Beyond Words: Exploring History Through the Lens of Literary Theory and Research

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BEYOND WORDS: EXPLORING HISTORY THROUGH THE LENS OF LITERARY THEORY AND RESEARCH

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the field of English with a specialization in English Teaching

July 5, 2023

Dr. Lee Nickoson
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Beyond Words: Exploring History through the Lens of Literary Theory and Research

Pursuing an MA in English at BGSU

In the fall of 2021, I took Graduate Writing with Dr. Lee Nickoson, my first course in the Master of Arts in English with a Specialization in Teaching program through Bowling Green State University. As a high school English teacher and mother of three teenagers, I knew I needed to find an online program. I never imagined how much I would genuinely enjoy and value the experience. The collegiality with peers across online course experiences was a rich and meaningful aspect of the program that I did not anticipate. I am deeply appreciative and inspired by every instructor and peer I have worked alongside and learned from over the last two years.

My goals for completing this program included expanding my understanding of literature and literary criticism, developing new and effective strategies for teaching writing, and gaining certification to teach English courses at the college level. This Specialization in Teaching track blended the aspects of the field I wanted to explore with the credentials I needed to acquire to further my career as an educator. I was challenged to move beyond my comfort zone by sharing my writing with new people, creating lesson plans using scholarly theories and strategies, and reading new genres, topics, and authors, which continued to grow my love of literature. While each course I took benefitted my teaching practice and growth as a professional in some way, a few had profound impacts.

Dr. Piya Lapinski’s classes, British Romanticism and Film and Victorian Monsters: Fiction and Film, and Dr. Khani Begum’s Teaching Literature course introduced me to new genres and inspired me to incorporate diverse content into my
curriculum. Dr. Lapinski broadened my knowledge of British Literature with films such as *The Limehouse Golem*, *The Invisible Man*, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, *Ex-Machina*, *L’Aventura*, *Bright Star*, and *The Black Swan*. She encouraged me to dig into historical and cultural contexts when critically reading literature and watching films. She pushed me to move past my surface-level analysis and research for deeper connections and meanings to the content by assigning additional readings and scholarship about the works we studied. Dr. Begum exposed me to genres that were previously unnamed to me, such as the Trauma Memoir. We studied a book titled *Channel of Peace: Stranded in Gander on 9/11* by Kevin Tuerff, which I have since adapted and incorporated into my senior class curriculum. The Contemporary Novel genre unit included a book titled *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid which was thought-provoking, and the first-person point of view was compelling. I would not have selected either of these books on my own, and they each profoundly impacted and expanded my view of the world; they are controversial but important narratives.

I gained extensive insight into how to teach writing in my high school classroom from the strategies and theories I learned in Dr. Lee Nickoson’s course Teaching of Writing. I created a unit plan called “Research Informed Project: STEM Career Research Paper Peer Review” that incorporates various new strategies for evaluating and providing usable and relevant feedback to my students and requires students to conduct effective peer reviews. Dr. Nickoson’s approach to providing student feedback with *my* work in her class beautifully and effectively modeled how I can do the same for my students.
I plan to teach at the college undergraduate level soon. Dr. Cheryl Hoy’s course Composition Instructor’s Workshop provided a comprehensive and detailed framework for building a College Writing I course, giving me the knowledge, practice, and confidence to pursue a career at this advanced level. I found the work we did in this class to be highly relevant and practical. I was grateful to have this guidance on developing a college course in such a supportive environment in her online classroom.

Finally, Dr. Heath Diehl’s course Theory and Methods of Literary Criticism opened up an entirely new aspect of English studies. I have learned so much from Dr. Diehl about literary theory and how to think and write critically. Most of all, I am inspired by his approach to teaching and his methods of providing feedback. Dr. Diehl created videos of himself explaining the content and provided scholarship and additional supplemental readings related to the topic each week, which helped me better understand the dense material. He also provided extensive feedback via audio messages that were extraordinarily personalized to my work. I appreciated his time and interest in describing how I could further develop my ideas and narrow in on the points I was trying to make in my writing instead of broadly discussing several points.

