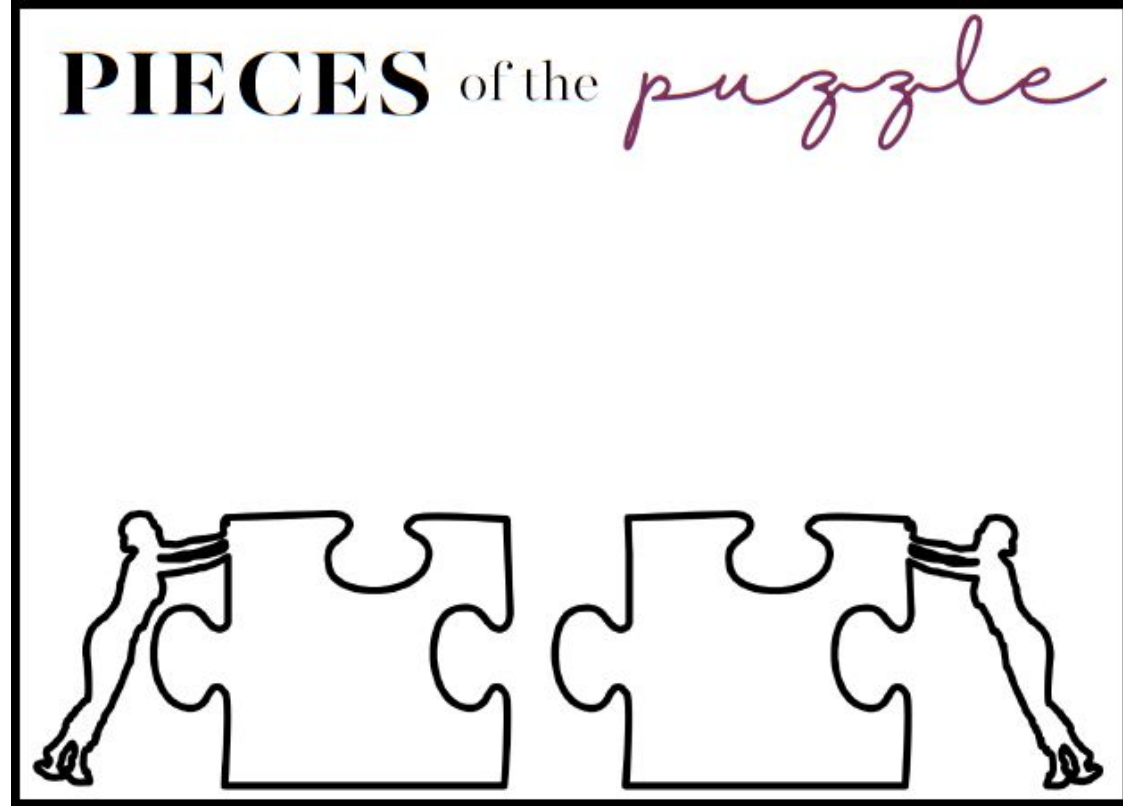
How do we do it?

- Define the social constructs of “normal” and “abnormal” in the story and determine how cultural values apply to the characters with disabilities.

Disability Studies Lens

Practice:

- Consider how “normal” and “abnormal” are defined within the culture of the story. Then, using the puzzle pieces, define the characteristics of people who fit in each group. Include quotes from the text to show these cultural reactions.



A Teacher's Guide to Literary Theory

A. New Criticism

New Criticism, prevalent from approximately 1930 to 1960. New Criticism requires an ontological critic, that is one who asserts that a work is a timeless, concrete entity. New Criticism is a derivative of Formalism, which stems from Modernism. Formalists rely on a work's form to arrive at an overall meaning. Therefore, outside information, such as historical, social, political, or cultural context has no influence on meaning. Conversely, New Criticism tends to work with science, a common theme of Modernism. Modernism and Formalism are associated with a movement away from religion, a continuation of enlightenment, which is established by a shift towards intellect and science. New Critics believe that the structure of a work can be analyzed scientifically. New Criticism asserts that the role of the critic is to identify the main idea to which all the other parts of the text point.

New Criticism In Practice:

- Assign reading check questions about the plot and other literary devices of the story. Discuss the answers as a class.
- Instruct students to identify difficult words from the text as they go on a note card or piece of paper. Then, instruct the students to research and present at least one of the difficult words in the story to the class. As a class, analyze the significance of the word choice to the story.
- After analyzing the text as a class, hand out a guided notes worksheet to instruct students on the central meaning of the work

B. Reader Response Theory

Reader Response Theory traveled a long path before it reached the status critics are familiar with today. The main shift occurred with Louise M. Rosenblatt's revolutionary concepts about reader. Following Plato and Aristotle's concern about the passive reader, Rosenblatt took their ideas a step further by insisting that textual meaning could only be discovered by an active audience. In these terms, Roseblatt asserted that the text should provide a transactional experience for the reader. This scheme was eventually accepted as the "formula" for Reader-Response Theory, which consists of Considering this regard, all interpretations are valid but not necessarily important. This idea is vital to the existence and validity of Reader-Response Theory. Despite the fact that all Reader-Response essays essentially assert a "right answer," the fact is that based on expression, detail, and sources some interpretations are simply better than others.

Reader Response Theory In Practice:

- Instruct students to free write, keep a journal, or use Post-it Notes to record reflections while reading the text.
- Provide students with writing or small group discussion prompts to encourage personal reflection.
- Hold a fishbowl discussion (several members of the class discuss the text in the center of a circle made by the rest of the class) to discuss different interpretations praises interpretations that are particularly insightful.

C. Deconstruction

The birth of Deconstruction in America is decidedly in 1966 during a Structuralist Convention at John Hopkins University when Jacques Derrida gave his famous “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science” lecture. Though Derrida, a French philosopher, did not coin the common name of the critical theory, followers flocked to Derrida’s revolutionary ideas for textual interpretation. Derrida begins his focus on matters of linguistics, using the studies of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure’s studies hypothesized that the English language is a system based on differences. For example, different letters are associated with different sounds, hence, constituting a collection of different letters that are all interrelated. Derrida takes this idea further by examining the relationship of words and their meanings within a language system. As a result, binaries, good versus bad, male versus female, sun versus moon, day versus night, etc., are important concepts of Deconstruction. Derrida focuses on society’s persistence to established hierarchical trends through these oppositions. The point is that these representations establish falsities of the ever-so-familiar good versus evil ideal likening that men are good and women are evil, for example. Derrida uses this theory to conclude that language is imprecise and incessantly changing. Additionally, Derrida asserts that words only have meanings based on the social constructs of differences, which entails that words do not have fixed meanings.

In Practice:

- Assign all students one partner. Instruct one of the pair to role play as a first grade teacher and the second to play a first grade student. Tell the “teachers” to give the first graders a lesson on opposites. Ask the pairs to identify the purpose of teaching young children oppositions.
- Instruct students to make a visual presentation of one of the binary oppositions in the work making sure to identify which half is favored. Afterwards, ask students to present their findings to the class.
- Facilitate a class discussion identifying which part of the pair is favored and why, and then discuss the repercussions of a reversal.

D. Psychoanalytical Theory

As the title suggests, psychoanalytical theory began as a psychological theory. Sigmund Freud is a name synonymous with this theory, because his studies focused on the human psyche. Freud believed that the unconscious thinking processes of the brain reveal repressed feelings that can drastically influence a person’s conscious psyche. Eventually, Freud translated his work into a literary interpretation model. Identifying a similarity between unconscious dreams and literary works, Freud applied his techniques to literature by examining the author’s hidden desires or repressed feelings. The same ideas can be applied to the characters in a story. Many of Freud’s specific theories involve sexual imagery and discussion that may not be appropriate for a high school classroom.

In Practice:

- Give students a particular period, person, and/or event significant to the author to research the life of the author. Report this information to the class.
- Watch a documentary on the life of the author, and instruct students to identify any conflicts or personal crises in the author’s life.
- Give students a character chart with columns to identify any emotional events that the character goes through. As a class, evaluate the characters’ responses to these events. Ask students to suggest other solutions the characters could have considered.
- Identify unconscious or repressed feelings of the author or character(s), and research those themes in a dream analysis book or on a free website, like www.dreammoods.com. (This is also fun to do with your students’ reoccurring dreams. Just be sure to go through it first and avoid entries involving sexual references.)

E. Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory began as a mindset for women in the early 20th century who felt that they were being oppressed in terms of social, political, and economic issues in a “patriarchal” society. Therefore, the aim of feminism as a movement is to exert their independence and prove that they are valuable people who deserve to be treated equally instead of the “other.” Eventually, this movement translated into a literary theory, because women wanted to add their conception of women, their point of view, and their female characters in the literary canon that had previously been dominated by men in an effort to establish equality. Therefore, feminist criticism focuses on the relationship between genders in a given text.

In Practice:

- Ask students to draw a picture of a lawyer, doctor, elementary teacher, and nurse being sure to include their attire. Poll the class to survey which gender was predominate for each profession. Discuss why.
- Use a two-column guide to summarize traditional gender roles attributed by societal standards. Discuss how these roles have changed or remained.
- Use a characterization chart to discuss the role of each character in the story in relation to societal standards. Discuss how the characters’ actions and desires relate to their gender.

F. Marxist Theory

Marxism is a philosophy outlined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In this philosophy turned literary theory, Marx and Engels established two groups of society, “the haves” (Capitalists) and “the have nots” (the working class). Marxists believe that society molds the individual based on status. The main objective of Marxism is to establish a working class revolt against “the haves” to redistribute the societal power. It is important to note that Marx never specifically discussed literary interpretations of Marxism. Therefore, no specific doctrines exist. In general, Marxist criticism focuses on the interpretation of the text as either a Capitalist or working class text with particular emphasis on exploitation of different social classes.

In Practice:

- Define the social structure of the work as a class. Then, ask students to classify the characters into certain class groups by identifying specific evidence from the story.
- Instruct students to list famous, historical revolts. As a class, discuss why the revolts took place or have the students research a rebellion. (The American Revolution, Caesar’s revolt against Pompey’s ruling in Rome, The Mexican War of Independence, The French Revolution, etc., are examples that students generally know.)
- Instruct the students to research Karl Marx, read a biography about Karl Marx, or watch a documentary about Karl Marx, and discuss how his life shaped his views.

