

Historian

Essential Questions:

- A. *What historical and authorial context is necessary to understand the text?*
- B. *How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?*
- C. *How powerfully—or not—would you say the setting affected the events or action of the book?*

- **A historian—in academia or a book club group—knows things about history, helping other readers get the broader context for a text.**
- A historian always cites their research-based sources. Verbally, when speaking, and using in-text citations; for your written work, create a MLA works cited list of at least three other sources. Bonus glory goes to students who use a variety of types of sources—different text forms and various perspectives are encouraged.
- Research the author of the book. Find fun facts the group members don't already know. Yes, this does become increasingly difficult each time the group meets. ☺
- Research the details and impact of actual historical events that occur in your section of the novel, if they do.
- Research the geographical place and the time period's ethos author chose for the setting(s).
- What language/characters/events present in the work reflect the current events of the author's day? How are such events interpreted and presented?
- 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/cultural texts from the same period...?

Language Stylist

Essential Questions:

- A. *How does the author's use of language and style shape meaning in the text and reflect the context in which the text was written?*
- B. *How has one of the universal themes, for example, love, murder, ambition or jealousy, been treated in this text by this author?*
- C. *What was the most riveting moment in the book? How did the author use language to achieve that effect?*

- **A stylist—in fashion or language—knows what is attractive to a variety of different groups of people, finds worthwhile patterns, and points out artistic touches.**
- A stylist always cites quoted evidence from the book.
- Analyze the author's use of an imagery motif in your book.
- Analyze the relationship between the title and the chapter/whole text.
- How is this text/chapter's style atypical of or similar to the author's body of work?
- Analyze how this author's style is similar to another author you've read.
- Analyze motifs in characters' diction, use of slang, formality or informality of speech, and any dialect the author employs in the text.
- Analyze how the text conforms to, or deviates from, the conventions of a particular genre, and for what purpose.
- Are there words in the text that have changed their meaning from the time of the writing?

Characterization Therapist

Essential Questions:

- A. *Which fictional character did you find most interesting? Can you account for that effect based on some choices you see that the writer has made in constructing the character?*
- B. *Who was your favorite secondary character in the book? How did the author elicit that response?*
- C. *To what extent do character flaws or heroic strengths affect each character?*

- **A therapist—in practice or in a book club group—knows how to analyze individuals' thoughts and actions to find out their motivations.**
- A therapist always cites evidence from the book when analyzing character speech and actions, using both paraphrased big ideas and quoted evidence for more specific instances
- Use Freudian psychoanalytical ideas and terminology to analyze the actions, thoughts, and diction of major and minor characters.
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the protagonist(s) and the effect they have on the believability of the book.
- What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author?
- What might a particular 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"?

Chief Diversity Officer

Essential Questions:

- A. How could the text be read and interpreted differently by two different readers?
- B. Which social groups are marginalized, excluded, or silenced within the text?

- **A chief diversity officer knows how to cultivate work and learning environments that encourage and support diversity by analyzing and evaluating texts for cultural bias and including developing and incorporating inclusion initiatives.**
- A chief diversity officer identifies the author's tone and perspective, evaluating which groups that are privileged by the text and those groups whose perspective is left out.
- A chief diversity officer always cites quoted evidence from the book.
- Research the ways that the text is inclusive or exclusive, and what the author's purpose is for writing. Consider using the "Washington Models for the Evaluation of Bias Content in Instructional Materials" as a resource for your analysis.
- Research the author's audience for the text and the ways that the text was sold, bought, received, and reviewed by various significant people or groups.
- What is the significance of race in this text and its' author's society?
- Where does race shape the ways characters interact with one another?
- What is the dominant culture's perception of race in this text?
- To what extent does the text explore that racism is a concern that affects all members of society?
- Does racism function as a persistent force in the text?
- To what extent do characters combat racism to ensure that all members of the text's society experience equal representation and access to fundamental rights?
- To what extent does this text accurately reflect the experiences of victims of racism?

The Critic

Essential Questions:

- A. Which critical lens (gender/feminist, psychoanalytical, ecocriticism, Marxist/economic, historical/biographical, critical race) reveals the most interesting analysis of the text?
- B. Which critical lenses are missing from your book? Analyze the absence of that content.

- **A literary critic knows the art of evaluating and commenting on the qualities and character of literary works.**
- A literary critic uses a particular lens, or school of thought, to analyze the extent to which a literary work is useful to a particular audience.
- **Choose ONE most relevant literary lens to apply to your text**, and respond to the necessary questions for your book or excerpt. You don't have to choose the same lens other group members choose for their role. Make connections between your text and the following questions. The absence of the lens is also analytically important.

Marxist/Economic Theory

"Who has power and why?"

- 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?

Ecocriticism

"An 'earth-centered' approach"

- How is nature represented in this text?
- How has the concept of nature changed over time?
- How is the setting of the play/film/text related to the environment?
- What is the influence on metaphors and representations of the land and the environment on how we treat it?
- How do we see issues of environmental disaster and crises reflected in popular culture and literary works?
- How are animals represented in this text and what is their relationship to humans?
- How do the roles or representations of men and women towards the environment differ in this play/film/text/etc.
- Where is the environment placed in the power hierarchy?
- How is nature empowered or oppressed in this work?
- What parallels can be drawn between the sufferings and oppression of groups of people (women, minorities, immigrants, etc.) and treatment of the land?
- What rhetorical moves are used by environmentalists, and what can we learn from them about our cultural attitudes towards nature?

Feminist/Gender Theory

"Consider it through her eyes"

- 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' reaction 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?
- 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 the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition?

Formalism/New Criticism

"All meaning lies within the text"

- How does the work use imagery to develop its own symbols? (i.e. making a certain road stand for death by constant association)
- What is the quality of the work's organic unity "...the working together of all the parts to make an inseparable whole..."? In other words, does how the work is put together reflect what it is?
- How are the various parts of the work interconnected?
- How do paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension work in the text?
- How do these parts and their collective whole contribute to or not contribute to the aesthetic quality of the work?
- How does the author resolve apparent contradictions within the work?
- What does the form of the work say about its content?
- Is there a central or focal passage that can be said to sum up the entirety of the work?
- To what extent do rhythms and/or rhyme schemes contribute to the meaning or effect of the piece?

Consider the information you gathered above. What conclusions can you draw about this text? Remember the rules for literary criticism:

1. Argue your educated opinion of the overall quality of a composition.
2. The purpose isn't ordinarily to "criticize" a piece; but to understand, analyze, interpret, and then evaluate the piece.
3. You must present support (rational thoughts, not merely emotional responses) with specific evidence and examples from the piece.