The projects I chose to include in this portfolio reflect how I have incorporated what I have learned during this MA program into my academic work and the curricula I created for my high school classroom. This portfolio includes my rhetorical Ohio Suffragist unit plan, a seminar paper critically analyzing the film *Interview with the Vampire*, and a digital presentation of artifacts and research about literary theorist Wolfgang Iser and his work in Reader Response Theory. While these pieces may seem like unlikely bedfellows, the framework of New Historicism is threaded throughout each
project, tying them together. Each emphasizes historicizing literature, placing it within its socio-historical and political-cultural context, understanding it as not separate from but as a product of it, and producing new discourses and practices. Understanding literature as a practice and a product that comes from other things circulating within a given historical moment connects these projects. The lens of New Historicism was a meaningful focus, as applying literary theory and researching social, historical, and cultural context is an area I have grown in and plan to pursue. Exploring this approach to understanding literature and teaching has profoundly impacted my academic and professional life by adding meaningful context to my work.

Project 1: “Ohio Suffragists: Convincing Women and Their Rhetoric”

“Ohio Suffragists: Convincing Women and Their Rhetoric” was the final project for ENG 6800 Convincing Women with Dr. Sue Carter Wood in the spring of 2022, and this project fulfills the portfolio’s research and teaching plan components. This is a unit plan designed for my tenth-grade students during the third quarter of the school year, in March, which is Women’s History Month. The knowledge and skills my students will have at this point in their high school career will enable them to be challenged and successful with the content and requirements of this unit. I will introduce them to archival rhetorical research with these lessons, scaffolded to offer guidance and support as they undertake this new skill. This unit focuses on the women’s suffrage movement, rhetorical strategies used to achieve this radical change to the U.S. Constitution, and a focus on six suffragists from Ohio. The project starts with a rationale explaining my reasons for selecting this topic and the organization of the unit, followed by my teaching plan schedule. Along with daily plans, there are links and materials for each lesson.
I selected this piece for the portfolio because this was a topic I knew little about before this course, and conducting research to create this unit significantly increased my understanding of women’s rights and provided ideas of how I could incorporate this topic into the secondary classroom. During my revision, I worked on the introduction, clarifying wording and condensing my rationale into a more concise explanation. I have updated two of the writing-heavy assignments; instead of two 400-word written responses, I changed one to a video assessment of some texts my students were required to read, and in another, I asked them to demonstrate what they learned through a presentation, giving the option of Google Slides, Prezi, or Microsoft Sway as their platform. This change will support student engagement and prevent burnout, as these options are more personalized and hands-on project-based learning. Some of the links to the accompanying materials were not accessible to viewers, so I updated those links in each Google Doc to be accessible to anyone with the link.

This project increased my learning and reflects my growth and development as a scholar and teacher in English studies by expanding my knowledge of the history of women’s rights and why it is necessary to teach students about the women who contributed to the freedoms we enjoy today. Moreover, this project improved the creativity that goes into my lesson planning, such as delivering content through interactive and personalized assignments and activities and offering a variety of choices and methods to demonstrate student learning.

**Project 2: “Vampires, Vampire Fiction, and Interview with the Vampire”**

“Vampires, Vampire Fiction, and Interview with the Vampire” was the final project for ENG 6800 British Romanticism and Film with Dr. Piya Lapinski in the spring of 2023.
I selected this project for the portfolio because it represents much of what I have learned throughout this program. This literature seminar paper is a researched and critical analysis of the film *Interview with the Vampire*. This project demonstrates several elements of the New Historicism thread of my portfolio, as I placed the film within its socio-historical and political-cultural context, explaining how *Interview with the Vampire* is a product of the British Romanticism moment in history and how the genre has developed and evolved over time.

During the revision, I primarily focused on further developing my discussion of how vampire fiction fit into or challenged the societal constructs and fears of the 18th and 19th centuries. I expanded on how vampire fiction is a subgenre of Gothic literature, the public’s fascination with how scientific technology could advance medicine and affect the human body, and how vampire families relate to modern non-nuclear families as a way to find acceptance and belonging. Extensive scholarship exists on these topics, so I focused on finding information to add that was concise and specific. I wanted to keep my purpose of the paper clear and avoid branching out into too many subtopics, thereby losing the point I was trying to convey in the work. I also revised my writing overall, making my language more clear and concise.