G. Postcolonial Theory

Edward Said is essentially identified as the father of modern Postcolonial Theory. Said established a foundation for this theory with the development of Orientalism, a principle concept of Postcolonialism. In his work "Orientalism," Said defines Orientalism in several ways the primary being "a way to come to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said, 1978, p. 1). Based on this European Western focal point, Orientalism marks the distinction between the East, the Orient, and the West, the Occident. Said hypothesizes that the Western world brands the non-European East as an embodiment of mystery, obscurity, and even danger (Said, 1978). This concept is used to express the relationship between colonized people and the colonizer. Therefore, colonizer rationalizes Imperialism and Colonialism by the "'They're not like us,' and for that reason deserve to be ruled" train of thought (Bressler, 2003, p. 203). This factor is only one reason that Postcolonialism is a valiant attempt to rid or at least inform the colonizer of the prejudices toward the subjugated natives of the past and present colonies.

In Practice:

- As a class, define the dominant and subjugated groups in the story. Discuss how certain groups are dominated through colonization.
- Research colonialism by stating a definition and identifying colonies of the past and present.
- Identify the different cultures present in the story. Research the cultures of both groups. Discuss how the dominate group views the subjugated group through dialogue, action, and opinion.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.

H. Political and Historical Theories

Historical theory studies the text in terms of historical themes, time period, and culture. The text can either be historically significant for the context, or the time period it was written can also be relevant. Historical theories believe that the text is always influenced by history; therefore, the text serves as historical data to be studied to arrive at meaning. Political theory is very similar to historical theory in that it assumes that political movements always influence the text. Therefore, political theorists examine the text for support or rejection of particular political movements.

In Practice:

- Identify key historical and periods terms, including people, places, and events. Discuss how these terms represent a particular time period.
- Give the students a series of questions relating to the historical background of the story. Give them time to research the questions on the internet, and discuss their findings as a class.
- Instruct the students to make a faux newspaper representative of the time period in the story, using Microsoft Publisher. Include articles about sports, entertainment, economics, and products of the time period. (For example, the students could create a newspaper representing the Roaring Twenties for *The Great Gatsby*.)

I. Biographical Theory

Biographical theory assumes that the text is always heavily influenced by the life, thoughts, and feelings of the author. Therefore, biographical theorists believe that it is necessary to study the life of the author in order to truly understand the text. Additionally, the theory also assumes that the text is an extension of the author's psychological state at the time it was written.

In Practice:

- Research the life of the author in relation to the story. Instruct students to answer questions about the relationship between author's life and the story.
- Instruct the students to make a documentary style movie using Windows Movie Maker. Include pictures, sounds, voiceovers, and a discussion of the similarities between the author's life and the work.
- Instruct the students to write a research paper about the author's life and influences.

J. Myth & Archetypal Theories

Influenced by his famous teacher, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung established a set of ideals, which influenced yet another literary theory. Jung challenged Freud's assumption that the majority of thoughts were sexual in nature; therefore, Jung's contribution to Psychoanalytical Theory was to identify the personal unconscious, a place where thoughts and images are stored in an unconscious safe box completely forgotten by the person's conscious state. Archetypal Theory was developed from these psychological theories. Archetypes are recurrent patterns associated with the universal human experience. Therefore, archetypal theorists examine texts for commonalities with other stories, themes, or symbols representative of larger patterns in society. Myth Theory, developed by Northrop Frye, is similar to Archetypal Theory in that it uses archetypal themes to categorize literature. The point for this theory is to compare works to other stories within the same categories.

In Practice:

- Read several stories about "Santa Clause" from different cultures; for example, La Befana and St. Nicholas. Compare the stories for their similarities.
- Read origin stories from several different traditions. Discuss the patterns from the stories.
- List popular fairy tales and fables. Ask the students to categorize the stories according to similarities. Discuss the different groupings.

Literary Theory Cards

Gender/Feminist Lens

Essential Question: How does this text reinforce, critique, or challenge definitions of masculinity or femininity?

Central Concerns: gender roles, objectivity/objectification, representation, differences

Critical Assumptions:

1. Any text cannot exist outside of a gender frame of reference.
2. Historically, writing (and interpretation) has been dominated by men and masculine perceptions; it is important for women to create a feminine/feminist way of writing and reading.
3. Men and women are essentially different, and differences can be examined in social behavior, ideas, and values; these differences should be recognized.
4. Stereotyping is dangerous and can lead to destructive social norms.

What to do:

1. Consider the gender of the author, the reader, and the characters/voices in the text: how does the text reflect social gender codes?
2. Ask how the text reinforces or undermines gender stereotypes.
3. Imagine yourself as someone of the opposite gender reading this work.

Social Power/Marxist Lens

Essential Question: How does this text comment on or represent class conflict?

Central Concerns: power, economics, class, differences, fairness, society

Critical Assumptions:

1. The way people think and behave is determined by basic economic factors.
2. Class conflict is the same as political conflict.
3. The wealthy class exploits the working class by forcing their own values and beliefs upon them, usually through control of working conditions and money.
4. These ideas can be applied to the study of literature, which is a product of culture and social conflict.

What to do:

1. Explore the way different economic classes are represented in the text.
2. Determine the ideological stance of the text. (Is it radical? Conservative?)
3. Link the text to the social class of its author.
4. Consider how the text itself is a commodity that reproduces certain beliefs and behaviors. What is the effect of the work as means of control?

Psychological Lens

Essential Question: How can we apply psychology and psychoanalytical criticism to gain insights into the behavior and motivations of authors and characters?

Central Concerns: expression, personality, state of mind, designs of author

Critical Assumptions:

1. An author reveals repressed wishes or fears in a literary text.
2. Creative writing, like dreaming, can unlock the subconscious.
3. There are some patterns such as anxiety, repression, fear of death that can be applied both to individual characters and authors as well as generally to human beings.

What to do:

1. Look for an underlying psychological subtext in the work.
2. Discover key biographical moments and relate them to the text.
3. Try to explain the behavior of the characters in psychological terms, such as projection, repression, fear (of abandonment, sexuality, etc.).

Biographical Lens

Essential Question: How does this text reflect the experiences, beliefs, and intentions of its maker(s)?

Central Concerns: context, systems of meaning, commentary, society, belief, self-expression

Critical Assumptions:

1. Meaning is contextual.
2. Writing is a product of social, political, and historical forces.
3. Writing reflects the systems of meaning available to the author.
4. Interpretation of writing demands interpretation of its historical or biographical context.

What to do:

1. Research the author's life, and relate that information to the text.
2. Research the author's time—its historical, geographical, political, and intellectual moment—and relate that data to the text.
3. Research the systems of meaning available to the author, and relate those systems to the text.

New Historicism Lens

Essential Question: What are the ways in which our understanding of literature and its historical context change over time?

Central Concerns: history as interpretation and cultural construction, literature as dynamic, meaning changes over time

Critical Assumptions:

1. Meaning is contextual.
2. There are divergent viewpoints on the nature of a historical context.
3. History is subjective.
4. Interpretation is a kind of cultural production, marked by a particular context; we cannot look at history objectively, as we too interpret events as a product of our culture and our time.

What to do:

1. Learn about the systems of meaning that were available to the author at the time the work was produced.
2. Consider the ways in which cultural concepts change over time.
3. List the ways in which contemporary events, assumptions and perspectives might shape one's reading of the literary texts.
4. Imagine the ways in which literary works influence reconsiderations of history.

Archetypal Lens

Essential Question: How does this text show similarities to ancient story designs, character categories, and imagery?

Central Concerns: myth, image, dreams, rituals, pattern, model

Critical Assumptions:

1. Imaginative work is indebted to ancient systems of meaning, including ritual, mythology, and inherited symbolism (the “collective unconscious”).
2. There are no new stories.
3. Conflicts, characters, and symbols in fiction and poetry come from the same place as dreams, and can be interpreted the same way dreams are.

What to do:

1. Determine how the text mirrors certain inherited story structures, such as the heroic journey, creation myths, fairy tales, legends, and so forth.
2. Determine how the characters in the text can be said to reflect inherited character types such as the hero, the crone, the wicked stepmother, and so forth.
3. Show patterns in the text that resemble dream logic or seem to be without explicit context.

Deconstruction Lens

Essential Question: How does analysis of this text reveal privileged oppositions of meaning and arbitrary nature of language?

Central Concerns: privilege, hierarchies, indeterminacy, sign, signifier

Critical Assumptions:

1. Meaning is not determinate: it is made by binary oppositions (yes/no, positive, negative, etc.), but one item in an opposition is unavoidably favored or privileged over the other.
2. The hierarchy is arbitrary and can be exposed or reversed.
3. Texts contain unavoidable gaps, spaces, absences, contradictions and irresolvable ambiguities that defeat complete interpretation.

What to do:

1. Identify oppositions in the text.
2. Determine which member in a given opposition appears favored, and demonstrate contradiction of that favoring.
3. Expose a text's inability to resolve its ambiguities.

Postcolonial Lens

Essential Question: How does this text comment on, represent, or repress the marginalized voices?

Central Concerns: cultural markers, the Other, oppression, justice, society

Critical Assumptions:

1. Colonization—the exploitation of one national or ethnic group by another—is a powerful destructive force that disrupts the identities of both groups.
2. Colonized societies are forced to the margins by their colonizers (called “Othering”), despite having a historical claim to the land they inhabit.
3. Literature written by colonizers distorts the experiences and realities of the colonized; literature written by the colonized often attempts to redefine or preserve a sense of cultural identity.

What to do:

1. Explore how the text represents a colonized or colonized cultural group.
2. Ask how the text creates images of “others.” How does it demonstrate a colonial mindset?
3. Ask how conflicts in the text might be viewed as cultural conflicts.

Literary Criticism: Questions for a Variety of Approaches

I. Formalistic Approach: This approach focuses on form. The analysis stresses items like symbols, images, and structure and how one part of the work relates to other parts and to the whole.

- A. How is the work's structure unified?
- B. How do various elements of the work reinforce its meaning?
- C. What recurring patterns (repeated or related words, images, etc.) can you find? What is the effect of these patterns or motifs?
- D. How does repetition reinforce the theme(s)?
- E. How does the writer's diction reveal or reflect the work's meaning?
- F. What is the effect of the plot, and what parts specifically produce that effect?
- G. What figures of speech are used? (metaphors, similes, etc.)
- H. Note the writer's use of paradox, irony, symbol, plot, characterization, and style of narration. What effects are produced? Do any of these relate to one another or to the theme?
- I. Is there a relationship between the beginning and the end of the story?
- J. What tone and mood are created at various parts of the work?
- K. How does the author create tone and mood? What relationship is there between tone and mood and the effect of the story?
- L. How do the various elements interact to create a unified whole?

