

Essential Questions For Each Specific Critical Perspective

When viewing a text through a specific critical lens, use these questions to guide your analysis.

Deconstruction Essential Questions:

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003.

- What is the relationship of the title to the rest of the work?
- What words need to be defined?
- What relationships or patterns do you see among any words in the text?
- What are the various connotative meanings words in the text may have?
- What allusions, if any, are in the text?
- What symbols, images, and figures of speech are used?
- What elements of prosody can you note and discuss?
- What is the tone of the work and from what point of view is it being told?
- What tensions, ambiguities, or paradoxes arise within the text?
- How do all the elements of the text support and develop the overall theme?

Social Class Essential Questions:

- Whom does it benefit if the work or effort is accepted/successful/believed, etc.?
- What is the social class of the author?
- Which class does the work claim to represent?
- What values does it reinforce?
- What values does it subvert?
- What conflict can be seen between the values the work champions and those it portrays?
- What social classes do the characters represent?
- How do characters from different classes interact or conflict?

Reader-Response Essential Questions:

- How does the interaction of text and reader create meaning?
- What does a phrase-by-phrase analysis of a short literary text, or a key portion of a longer text, tell us about the reading experience pre-structured by (built into) that text?
- Do the sounds/shapes of the words as they appear on the page or how they are spoken by the reader enhance or change the meaning of the word/work?
- How might we interpret a literary text to show that the reader's response is, or is analogous to, the topic of the story?
- What does the body of criticism published about a literary text suggest about the critics who interpreted that text and/or about the reading experience produced by that text?

Post-colonialism Essential Questions:

- What language/characters/events present in the work reflect the current events of the author's day?
- Are there words in the text that have changed their meaning from the time of the writing?
- How are such events interpreted and presented?
- Does the work's presentation support or condemn the event?
- Can it be seen to do both?
- How does this portrayal criticize the leading political figures or movements of the day?
- How does the literary text function as part of a continuum with other historical texts from the same period...?
- How can we use a literary work to "map" the interplay of both traditional and subversive discourses circulating in the society in which that work emerged and/or the societies in which the work has been interpreted?
- How does the work consider traditionally marginalized populations?

Cultural Criticism Essential Questions:

- How are events' interpretation and presentation a product of the culture of the author?
- How does the literary text function as part of a continuum with other cultural texts from the same period?
- How can we use a literary work to "map" the interplay of both traditional and subversive discourses circulating in the culture in which that work emerged and/or the cultures in which the work has been interpreted?
- How does the work consider traditionally marginalized populations?

Gender Conflict Essential Questions:

- How is the relationship between men and women portrayed?
- What are the power relationships between men and women (or characters assuming male/female roles)?
- How are male and female roles defined?
- What constitutes masculinity and femininity?
- How do characters embody these traits?
- Do characters take on traits from opposite genders? How so? How does this change others' reactions to them?
- What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy?
- What does the work imply about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy?
- What does the work say about women's creativity? Men's ambition? The androgynous dichotomy?
- What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operation of patriarchy?
- What role does the work play in terms of gender literary history and literary tradition?

Psychoanalytic Criticism Essential Questions:

- How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work?
- Are there any oedipal dynamics - or any other family dynamics - at work here?
- How can characters' behavior, narrative events, and/or images be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example...fear or fascination with death, sexuality - which includes love and romance as well as sexual behavior - as a primary indicator of psychological identity or the operations of ego-id-superego)?
- What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author?
- What might a given interpretation of a literary work suggest about the psychological motives of the reader?
- Are there prominent words in the piece that could have different or hidden meanings? Could there be a subconscious reason for the author using these "problem words"?

Eco-Criticism Essential Questions:

<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng385/ecocrit.htm>

- How is nature represented in this sonnet?
- What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel?
- Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom?
- How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?
- How can we characterize nature writing as a genre?
- In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category?
- Do men write about nature differently than women do?
- In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world?
- How has the concept of wilderness changed over time?
- In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?
- What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect?
- What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies?
- How is science itself open to literary analysis?
- What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?

Archetypal Criticism Essential Questions:

- What archetypal characters do you see, if any, in the text?
- What archetypal situations do you see, if any, in the text?
- What archetypal symbols do you see, if any, in the text?
- What recurring images do you see, if any, in the text?
- What recurring themes do you see, if any, in the text?
- How do recurring patterns and our understanding of these patterns affect our understanding of the text?

Adapted from: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu> unless noted otherwise