The experience of creating, researching, and revising this paper benefitted my role as a writer and teacher by allowing me to develop research and analytical skills, applying them to a British Romantic topic covered in the course that was of personal interest. The skills I learned and demonstrated will transfer to my role as an educator, as I can teach these skills to my students at an appropriate high school level.
Project 3: Wolfgang Iser: Reader-Response Criticism in Literary Theory

“Wolfgang Iser: Reader-Response Criticism in Literary Theory” was a project for ENG 6070 Theory and Methods of Literary Criticism with Dr. Heath Diehl in the summer of 2023. I selected this project because it is a unique addition to my portfolio, introducing a new platform that I learned with Dr. Diehl and am excited to implement in my classroom: Microsoft Sway. The presentation is on a live website. I have copied the live link below and included a PDF version of the work.

This is the third piece in my portfolio with a significant research component and incorporates cultural, social, and historical contexts. This project was intimidating, as literary theory was new and difficult. Still, with Dr. Diehl’s support, encouragement, and guidance, I enjoyed researching Iser and Reader Response Theory and creating this presentation on a platform I had never heard of or used before. Crafting the introductions to the entire presentation and each artifact was challenging yet rewarding. I am proud of this project and hope to recreate a version of the assignment for my high school students and future undergraduate students.

I spent time reconsidering the introduction to the Sway project, adding more details about what was to come in each of the five artifacts later in the presentation, cleaning up language, and clarifying my intentions for each artifact, preparing and guiding the reader before they encounter each one. The experience of building, researching, and revising this piece reflects my growth as a scholar and teacher because it required me to present and teach my fellow 6070 peers about a literary theorist using new technology and, quite honestly, language and ideas with which I was
unfamiliar. Diving head first into this assignment ultimately proved that I could tackle any course or topic I set my mind to and provided a rich and rewarding experience.

**Future Plans**

As one goal for pursuing this degree was to teach at the college level, this program has undoubtedly prepared me to teach CCP courses and become an undergraduate instructor at local universities, such as Youngstown State University, Kent State University, The University of Mount Union, and Malone University. I had a remarkable experience with the online platform and instructors through BGSU and at Notre Dame College, where I earned my teaching licensure. I am now interested in pursuing college-level instruction online, as well.

While I am proud to have earned my Master’s in English, I am disappointed and sad that the experience is over. I love learning and enjoy being a student. Most of all, I am passionate about the content of English and have a newly realized appreciation for literary theory. I plan to pursue a doctorate in Literary Studies or Literary Theory and Criticism within the next few years. If BGSU offered this Ph.D. program online, I would enroll today. Since this is not an option, I am researching universities offering an online doctorate program in these areas. While I have a profound affection for teaching high school and would miss it deeply, I now dream of a career in academia, becoming a full-time professor of English where I can teach and continue to learn while researching and authoring my own work. I credit my experience at Bowling Green State University and the instructors I worked with throughout this program for inspiring me to pursue this ambitious next step in my career.
Project 1
Ohio Suffragists: Convincing Women and Their Rhetoric
Unit Plan for English 10

Rationale

I created this unit for several reasons, but the primary motive was that it was a way for me to learn more about this topic. I did not know much about women’s suffrage beyond the basics. I knew about the nineteenth amendment. I had heard of Susan B. Anthony, although the details of her life were largely unknown. I knew next to nothing about the women’s suffrage movement. My first graduate school course at BGSU was Graduate Writing, and one of my peers rewrote a paper she did for a class called Convincing Women for a revision project assignment. I read her work and was so drawn in by the topic and the content I knew I needed to take this course, too.

A couple of weeks into the Convincing Women class, I asked a few of my sophomore students about some of the people and events covered in the course readings, and they, too, were unfamiliar with the names and influences of these women. I decided to change that; I would introduce what I have learned in Convincing Women to my students and create a curriculum about these topics tailored to the high school level. I want them to know the history of the suffrage movement and gender inequality and show them how the actions and language of these influential women relate to our modern world. The bravery and determination these persuasive women demonstrated, which are too often left out of textbooks or history curricula, allowing women today to enjoy improved equality in voting and fundamental human rights. I want to introduce my students to the lives of some well-known American suffragists and some influential
women from Ohio. I want to show them how they can use their voice and discover and develop their own ethos to create a better world for themselves and future generations.