II. Philosophical Approach: This approach focuses on themes, view of the world, moral statements, author's philosophy, etc.

- A. What view of life does the story present? Which character best articulates this viewpoint?
- B. According to this work's view of life, what is mankind's relationship to God? To the universe?
- C. What moral statement, if any, does this story make? Is it explicit or implicit?
- D. What is the author's attitude toward his world? Toward fate? Toward God?
- E. What is the author's conception of good and evil?
- F. What does the work say about the nature of good or evil?
- G. What does the work say about human nature?

III. Biographical Approach: Focuses on connection of work to author's personal experiences.

- A. What aspects of the author's personal life are relevant to this story?
- B. Which of the author's stated beliefs are reflected in the work?
- C. Does the writer challenge or support the values of her contemporaries?
- D. What seem to be the author's major concerns? Do they reflect any of the writer's personal experiences?
- E. Do any of the events in the story correspond to events experienced by the author?
- F. Do any of the characters in the story correspond to real people?

IV. Historical Approach: This approach focuses on connection of work to the historical period in which it was written; literary historians attempt to connect the historical background of the work to specific aspects of the work.

- A. How does it reflect the time in which it was written?
- B. How accurately does the story depict the time in which it is set?
- C. What literary or historical influences helped to shape the form and content of the work?
- D. How does the story reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the time in which it was written or set?
(Consider beliefs and attitudes related to race, religion, politics, gender, society, philosophy, etc.)
- E. What other literary works may have influenced the writer?
- F. What historical events or movements might have influenced this writer?
- G. How would characters and events in this story have been viewed by the writer's contemporaries?
- H. Does the story reveal or contradict the prevailing values of the time in which it was written?
Does it provide an opposing view of the period's prevailing values?
- I. How important is it the historical context (the work's and the reader's) to interpreting the work?

V. Psychological Approach: This approach focuses on the psychology of characters.

- A. What forces are motivating the characters?
- B. Which behaviors of the characters are conscious ones?
- C. Which are unconscious?
- D. What conscious or unconscious conflicts exist between the characters?
- E. Given their backgrounds, how plausible is the characters' behavior?
- F. Are the theories of Freud or other psychologists applicable to this work? To what degree?
- G. Do any of the characters correspond to the parts of the tripartite self? (Id, ego, superego)
- H. What roles do psychological disorders and dreams play in this story?
- I. Are the characters recognizable psychological types?
- J. How might a psychological approach account for different responses in female and male readers?
- K. How does the work reflect the writer's personal psychology?
- L. What do the characters' emotions and behaviors reveal about their psychological states?
- M. How does the work reflect the unconscious dimensions of the writer's mind?
- N. How does the reader's own psychology affect his response to the work?

VI. Sociological Approach: This approach focuses on man's relationship to others in society, politics, religion, and business.

- A. What is the relationship between the characters and their society?
- B. Does the story address societal issues, such as race, gender, and class?
- C. How do social forces shape the power relationships between groups or classes of people in the story? Who has the power, and who doesn't? Why?
- D. How does the story reflect the Great American Dream?
- E. How does the story reflect urban, rural, or suburban values?
- F. What does the work say about economic or social power? Who has it and who doesn't? Any Marxist leanings evident?
- G. Does the story address issues of economic exploitation? What role does money play?
- H. How do economic conditions determine the direction of the characters' lives?
- I. Does the work challenge or affirm the social order it depicts?
- J. Can the protagonist's struggle be seen as symbolic of a larger class struggle?
How does the microcosm (small world) of the story reflect the macrocosm (large world) of the society in which it was composed?
- K. Do any of the characters correspond to types of government, such as a dictatorship, democracy, communism, socialism, fascism, etc.? What attitudes toward these political structures/systems are expressed in the work?

VII. Archetypal Approach: This approach focuses on connections to other literature, mythological/biblical allusions, archetypal images, symbols, characters, and themes.

- A. How does this story resemble other stories in plot, character, setting, or symbolism?
- B. What universal experiences are depicted?
- C. Are patterns suggested? Are seasons used to suggest a pattern or cycle?
- D. Does the protagonist undergo any kind of transformation, such as movement from innocence to experience, that seems archetypal?
- E. Are the names significant?
- F. Is there a Christ-like figure in the work?
- G. Does the writer allude to biblical or mythological literature? For what purpose?
- H. What aspects of the work create deep universal responses to it?
- I. How does the work reflect the hopes, fears, and expectations of entire cultures (for example, the ancient Greeks)?
- J. How do myths attempt to explain the unexplainable: origin of man? Purpose and destiny of human beings?
- K. What common human concerns are revealed in the story?
- L. How do stories from one culture correspond to those of another? (For example, creation myths, flood myths, etc.)
- M. How does the story reflect the experiences of death and rebirth?
- N. What archetypal events occur in the story? (Quest? Initiation? Scapegoating? Descents into the underworld? Ascents into heaven?)
- O. What archetypal images occur? (Water, rising sun, setting sun, symbolic colors)
- P. What archetypal characters appear in the story? (Mother Earth? Femme Fatal? Wise old man? Wanderer?)
- Q. What archetypal settings appear? (Garden? Desert?)
- R. How and why are these archetypes embodied in the work?

VIII. Feminist Criticism: This approach examines images of women and concepts of the feminine in myth and literature; uses the psychological, archetypal, and sociological approaches; often focuses on female characters who have been neglected in previous criticism. Feminist critics attempt to correct or supplement what they regard as a predominantly male-dominated critical perspective.

- A. How are women's lives portrayed in the work?
- B. Is the form and content of the work influenced by the writer's gender?
- C. How do male and female characters relate to one another? Are these relationships sources of conflict? Are these conflicts resolved?
- D. Does the work challenge or affirm traditional views of women?
- E. How do the images of women in the story reflect patriarchal social forces that have impeded women's efforts to achieve full equality with men?
- F. What marital expectations are imposed on the characters? What effect do these expectations have?
- G. What behavioral expectations are imposed on the characters? What effect do these expectations have?
- H. If a female character were male, how would the story be different (and vice versa)?
- I. How does the marital status of a character affect her decisions or happiness?



Round here, we are carving out our names
Around here, we all look the same
Round here, we talk just like lions
Yeah but we sacrifice like lambs
Round round round round here
She's slipping through my hands

Stanzas Four and Five



Applying Literary Theories to Poetry

Pick 1 poem per group and apply 2

theories to each one:

What aspects of the poem lend themselves to this particular lens?

Cite specific textual passage(s) that support this reading.

If you look through this lens, what themes or patterns are brought into sharp relief?

Consider a song that represents the theme or meaning of the poem.

If you look through this lens, what questions emerge?

Do you believe in this reading? Why or why not?

Psychological

Archetypal

Ecocriticism

Biographical

Marxist

Historical

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Discovering Literature: Shakespeare & Renaissance

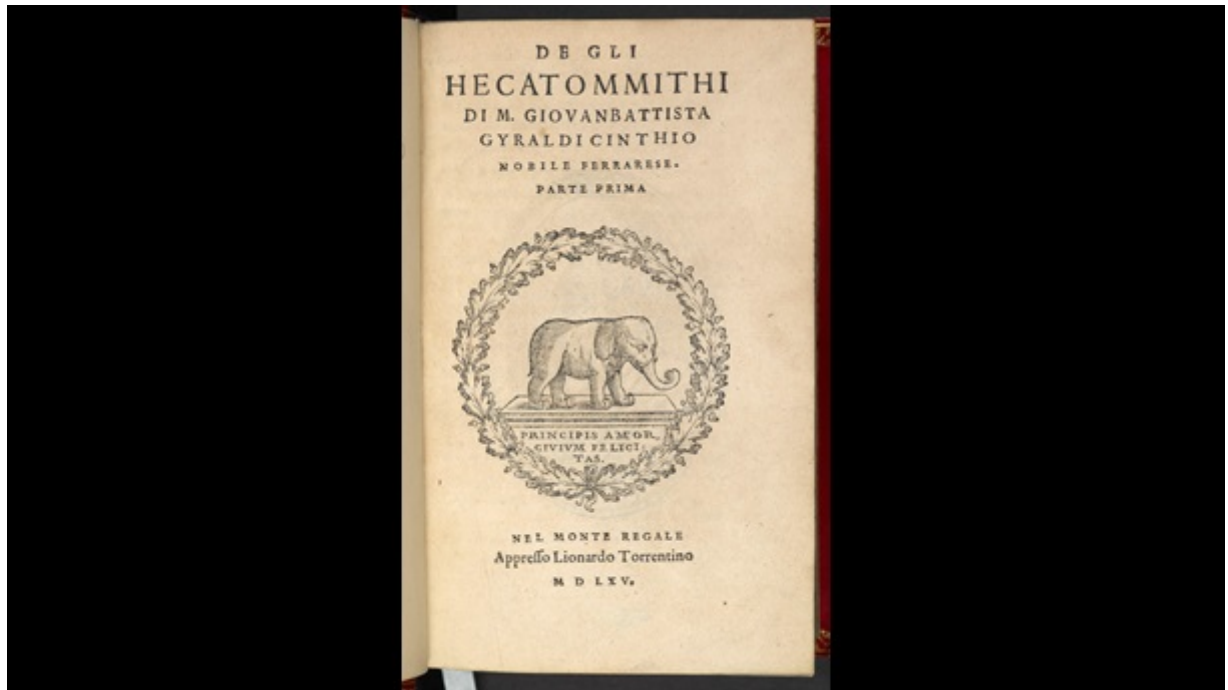
Critical approaches to *Othello*

- Article written by: [Virginia Mason Vaughan](#)
- Themes: [Tragedies](#) [\[shakespeare/themes/tragedies\]](#), [Ethnicity and identity](#) [\[shakespeare/themes/ethnicity-and-identity\]](#).
- Published: 15 Mar 2016

There have been numerous interpretations of *Othello* over the last 400 years. Virginia Mason Vaughan discusses four recent critical approaches: feminist, new historicist, marxist and post-colonial.

Othello [\[works/othello\]](#) was crafted at the dawn of the 17th century, shaped by complex social and geopolitical issues that new historicist critics, who seek to place literary works within a historical framework, have recently sought to unravel. Yet from its first staging to the present, *Othello* has also been among the few Shakespearean plays to be repeatedly staged to enthusiastic audiences, not only in England, but across the globe. This continuing appeal suggests that the tragedy transcends the time and location in which it was written, provoking new interpretations from generation to generation, place to place. In order to fully appreciate *Othello*, we need to see it in its multifaceted historical context – then – and consider the myriad ways it speaks to audiences now.

Cinthio's *Gli Hecatommithi*, an Italian source for *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*



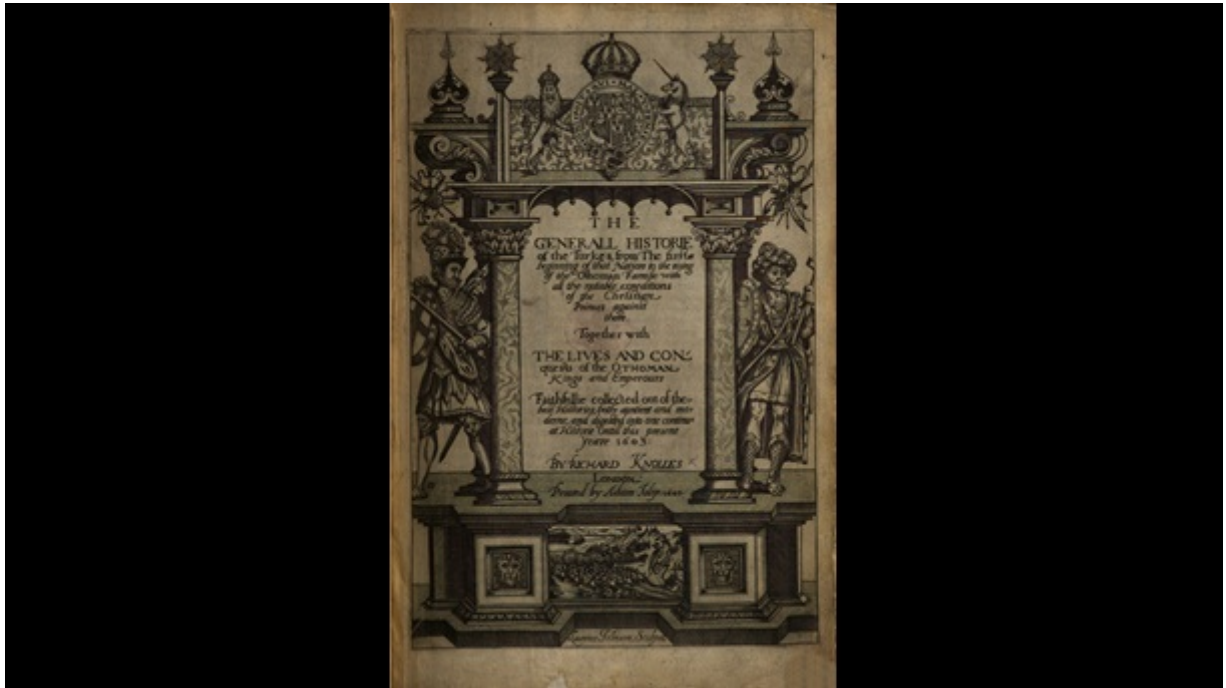
Shakespeare took the idea for Othello from a tale of doomed mixed-race marriage in Cinthio's *De Gli Hecatommithi*, 1565.

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Postcolonial reading: 'something from Cyprus'

Postcolonial readings focus on the play's representation of Ottoman Turks. Shakespeare derived *Othello*'s plot from a short narrative in Giraldi Cinthio's *Gli Hecatommithi* (1565), but set his play within the context of Venice's struggle during the 1570s with the Ottoman Empire for control of Cyprus, the eastern Mediterranean island that overlooked the shipping lanes between Europe and trading centres in the East. Venice owned Cyprus from 1470 to 1569, but in 1571 Turkish forces seized the island. Later that year an alliance of Christian powers defeated the Turk in the famous naval battle of Lepanto. As a young man, James VI of Scotland (James I of England in 1603) celebrated that battle, fought 'Betwixt the baptiz'd race, / And circumcised Turband Turkes'.^[1] References throughout *Othello* to 'the Turk' or 'turning Turk' evoke the intermittent conflict between Europe's Christian powers and the Islamic Ottoman Empire, which was as much an economic competition as a clash of religions. In sermons and treatises, English writers like Richard Knolles, who published *The General Historie of the Turks* (1603), demonised the Ottoman Empire as barbaric and cruel, even as they admired its military success and bureaucratic structure.

Description of the Battle of Lepanto in Knolles's *History of the Turks*



Richard Knolles' *General Historie of the Turks* (1603) demonizes the lion-like Turks but admires their military power.

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Shakespeare draws upon the Christian-Turkish binary but also undercuts it by making the play's most villainous character a Venetian and its hero an outsider. Fearful of vesting military power in one of its own citizens, Venice's republican government contracted with foreign mercenaries who could easily be dismissed once the crisis was over (as Othello is in Act 5). Although Othello has been chosen by the Venetian government to lead its army, 'the Moor' (a term that originally referred to practitioners of Islam) remains an alien in Venice. Like the liminal island of Cyprus, he is caught in the middle, neither European nor Turk yet embodying both, and in his suicide he highlights his service as a Christian hero by killing the 'turbaned Turk' within, who 'beat a Venetian and traduced the state' (5.2.352–53).

Othello's geopolitical impact is not limited, however, to conflicts between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Othello's blackness and his background as a foreign mercenary prefigures the hybridity postcolonial theorists have identified in colonial subjects. Brabantio and Desdemona are fascinated by his strange stories of cannibals and anthropophagi; Othello's first gift to her is a handkerchief given to him by an Egyptian charmer, 'dyed in mummy [a black liquid distilled from corpses] and steeped in the ancient lore of charmers, sibyls and magic'. [2]. [[EditorPage.aspx?da=core&id=%7B4BA49ADA-AAD5-4180-8BF4-](#)

[1323AEF62AEE%7D&ed=FIELD2728129641&vs&la=en&fld=%7BA03AE84A-59C0-4905-BE50-](#)

[B6AE9CE96875%7D&so&di=0&hdl=H2728129863&us=sitecore%5Cythorsdottir&mo&pe=0#footnote2](#)]. The Moor's

stories allow Desdemona to experience the exotic/erotic delight found by many early modern readers in travel narratives that described the 'antres vast' of unexplored territories in Africa, the East and the New World.

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville



Headless men and men with mouths behind their shoulders: these are some of the wondrous creatures depicted in *The Travels of John Mandeville*, a book still hugely popular in Shakespeare's day.

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New historicist reading: 'far more fair than black'

New historicist critics often debate whether or not race was a factor in early modern representations of non-English peoples. Although Othello's racial identity is clearly a factor in Shakespeare's text, when the play was first performed the audience would not have seen it as squarely focussed on race as we do. As editor Michael Neill observes, 'to talk about race in *Othello* is inevitably to fall into some degree of anachronism, while to ignore it is to efface something fundamental to the tragedy.'^[3] As a result, Shakespeare's *Othello* has been appropriated worldwide as a vehicle for the exploration of racial and ethnic tensions.

In the opening scene Iago refers to Othello as 'the thick-lips' (1.1.66) and later he raises a toast to 'the health of black Othello' (2.2.29). Through these and other comments we learn that Othello is a black African of sub-Saharan origin. In 1604 England was not yet formally immersed in the slave trade, but as early as 1565 English privateers had bought captured Africans, and Shakespeare may well have known some of them or other people of African heritage. Contemporary conceptions of race and racism, influenced by the history of racial slavery and 18th-century pseudo-science, are often based on hard and fast racial categories that were only incipient in Shakespeare's England. While Iago's and Brabantio's remarks in Act 1 exude what is today accepted as racism, the Duke's pronouncement that Othello is 'far more fair than black' and Montano's claim that 'the man commands / Like a full soldier' (2.1.36–37) indicate the high esteem others have for him. Nevertheless, references to Othello as black and a Moor, as well as his lack of understanding of Venetian customs, establish his liminal position in Venetian society.

16th-century costume guide



A wealthy Moor, 1598: In his guide to global fashions, Cesare Vecellio shows the fluid meaning of the word 'Moor' at the time Shakespeare was writing.

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In Shakespeare's time Othello was performed by Richard Burbage, a white actor who wore black make-up and a wig of black lamb's wool. (Burbage's powerful cross-racial performance should not be confused with the caricatured blackface used in 19th-century minstrel shows.) Still, by the early 19th century, a truly black Othello was no longer tenable in England and America. The English actor Edmund Kean chose instead to appear as a North African in light brown make-up, suggesting an African from the Mediterranean rim rather than a sub-Saharan. With the exception of Ira Aldridge, a black actor who portrayed Othello throughout northern Europe in the 19th century, the role was taken by white actors in various shades of make-up until the African-American actor Paul Robeson undertook the role in London (1930) and New York (1943). Since then, black actors have usually impersonated Shakespeare's Moor.

Portrait of Richard Burbage



17th-century portrait of the actor, Richard Burbage, probably the first man to play Othello. He played the part wearing black make-up and a wig made of black lamb's wool.

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Paul Robeson as Othello and Uta Hagen as Desdemona in New York, 1943–44



When Paul Robeson played Othello in New York in 1943, it ran for 296 performances – still the longest Shakespearean run in Broadway history.

Feminist reading: 'a maiden never bold'

Feminist critics highlight the ways Shakespeare portrays gender roles. In Act 1, Scene 3, Brabantio describes his daughter Desdemona as 'a maiden never bold', yet in choosing a foreigner she has violated the Venetian norm of arranged endogamous marriages (the practice of marrying within a local community or ethnic group) and rejected her father's authority. Still, she honours the patriarchal dictum that, once married, the wife owes her husband the same respect and duty she had shown her father. Emilia, too, defers to her husband Iago's wishes. Even after she realises the full extent of his villainy, she admits, 'Tis proper I obey him, but not now' (5.2.194). At the same time, romances, poems and plays often countered patriarchal authority in favour of romantic love. Just as the Duke overrules Brabantio's demands in Act 1, Scene 3, in fictional narratives the blocking father figure cannot prevail and young lovers marry. If *Othello* ended after Act 1, it would be, as many commentators have observed, a romantic comedy.