I currently teach an introductory rhetoric unit, so I decided to take some of those components and build and adapt them to fit into a new unit titled: “Ohio Suffragists: Convincing Women and Their Rhetoric.” My current rhetoric unit introduces my students to ethos, pathos, and logos through advertisements, political propaganda, and candidate debates. It provides excerpts of famous speeches from influential people and world leaders to demonstrate persuasive appeals. Only now do I realize the focus is mostly on men; there are various races and nationalities, but are primarily men. The only women I include in this assignment are Sojourner Truth and Malala Yousafzai.

In my current rhetoric unit, students apply rhetorical appeals to study Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” and Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. I still want to use the rhetorical appeals information from that unit as an introduction to this new women’s suffrage unit. However, I will build it around the speeches and achievements of women I have learned about in this course, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and I will keep Sojourner Truth, too. I will also incorporate convincing women from Ohio, including Hallie Quinn Brown, Harriett Taylor Upton, Florence E. Allen, Pauline Perlmutter Steinem, Bettie Wilson, and Belle Sherwin.

This unit plan will cover approximately four weeks and blend informational text analysis, rhetoric, persuasive writing, creative writing, research, and speaking. Students will watch videos, read and analyze news articles, observe artifacts, interpret speeches, complete various assignments on the women covered, compose a creative writing
assignment, create presentations, and write and deliver a persuasive speech on gender equality about a current topic to a modern audience.

The unit will begin with an introduction to rhetoric, introducing ethos, pathos, and logos. They will watch and practice identifying these rhetorical strategies in advertisements, films, political debates, and speeches. Next, the unit will introduce and give a background to the women’s suffrage movement. They must understand what happened, why, and who was involved. I will introduce them to some of the more famous suffragists, utilizing CommonLit texts they can read and study. I use CommonLit.org regularly in my classroom, and they have various texts to choose from. I have found a few that I have included in the unit plan below that will tie in nicely.

Once the students learn about women's suffrage and see how it affected women in America, we will focus specifically on six women from Ohio. In the section about Harriet Taylor Upton and The Upton House in nearby Warren, Ohio, students will complete a creative assignment to develop an advertisement for the house to attract visitors and include rhetorical appeals in their artwork and text. Since propaganda was an essential part of the women’s suffrage movement, I thought it would be an opportunity to include a creative project in this unit. After learning about the Ohio women named above, students will compose a creative writing piece from a suffragist's point of view concerning a speech that person delivered. The final project for the unit will be writing and delivering their own speech. They will read and watch British actress Emma Watson deliver a speech to the UN regarding gender equality and why men should care about this topic, too. I think it is essential for students to see modern, young people using their voices and speaking out for a cause they believe in. Finally, after
studying Watson’s speech, they will write a persuasive speech using rhetorical appeals about any issue they choose that relates to gender equality today and deliver it to the class in a formal setting.

This unit plan includes several benchmarks: reading informational text, speaking and listening skills and strategies, and research, analysis, creative, and persuasive writing.

Ohio Department of Education State Standards

Reading Informational Text Standards

- RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.9-10.2 Analyze informational text development.
  - a. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details
  - b. Provide an objective summary of the text that includes the development of the central idea and how details impact this idea.
- RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
- RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings;
analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

○ RI.9-10.5 Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

○ RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s perspective or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that perspective or purpose.

○ RI.9-10.9 Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”), including how they address related themes and concepts.

Writing Standards

○ W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

○ W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

○ W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize
multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

○ W.9-10.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Speaking and Listening Standards

○ SL.9-10.3 Evaluate a speaker’s perspective, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

○ SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Unit Plan Schedule Ohio Suffragists Below: I have set up this unit schedule in the format I use in my teaching practice. This daily schedule layout with hyperlinks makes it easy for me to access and distribute the materials needed to teach this unit year after year. I look forward to incorporating this complete unit into my syllabus for the upcoming school year.
# Ohio Suffragists:
## Convincing Women and Their Rhetoric

Informational Text ~ Research ~ Rhetoric ~ Persuasive Writing ~ Speaking

![Image](image.png)

---

**4 Week Unit: 50 Minute Class Periods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Lesson Topic</th>
<th>Links/Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1: Introduction to Rhetorical Appeals</td>
<td><strong>Rhetoric: persuading audiences/readers in various mediums.</strong></td>
<td><strong>YouTube Intro to Rhetorical Appeals</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Google Doc: Ethos, Pathos, &amp; Logos</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Commercial: Budweiser Pathos Analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduce ethos, pathos, and logos.</td>
<td>Watch: Practice identifying ethos, pathos, and logos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch Presidential Political Debate Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>Examples of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in Advertisements and Film 2016 Presidential Debate: Rhetorical Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss the rhetorical devices used in all of the examples in class today. Ask students how they already use rhetoric and how they can intentionally incorporate these rhetorical appeals inside and outside school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2 | **Assignment** Rhetorical Device Task Cards  
   - Students will practice identifying and explaining the information they learned yesterday about ethos, pathos, and logos.  
     - With a partner, students will receive task cards with excerpts from famous speeches. The students will identify which rhetorical appeal is used (in some cases, there are multiple) and prepare to explain and defend to the class what appeals they think the speaker is using in their speech. | Examples of Task Cards (I will pass out physical cards in class.) |
| Part 2: Introduction to the Women’s Suffrage Movement | | |
| 3 | **Watch** Crash Course U.S. History: Women’s Suffrage | Crash Course U.S. History with John Green |
| Write: Women’s Suffrage: What I Know  
   - Fill in the chart on the Google Doc assignment explaining what you already knew about women’s suffrage, what you have learned, and what you want to know after watching the video today. | Google Doc: Women’s Suffrage: What I Know |
| 4 | **CommonLit:** Address to Congress on Women’s Suffrage | CommonLit: Address to Congress on Women’s Suffrage |
|          **CommonLit:** Was Hard to Get to Vote | CommonLit: Was Hard Fight to Get to Vote |
# Part 3: Famous American Suffragists

## 5. Introduction to Famous American Suffragists

**Watch** the mini-biographies of three influential convincing women including Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth.

**Discuss:** How do the videos portray each woman and their speeches/achievements? Why were they so influential?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Susan B. Anthony Mini Bio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Cady Stanton Mini Bio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sojourner Truth Mini Bio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 6. CommonLit:

- Susan B. Anthony: Life’s Work
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Excerpt from “The Solitude of Self”
- Sojourner Truth: “Ain’t I a Woman?”
  - Listen to Sojourner Truth’s speech as students read along: How does reading the speech aloud compare to reading it as a text? How do the speaker’s tone and deliverance of Truth’s words grab the listener’s attention?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CommonLit: The Life’s Work of Susan B. Anthony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CommonLit: The Solitude of Self ECS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CommonLit: Ain’t I a Woman?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 7. Read  Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s Address Delivered at Seneca Falls and an excerpt from Susan B. Anthony’s speech defending her vote and choose one to analyze. Highlight rhetoric in your chosen article: highlight ethos in green, pathos in pink, and logos in yellow.

**Video:** Identifying Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Address Delivered at Seneca Falls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan B. Anthony’s Speech Defending her Vote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Create a video using the platform of your choice (YouTube, TikTok, or just a video from your phone.) Deliver a 3-5 minute response to your chosen speech.
- Comment on the context of the speech (where and when...what important things were happening that prompted the speaker to deliver this speech?), the purpose of the speech, the rhetor's ethos, how rhetorical strategies were used in the speech (use your highlighted speech as a reference) and the speech’s effectiveness. Explain how this speech helped create the world we live in today for women.
- Be sure you speak clearly, make eye contact with the camera, and have a distraction-free background.
- You may use notecards, but be sure you are looking at the camera for most of the video; you will need to practice and memorize most of it and use notes to keep yourself on track if necessary.
- Create a Works Cited page in MLA format for any sources you use for the information you deliver in your speech. Attach that document to this assignment.
- Upload the video you created and the highlighted speech you chose to the assignment on Google Classroom.

### Part 4: Ohio Suffragists

8

**Introduction to Ohio Suffragists**

**Read** the Cincinnati Article titled “Women Who Made Suffrage a Reality” and “Women’s Suffrage” from the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, and then continue your research of Ohio suffragists by searching the internet for more information about the six women featured in the article. There are links embedded in the articles that will give you a good start but don’t be afraid to expand your research. Some of these women have very little written about their achievements, which is something to think about.