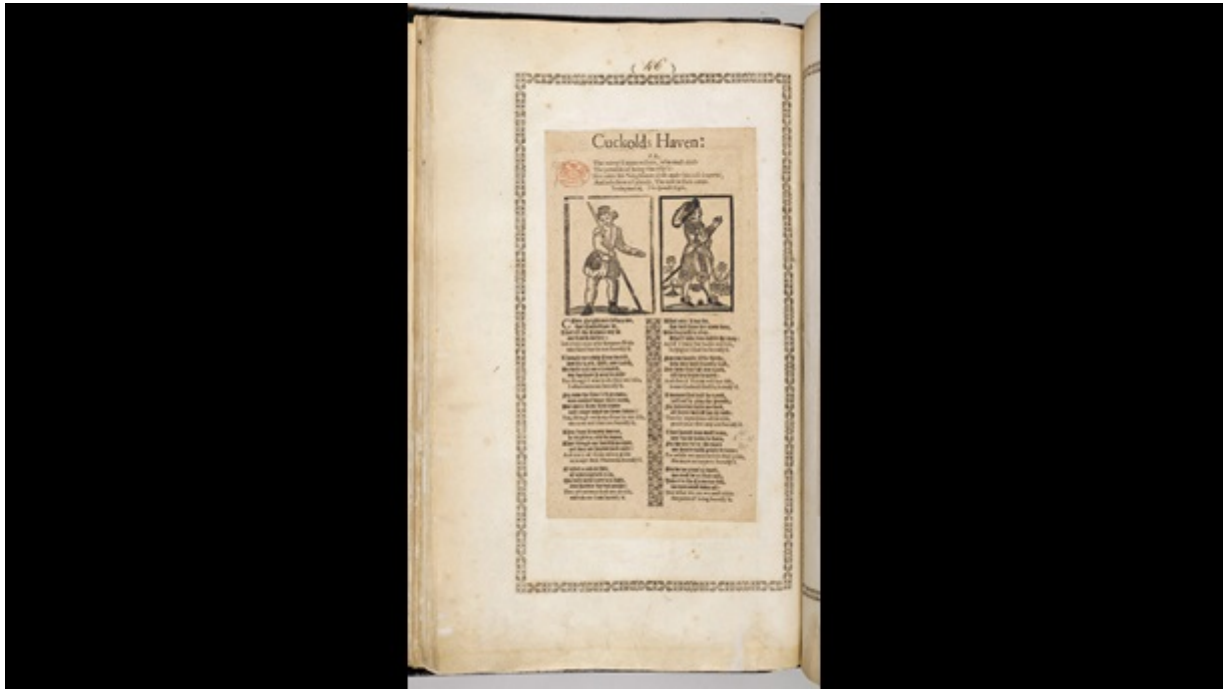
Alas, Desdemona and Othello's love is no match for Iago's plots and the green-eyed monster jealousy. Infidelity was the ultimate marital crime in early modern England. The prospect of illegitimate children subverted the bedrock of the era's social and economic system, the inheritance of property from father to son. In a speech that is often described as 'proto-feminist', Emilia argues that a wife's infidelity is a response to the husband's behaviour:

*Say they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps,
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant of former having in despite –
...
Yet have we some revenge. (4.4.82–88)*

Desdemona rejects this reasoning, promising 'Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend' (4.4.100). As she nears death in the play's final moments, she exonerates Othello by claiming no one has murdered her except herself.

From the play's earliest performances, audiences responded sympathetically to Desdemona's plight. After a 1610 production at Oxford, Henry Jackson recalled that Desdemona 'entreated the pity of the spectators by her very countenance'.^[4] That changed in the late 20th century, however, when feminist critics underscored Desdemona's initial independence and Emilia's eventual strength, and outlined the ways both women – as well as the courtesan Bianca – were constrained by the male characters' patriarchal suppositions. From a feminist perspective, early modern England's preoccupation with cuckoldry demonstrates a basic male insecurity about women's sexuality.

Broadside ballad on cuckolds



This 17th-century ballad, 'Cuckolds Haven', shows the early modern obsession with cuckolds – men who were depicted with animal horns as a sign that their wives had been unfaithful.

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Marxist reading: 'Tis the curse of service'

Marxist critics are concerned with the economic and psychological impact of early modern England's hierarchical social system. In 1604 James I took Shakespeare's acting company under his patronage, making Shakespeare a 'servant' of the king. Indeed, service to someone in a higher position was expected from the lowest kitchen maid to the lords and ladies of the king's court.^[5] The pecking order in *Othello* is clear. The Duke and aristocratic members of the Venetian Senate give orders to Othello, who in turn commands his Lieutenant Cassio. Ensign Iago is subordinate to both. All three ostensibly serve out of loyalty to the state and for the status their military position brings, but they can be dismissed at the pleasure of their superiors. Iago resents Cassio, a man with 'a daily beauty in his life' (5.1.19), hates being tied to Othello's service and yearns for preferment.

The different gradations of status embedded in the text are often represented in military terms, with Iago presented as a rough-speaking non-commissioned officer, resentful of Cassio's rank and courtly manners. But the play's exploration of rank and class go beyond the military. Iago's repeated advice, 'Put money in thy purse', suggests that a new economic model has replaced the feudal obligations of service, which had been based on a bond of loyalty and duty between servant and master. As a 'servant' of the king, Shakespeare – who applied for a coat of arms to be named a 'gentleman' but was also an entrepreneur who loaned money and invested in land and rents – was implicated in both models.

Photograph of Hugh Quarshie and Lucian Msamati in *Othello*, 2015



In the RSC's 2015 production of *Othello*, the lead role was played by Hugh Quarshie and Iago was played by Lucian Msamati.

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'O bloody period!'

Shakespeare wove the contradictory discourses of his age into *Othello*'s tangled web, whether it be the conflict between women's self-rule and patriarchal marriage, western society's fascination with and fear of the Islamic or African other, or the resentment caused by shifting economic parameters. 400 years later the discourses have changed, but as contemporary appropriations of *Othello* remind us, the issues have only intensified.

Footnotes

[1] James VI of Scotland, 'Lepanto', in *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. by James Craigie (Edinburgh: William Blackwood for the Scottish Text Society, 3rd series, no. XXII, 1955), p. 202.

[2] Ian Smith, 'Othello's Black Handkerchief', in *Othello: The State of Play*, ed. by Lena Cowan Orlin (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 95–120 (p. 103).

[3] Michael Neill, 'Introduction', *Othello* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 125.

[4] See Neill, p. 9.

[5] See Neill, p. 161.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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A FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS ON THE CHARACTER, OTHELLO

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ABSTRACT

Psychoanalytical approach has undergone a gradual importance over time in the world of literature. Psychoanalysis has always been an important tool in understanding literary texts. Psychoanalytical knowledge provides readers better sort of understanding of literary pieces and assists to achieve the target of communicative literary competence. The research tends to focus on one of the most acknowledged characters of William Shakespeare, Othello. Psychoanalytic approach has been used in this study to bring out the unconscious activity of Othello's mind aroused by jealousy, inferiority complex, and Iago's heinous plan. This study demonstrates how humans are helpless in the hand of some unconscious factors of mind. The purpose of this study is to depict how Shakespeare's character Othello is motivated by unconscious drives like Id, Ego and Superego. In order to balance the unconscious conflicts in mind, Othello's ego controls his Id and Superego while ego applying a series of defense mechanisms like rationalization, somatization, denial, intellectualization, regression, projection etc. By applying Freud's psychoanalytic approach on the character Othello, the paper will also attempt to interpret how the unconscious factors affect Othello's behavior, personality, mental health and personal relationships.

Key words: Freudian components of Personality, Jealousy, Inferiority complex, Defense mechanisms of *Othello*.

"Othello" or "The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice" (1603) is one of the most remarkable and well performed plays across the globe written by William Shakespeare. Ben Jonson said (1650), "Shakespeare was not of an age, but for all time!" Shakespeare is best known for his sincere presentations of human emotions. His literary works have the power to transcend over time. Perhaps, that is the striking reason for being his plays universal. Many critics appreciate Othello as one of the greatest hero of Shakespeare. The critics of psychoanalysis often focus on the inner workings of character. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis is one of the finest and effective ways to explain human

behavior and psychology. The article attempts to bring out Othello's unconscious mind and drives. "These unconscious factors have the potential to produce unhappiness in the form of disturbing personality traits or disturbances in self-esteem" (American psychoanalytic Association, 1998). Othello's psychological problem is rooted in his unconscious mind. By applying this theory on Othello's character, it allows the readers to have a great insight into the inner workings of Othello's mind. It also provides a deeper understanding of Othello.

Recently there has been a growing interest in the fields of psychology. "As a direct result of

psychoanalysis, approaches to psychological problem has been developed worldwide" (Farrell, 1981). In the past decade much research has been focused on the basic psychoanalysis of Othello. In this section of the paper, I would like to discuss some views of scholars on psychoanalysis of Othello. Most of the writers consider Othello's act of killing his beautiful wife and his tragic doom from the grand position because of racial prejudice, jealousy, inferiority complex, Iago's heinous plot and so on. Many researchers have extensively studied only a few defense mechanisms applied by Othello's ego which are not only interesting but also important.

Coleridge (Coleridge, 247) states that "Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago" (qtd. In Xun Wu, 27). But David Enoch, a psychiatrist, (David, 1991: 38) holds the view that that "Iago merely fanned the flame of jealousy, which was already embedded in Othello's personality". (qtd. Chin-jung, 50). Robeson states: "Othello is a tragedy of racial conflict, a tragedy of honor, rather than jealousy" (qtd. In Andreas, 39, In Mutlu, 135).

Crystal Cookies (2016) mentions Othello's superego (conscience) that makes him think twice about making this decision as he asks for "ocular proof" (III.iii.366). LokiS54cero (2017) states that "murdering others is an outward projection of an unconscious desire to die". Othello himself wanted to die for the feeling of betrayal. But in projecting his self-hatred to Desdemona, he projected his killing instinct. But Othello exercises his will for regression when killing himself. LokiS54cero (2017) also states "Othello's jealousy might be a denial of his own desires. Othello probably lusts after someone else. But he fails to express. In order to defend his ego, he projected these desires onto his wife. Then, he becomes very suspicious of her interactions with others. Othello then convinces himself of his wife's infidelity by displacing a hatred of himself onto Desdemona".

Athlete Mario Balotelli (1990) states that 'Racism springs from ignorance'. The fact cannot be denied that Othello's ignorance is his lack of prudence. He always considers Iago as "honest

ensign" which is ironic in the play (V.ii.150). From the experience of literature, it is understood that a great warrior, or a great king must exercise prudence in such important matters of state. If Othello had the capability to exercise such prudence, he would not be the victim of Iago's conspiracy.

The views above sound reasonable in interpreting the psychology of Othello because every reagent like conspiracy, jealousy directly or indirectly shapes Othello's behavior and personality. However, they pay much attention to the external causes and a few defense mechanisms. But in this paper the author will attempt to trace Freud's almost all defense mechanisms which is applied by Othello's ego internally. Moreover, the paper will end with a relationship among the causes which are responsible for shaping Othello's personality and actions.

Sigmund Freud is known as the proponent of Psychoanalysis. Human beings are motivated by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts. According to Freud, there are three components of personality like Id, Superego, Ego. The complex theory of Freud is overshadowed in Othello. From the psychoanalytic approach, it is understood that Othello's behavior is the result of the interaction among Id, Ego and Superego. This interaction happens in his unconscious mind.

In *An outline of psychoanalysis* (1949), Freud explains the components of Personality. Id resides completely at the unconscious level. It acts under the "pleasure principle" (Freud, 1856). Id wants an immediate gratification. Id is "the primitive and instinctual part of the mind" that contains sexual and aggressive drives (Freud, 1856). It is unwilling to compromise. Id will do anything to achieve its goal no matter how dangerous its action may seem. Superego is the idealistic part of the personality. It resides in preconscious mind. It is the decision making component of personality. "The super ego's function is to control the Id's impulses" (Freud 1856). It especially controls those which society forbids such as aggression. The superego can punish the ego through causing feelings of guilt. Ego resides in all levels of awareness. It operates under reality principle. Ego attempts to negotiate between

Id and Superego to satisfy both realistically. The ego acts as a referee for the Id and superego. Id is chaotic and unreasonable. But ego works by reason.

In "Othello", conflicts among id, ego, and superego arise in Othello's unconscious mind. Conflicts come in various ways like slip of the tongue, dreams, jokes, jealousy, anger, anxiety, and defense mechanisms. To deal with conflicts in life, the ego employs a range of defense mechanism. As Othello becomes more jealous, angry and tensed, his ego applies some defense mechanisms like projection, intellectualization, displacement, denial regression, rationalism etc. Some examples of which are stated later in this paper. "These unconscious drives and defense mechanisms also help an individual to overcome the challenges they face in life" (National Psychological Association for psychoanalysis, 1998). But sometimes these can be fatal as in Othello.

Some critics consider Othello's gullibility as a tragic flaw while many critics regard jealousy as Othello's "tragic flaw". But Othello did not create jealousy himself. Rather, it originates from Othello's psychology of inferiority. Jealousy is a strong emotion that strikes humans with its lethal venom. Iago poisons Othello's mind and Othello reacts to this jealousy. Jealousy heavily shapes his personality and behavior. This painful emotional feeling is good enough to destroy any happiness. Othello possesses "free and open nature" (I.iii.397). Though Othello is a soldier, leader and powerful figure of Venetian society, he is not devoid of jealousy. He is so gullible that sinister Iago easily manipulates him. "Iago reflects the archetypal villain" (Sen, 2006). Othello relies easily on Iago to believe without being thought deeply. Iago tries to prove Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio which increases Othello's torments of jealousy.

"Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;

And his unbookish jealousy must
construe". (IV.i. L 93-95)

Iago in a soliloquy explains that he intends to question Cassio about his relations with Bianca, a prostitute who earns her livelihood by selling her bodily charms. Consequently, overhearing their

conversation, Othello believes that they are talking about Desdemona. Then, he is quite convinced that "all his worst fears are justified" (Sen, 2006). Iago also soliloquizes to keep the handkerchief of Desdemona in Cassio's lodging and intends that Othello will discover the handkerchief in the former lieutenant's possession. Thus, his jealous suspicion will be confirmed. Thus jealousy arises and Othello reacts to it. Consequently, this jealousy kindles some unconscious drives in his mind.

Like jealousy, Othello's inferiority complex changes his personality and behavior. This Inferiority complex causes unnecessary doubt and jealousy, sense of revenge and hatred in Othello which results in disasters. Inferiority complex is an intense feeling of unworthiness. Othello corresponds to the Freud's theory of Inferiority complex. He is often referred to as the "Moor" (I.i.116), "the Barbary Horse" (I.i.111), "old black ram" (I.i.8), "Thick-lips" (I.i.66). Othello is a black moor who is living in a white society. He concerns over his race, poor language and age. That's why, he considers himself as racial outsider in Venetian society. Shakespeare seems to base her protagonist on racial prejudice. It is important to note that another striking reason of Iago's success of destroying Othello's marriage is "Inferiority complex". Because of Othello's inferiority complex, sinister Iago easily puts monstrous thoughts in him. Othello says,

"Rude am I in my speech, more than
pertains to feats of broil and battle" - (I.i.81-82)

His speech suggests that he always feels himself inferior to others. He gradually rejects the positivity of blackness. Desdemona can cope with the racial prejudice but Othello cannot cope with that. If Desdemona had racial prejudice, she had not accepted Othello as husband. Her relationship with him is based on love. But Othello gradually accepts the idea that blackness is ugliness and inferiority. He also thinks that he does not deserve Desdemona as he is black. He says,

"I am black, and have not those soft parts
of conversation". (I. ii. 268)

His speech seems to suggest how he is heavily influenced by inferiority complex. He has no idea

how unconsciously racial prejudice has penetrated into his mind. However, this inferiority complex, jealousy culminates gradually in the rise of his unconscious drives.

Before implanting monstrous thoughts in Othello's mind, Iago tactfully arouses Othello's curiosity. When Othello urges Iago to speak the truth, Iago pretends and cautions Othello to be aware of jealousy. Iago refers to Jealousy as the "green eyed monster" (III.iii.170). At that moment "Othello denies any thoughts of Jealousy in relation to Desdemona" (Sen, 2006). Here Othello refuses to accept a negative behavior which is denial. He intentionally denies that he would not feel jealousy regarding Desdemona. But he feels jealousy. Othello seems to apply here denial mechanism.

When Othello is convinced of Desdemona's adulterous behavior, he is enraged and determined to tear Desdemona into pieces. Anger is a strong feeling of annoyance. Sometimes, superego cannot control the impulses of Id. That time, psychological problems are manifested physically. Desdemona urges Othello several times to so that he can give Cassio his formal position. But the moor is surprised by her resistance. This increases his curiosity. At one point of the play, he cannot tolerate her "high concern for Cassio" and compels to strike her before the relatives (Sen, 2006). Othello's action here is the manifestation of his inward anger and jealousy. Here is the somatization defense mechanism because her psychological problems become physical.

After having convinced by Iago about Desdemona's infidelity, he decides to kill his wife. Othello kills her based on his jealousy. Since murdering someone is an aggressive desire, it is the Id of Othello. Desdemona asked Othello to postpone the murder for tomorrow but Othello did not pay any heed to her words. But before killing her, "his conscience makes him think twice about making this decision" (Crystal Cookies, 2016). His conscience is his superego.

"I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have
pluck'd thy rose,

I cannot give it vital growth again,/it needs
must wither". (V.iii.L12-14)

Nevertheless, it can be said that Othello does not directly rely on Iago. It is Othello's Id that drives him to jealousy but it is his superego that drives him to ask Iago to give "ocular proof" (III.iii.366). He says,

"Villain, be sure thou prove my love a
whore,

Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof" (III .
iii. L 365-366)

Here he attempts to figure out if she is unfaithful or not based on evidence. By asking an evidence, he tends to depend on his conscience (Superego) here rather than instinct rage and jealousy.

Iago's heinous accusation against Desdemona works very quickly. Othello soliloquizes that whether he should believe that Desdemona is unfaithful or not. He also soliloquizes over the fact that if he should disbelieve Iago or not. Instead of going to dinner, he complains of a headache to her wife. Her wife gives him handkerchief, but he refuses to take that. He says that it is too small. So, here Othello is both lying and denying his inner anxiety. He denies to her wife that something is wrong. Again, denial mechanism is manifested. After killing Desdemona, "Othello comes to know the horrible truth of Iago's treachery" (Sen, 2006.) Before dying, Emilia asserts that,

"Moor she was chaste, she lov'd thee, cruel
Moor" - (V. ii. L 250)

Then Othello becomes crazy with grief. He feels remorse for her. So, it is his superego that means conscience which makes him feel guilty for having done heinous murder. He says out of grief.

"O Desdemona! Dead Desdemona
!Dead! Oh! Oh!" - (V.ii. L 282)

Emilia confesses everything to Othello. Then he stabs Iago for his treachery and lying. Othello stabs out of anger which is the expression of Othello's Id. Othello admits that murdering his faithful and beautiful wife is his blunder. He thinks that it is useless to stay in the world. Then he murders himself. Through death, he tries to seek justice.

It is true that Desdemona has been murdered falsely. But Emilia demands an explanation to Othello for this terrible deed. Having questioned by Emilia, Othello's ego again applies

rationalization mechanism. Once again, he attempts to give a credible justification. He tries to justify his mistakes. Othello explains that he smoothers her for his "unchaste behavior with Cassio" (Sen, 2006). He also points out that he kills her so that she cannot "betray more men" (V.ii.6). Then, he moves forward to explain the evidence of the handkerchief. When Emilia tells the real story of the handkerchief, Othello's superego compels him to concern the terrible treachery of sinister Iago.

Othello asks Emilia about Desdemona's infidelity whether it is true or not. Though Emilia asserts that she is faithful, Othello does not concern over that fact. Rather, he soliloquizes that Emilia is a "subtle whore" (IV.ii.21) that is why she might not reveal her wife's infidelity. He also calls Desdemona "cunning whore of Venice" out of anger (IV. ii.91). So, it is understood how jealousy and anger have affected Othello's mind unconsciously. He begins treating other woman as whore. Jealousy has distorted his psychology, relationship, and views. Thus, jealousy creates sadness, anger, depression, and feelings of unworthiness in Othello.