[Google Doc: Identifying Ethos, Pathos, and Logos]

[Cincinnati Article: 6 Women Who Made Suffrage a Reality]

[Cleveland and Northeast Ohio Suffrage History]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9    | Write | Women Who Influenced Suffrage Movement in Ohio  
- Write a 500-word summary of the articles and the information you gathered online in an organized multi-paragraph response.  
- Be sure to format your writing in MLA and create a Works Cited page for any sources you use, including the above articles. |
| 9    | Ohio Woman 1: Hallie Q. Brown |  
|      | Read | Hallie Quinn Brown’s Biographical Sketches: *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* |
|      | Write | *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* Hallie Quinn Brown’s Biographical Sketches  
- You will choose three women from this biographical sketch and analyze their unique ethos and how it was effective regarding their lives from the profile. One will be Sojourner Truth, and the other two will be of your choosing:  
  1. Relate the profile on Sojourner Truth in Brown’s biographical sketch to her “Ain't I a Woman” speech concerning her ethos and its effectiveness.  
  2. Choose two other women from *Homespun Heroines* and read their profiles. Then, relate their experience and achievements to ethos, noting their style and effectiveness. |
| 10   | Ohio Woman 2: Belle Sherwin |  
|      | Google Doc: *Women Who Influenced the Suffrage Movement in Ohio* |
|      | HQB's *Homespun Heroines* |
|      | Google Doc: *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction Hallie Quinn Brown’s Biographical Sketches* |
|      | The Making of a Suffragist: *Belle Sherwin and Women Activism* |
Read the article about Sherwin and information about Bettie Wilson.

Create a Google Slideshow, Prezi, or Microsoft Sway presentation about these two women. You may respond to the articles above and your own research however you choose about their lives, accomplishments, and effectiveness. You may also conduct further research on these women to add to your response. Perhaps you will research and/or comment on Wilson’s two unsuccessful runs for a seat in the House of Representatives. Upload your presentation of choice to the assignment on Google Classroom. Your presentation should be about 6-10 Google Slides or the equivalent if using Prezi or Microsoft Sway.

There is little known of Bettie Wilson other than this information on OhioMemory.org: and this information from OhioRepublicanWomenStrong.org

Google Doc: Belle Sherwin and Bettie Wilson
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12</th>
<th><strong>Watch</strong> a tour of The Upton House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Assignment:** The Upton House  
Spend some time reading about the Upton House located in nearby Warren, Ohio.  
**Create** an advertisement in the form of a poster advertising this National Historic Landmark. Utilize any combination of ethos, pathos, and logos (via words and artwork) to attract visitors. You will use the posterboard provided in class and any of my art supplies, or bring your own. We will hang these in the hallway so all students and staff can do a gallery walk and learn about The Upton House. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13</th>
<th><strong>Ohio Woman 5: Florence E. Allen</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Ohio Woman 6: Pauline Perlmutter Steinem

**Read** the articles about both women.

**Write** a 400-word response; you may respond however you choose about their lives, accomplishments, and effectiveness. You may also conduct further research on these women to add to your response. Create an MLA Works Cited page at the end of your response.

**Read** this website titled “Women’s Suffrage and Activism Collections in the Ohio History Connection Archives & Library” by Lisa Wood

**Write**: Creative Writing Assignment: Choose a speech from the link and write a diary/journal entry written from the perspective of the woman who delivered the speech. In your writing, reveal what the speaker was feeling/thinking before, during, and after the speech, her motivations and hopes for the speech’s effect on her audience/society, and her plans for women’s suffrage efforts and beyond.

### Part 5: Final Unit Project

**15 CommonLit**: Emma Watson’s United Nations: “HeForShe: Gender Equality is Your Issue, Too” Speech

**Watch** Emma Watson’s speech
- Notice how Watson’s tone and presentation influence the impact of her message. How does this influence students’ reception of her speech and message?