In spite of being a powerful figure, he falls easily prey to a Machiavellian character Iago which is pathetic. If he had been careful about Iago, he would not have such a downfall in his life. However, he does not act wisely. Nor does he discuss with his wife. If he had discussed his suspicion with his wife and Cassio, he would not be the victim of Iago's plan. Iago's plotworks quick inflamed by jealousy, tragic flaw, racial prejudice, and inferiority complex. As Othello feels inferior, Iago quickly puts heinous thoughts in gullible Othello. He thinks that Cassio is more handsome than him. Because of inferiority complex and, Othello easily believes Desdemona's fake infidelity. These things are interrelated with each other.

In the light of above discussion, it can be surely understood that these unconscious drives in Othello's mind are inevitable. No human can avoid these drives. It is true that Othello becomes aware of these things. But it is too late then. Racial prejudice and inferiority complex are complex negative attitudes which are instinctual in Othello. These complex feelings heavily shape his behavior and actions. Consequently, Othello's defense

mechanisms are the outcome of these complex feelings. It is a difficult task to uproot these things from the world. But spiritual bonding among people would remove such negative feeling of unworthiness. So it can be said that Freud's psychoanalysis on the character of Othello enables the readers to have a great understanding of Othello. In fact, this theory provides a new level of understanding about Shakespearean art and efficiency. Here lies the greatness of Sigmund Freud as the proponent of psychoanalysis.

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Example Close Reading Workshop

- Find the match to your card; he or she will be your partner today.
- Then find your “theory” cards to apply to the story.
- Re-read the story (demo text: *The Story of an Hour*) and make annotations based on your theory.
- Discuss the text under the theory and determine the theme of the work under your literary theory.
- Discuss findings with a different partner.



Multiple Perspectives: Applying a Theory to a Text

What aspects of the text lend themselves to this particular lens?

Cite specific textual passages that support this reading.

If you look through this lens, what themes or patterns are brought into sharp relief?

If you look through this lens, what questions emerge?

**Do you believe in this reading?
Why or why not?**

Today's Literary Theories:

Marxist/Sociological

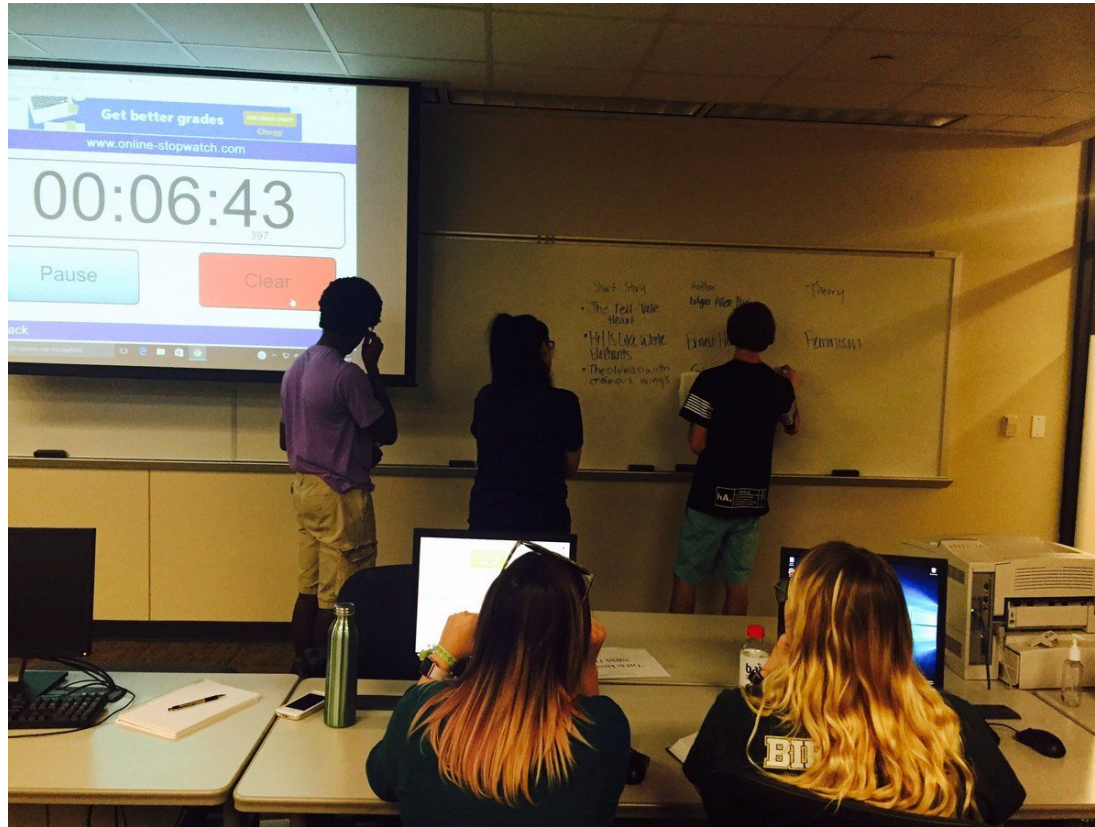
Feminist

Archetypal

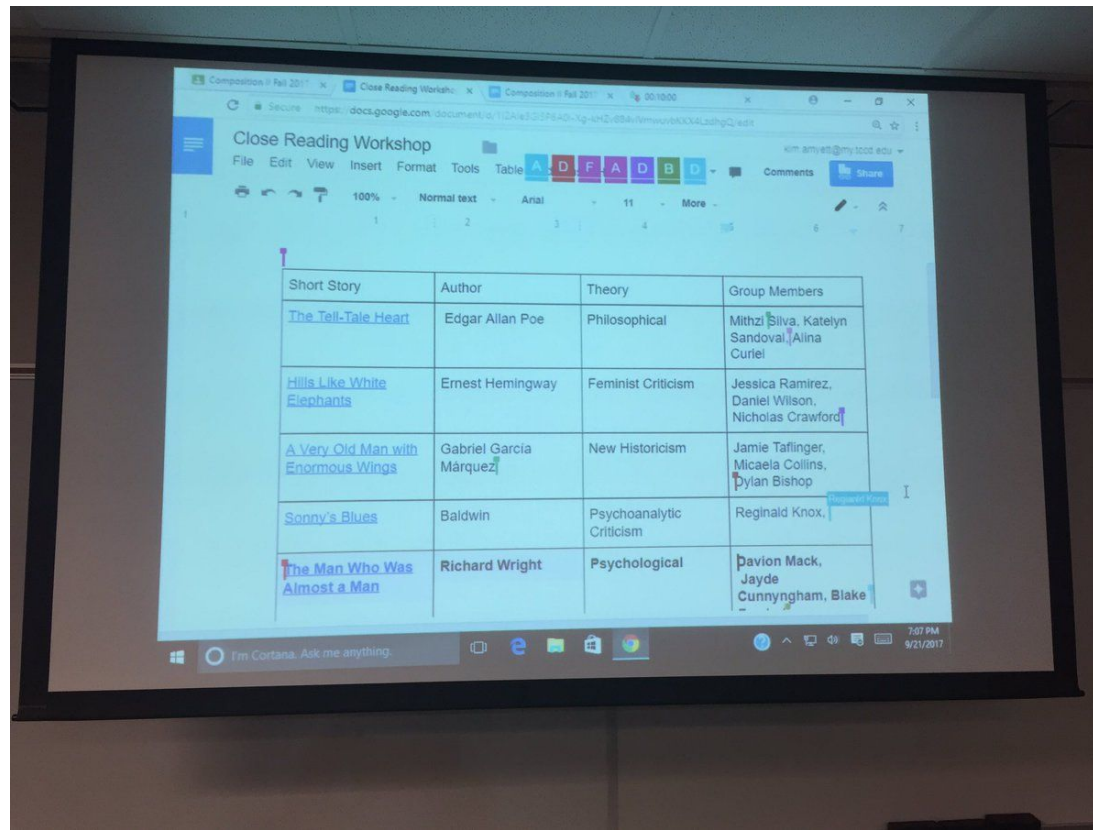
Historical

Ecocriticism

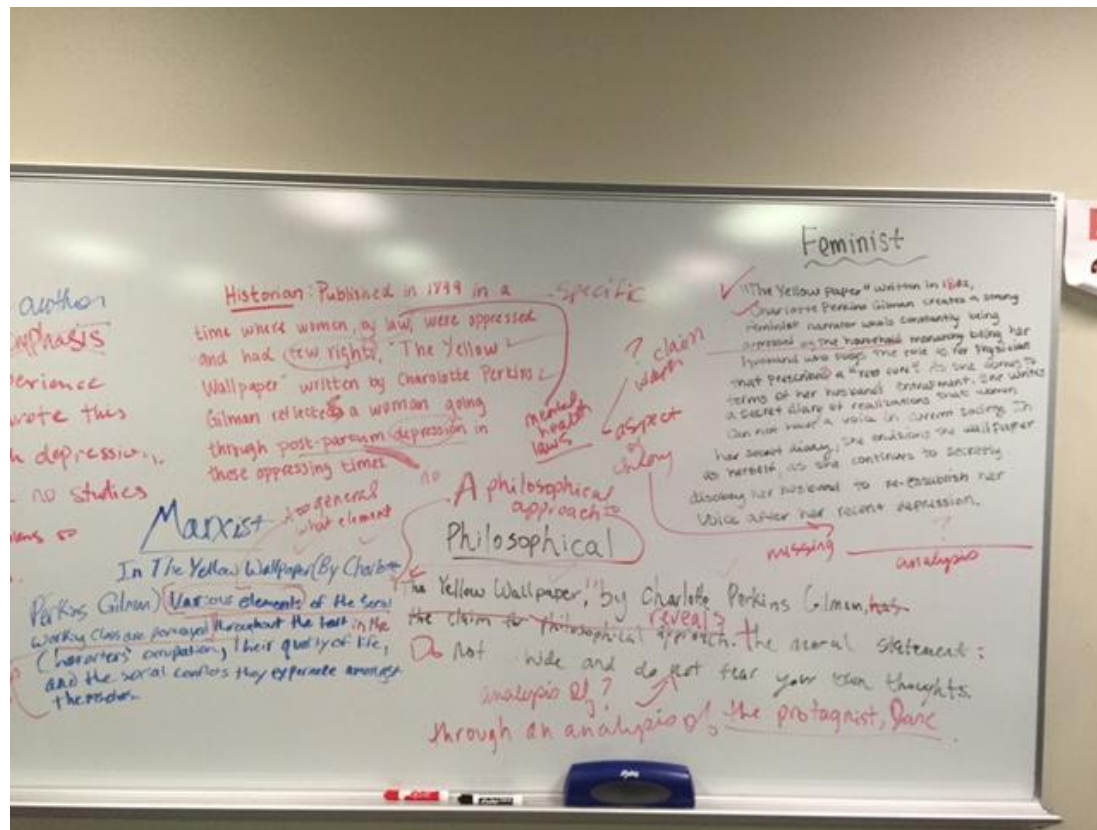
Cultural



Students running their Close Reading Workshop and choosing their first texts and theories!



Example Close Reading Workshop class [Google document](#).



Thesis statement brainstorm during a Close Reading Workshop.
These will be the foundation for a Writing Workshop.



Kim Amyett @K_Amyett · 15 Sep 2018

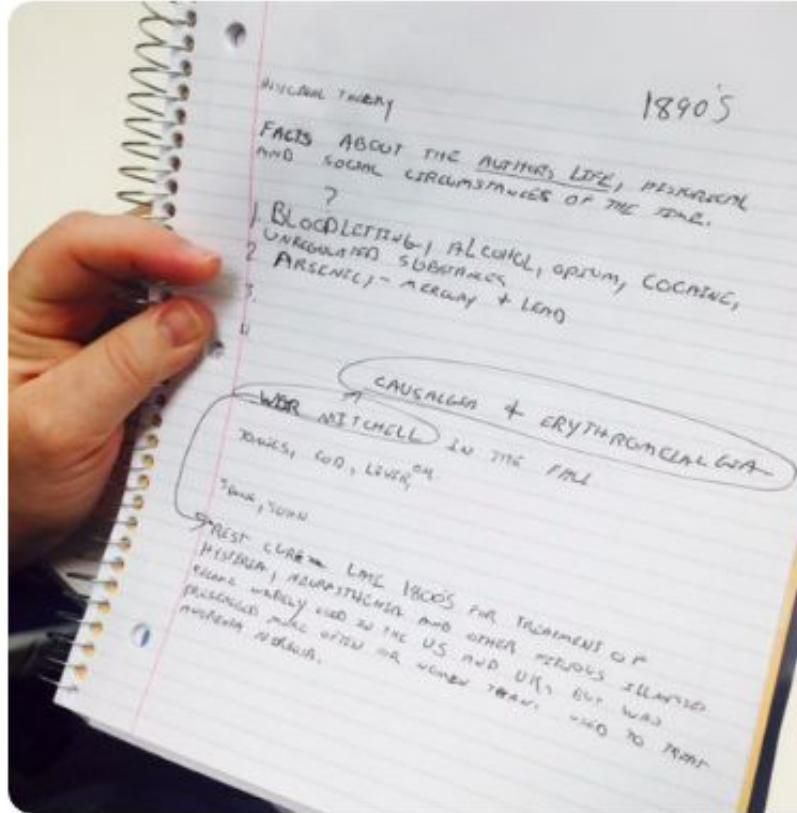
Composition II Writing Workshop on a Saturday night! [#TheYellowWallpaper](#)
[#BiographicalApproach](#) [#FeministApproach](#) [#HistoricalApproach](#)
[#PhilosophicalApproach](#)





Kim Amyett @K_Amyett · 8 Sep 2018

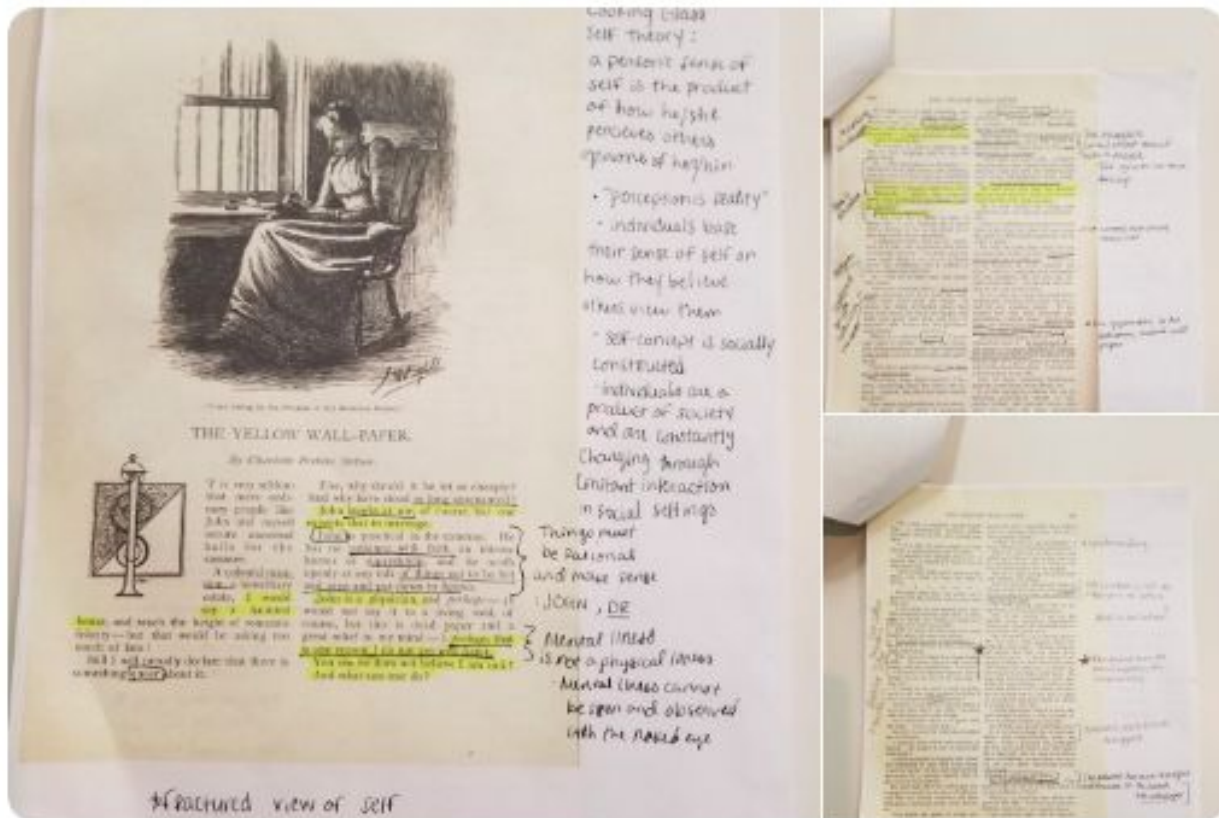
Despite the rain, these Composition II students have been rocking their Close Reading Workshop since 9:30am on a Saturday morning! #LiteraryTheory #HistoricalApproach #FeminisCriticism #BiographicalApproach #PsychologicalApproach #CompositionII





Kim Amyett @K_Amyett · Feb 16

Never gets old watching students discover meaning in a text...and their annotations are off to a fabulous start! [#CompositionII](#) [#sociologicalapproach](#) [#TheYellowWallpaper](#) – at NACB Building



Marxist Approach

The Story of
about pushing her out of freedom
the father, because of his death

Feminist Approach

The feminist approach is that
the father attempts to show that
the mother is not the previous agent
of her husband (the mother
is capable of developing independent
thought and can even be happy
outside the guiding force of the male
element in life).

Biographical Approach

The hope of freedom Mrs. Mallard displays
before her husband returns in "The story of an
hour" is a reflection on the actual freedom Kate
witnessed her mother have after the death of
her father that can be observed through her life.

Kim Amyett @K_Amyett · 1 Sep 2018

Composition II students getting outside of their comfort zone! Examining "the joy that kills." #Marxisttheory #Feministtheory #Biographicaltheory – at Tarrant County College (Northeast Campus)

Feminist Approach







Through the main character, the author attempts to show the

Biographical



Kim Amyett @K_Amyett · 1 Sep 2018





Composition II students getting outside of their comfort zone! Examining "the joy that kills." #Marxisttheory #Feministtheory #Biographicaltheory – at Tarrant County College (Northeast Campus)

September 21-26





Short Story	Author	Theory	Group Members
The Tell-Tale Heart Analysis 9/21-26	Edgar Allan Poe	Philosophical	
Hills Like White Elephants Analysis 9/21-26	Ernest Hemingway	Feminist Criticism	
A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings Analysis 9/21-26	Gabriel García Márquez	New Historicism	
Sonny's Blues Analysis 9/26/17	Baldwin	Psychoanalytic Criticism	
The Man Who Was Almost a Man Analysis 9/21-9/26	Richard Wright	Psychological	
The Storm Analysis 9/21-9/26	Kate Chopin	Ecocriticism	




September 28, 2017

Short Story	Author	Theory	Group Members
The Tell-Tale Heart Analysis 9/28	Edgar Allan Poe	Ecocriticism	
Hills Like White Elephants Analysis 9/28	Ernest Hemingway	Philosophical	







A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings Analysis 9/28	Gabriel García Márquez	Feminist Criticism	
Sonny's Blues Analysis 9/28	Baldwin	New Historicism	
The Man Who Was Almost a Man Analysis 9/28/17	Richard Wright	Psychoanalytic Criticism	
The Storm Analysis 9/28/17	Kate Chopin	Psychological	

October 3, 2017

Short Story	Author	Theory	Group Members
The Tell-Tale Heart Analysis 10/03/17	Edgar Allan Poe	Ecocriticism	
Hills Like White Elephants Playlist Theme	Ernest Hemingway	Philosophical	
A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings Playlist Link 10/3	Gabriel García Márquez	Feminist Criticism	
Sonny's Blues	Baldwin	New Historicism	

Playlist theme 10-3			
The Man Who Was Almost a Man Analysis 10/3	Richard Wright	Psychoanalytic Criticism	
The Storm Playlist Theme 10/3/17	Kate Chopin	Psychological	

October 5, 2017

Short Story	Author	Theory	Group Members
The Tell-Tale Heart	Edgar Allan Poe	Ecocriticism	
Hills Like White Elephants	Ernest Hemingway	Philosophical	
A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings Artwork Analysis	Gabriel García Márquez	Feminist Criticism	
Sonny's Blues Artwork Analysis	Baldwin	New Historicism	
The Man Who Was Almost a Man Analysis 10/5	Richard Wright	Psychoanalytic Criticism	
The Storm	Kate Chopin	Psychological	

Analysis 10/5			
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