**CommonLit**: Emma Watson’s UN Speech

**YouTube Video of Emma Watson’s UN Speech**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Write: Work on Speech in Class</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Write: Work on Speech in Class</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Field Trip to Warren to Upton House</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Speech Presentations</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Speech Presentations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Final Unit Project:** Introduce Speech Assignment

[Gender Equality Speech Directions]
Works Cited

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Author. “Florence E. Allen, Cleveland's Most Famous Woman Almost No Clevelanders Today Have Heard Of.” Teaching Cleveland Digital, 7 Mar. 2021,

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-HfiryNoXY.

“The Solitude of Self.” CommonLit,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-suAlXQhMI.

Ultimate Debate Rhetoric! Trump & Clinton Sparring, Logos, Ethos ...

“Was Hard Fight to Get Vote.” CommonLit,
https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/was-hard-fight-to-get-vote.

“Women’s Suffrage and Activism Collections in the Ohio History Connection Archives & Library.” Ohio History Connection, 14 Mar. 2022, 

Materials Used in the Lesson:

Appendix A

INTRODUCTION TO ETHOS, PATHOS & LOGOS

ARISTOTLE was a Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century BCE. He was an influential thinker and wrote on many subjects – from logic and ethics, to biology and metaphysics.

One area, in which Aristotle was particularly interested, was rhetoric. That is, the art of persuasive speaking or writing. He even wrote a whole book entitled ‘On Rhetoric’ in which he explains his theories of persuasive language and speech. Most significantly, in this work he expounds on the concepts of ethos, logos and pathos, as tools for persuasive language. A lot can be learned about the art of persuasion from these three concepts, and once understood, they can be easily applied to our own persuasive speaking and writing.

ETHOS

Ethos is a Greek word meaning ‘character’. In terms of persuasive language, it is an appeal to authority and credibility. Ethos is a means of convincing an audience of the reliable character or credibility of the speaker/writer, or the credibility of the argument.

It is an important tool of persuasion because if you can get your audience to see you (or your argument) as credible and trustworthy, it will be much easier to persuade them.

PATHOS

Pathos is a Greek word meaning ‘suffering’ or ‘experience’, and it is used in persuasive speech as an appeal to the emotions of the audience. Pathos is the way of creating a persuasive argument by evoking an emotional response in the audience/reader.

You can use pathos when trying to persuade, by appealing to an audience’s hopes and dreams, playing on their fears or worries, or appealing to their particular beliefs or ideals.

LOGOS

Logos is a Greek word meaning ‘a word’ or ‘reason’. In rhetoric, it is an appeal to logic and reason. It is used to persuade an audience by logical thought, fact and rationality.

Logos can be a useful tool of persuasion because if you can ‘prove’ an argument through logical and sound reasoning, your audience is more likely to be persuaded.

If you can include a combination of these three elements in your persuasive speaking and writing, you will appeal to your audience’s emotions, sense of reasoning and belief in you, and therefore your writing will be more convincing. Try to subtly weave ethos, pathos and logos into your persuasive writing and speaking.
Tools of Rhetoric Speech Excerpts

"A new generation of Indonesians is among the most wired in the world – connected through cell phones and social networks."
- Barack Obama

"And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at me! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it."
- Sojourner Truth

"[British]? Shall we try argument? We have been trying that for the last ten years."
- Patrick Henry

"What do we have to oppose them?"
- Speech in the Virginia Convention

"I found what I loved to do early in life. Wore a tuxedo, worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a $2 billion company with over 4000 employees.”
- Steve Jobs
Appendix C

Women’s Suffrage

What I Know

Fill in the chart below explaining what you *already knew* about women’s suffrage, what you *have learned*, and what you *want to know* after watching the video today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Already Knew</th>
<th>What I Learned Today</th>
<th>What I Want To Know</th>
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Appendix D

Identifying Ethos, Pathos, and Logos
Read & Explain

TASK 1

Read Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Address Delivered at Seneca Falls AND an excerpt from Susan B. Anthony's speech defending her vote.

Choose ONE of the documents, and highlight the use of rhetoric: ethos in green, pathos in pink, and logos in yellow.

TASK 2

After you analyze one of the speeches above, you will create a video discussing that speech in detail. Here are the criteria:

- Create a video using the platform of your choice (YouTube, TikTok, or just a video from your phone.) Deliver a 3-5 minute response to the speech you chose.
- Comment on the context of the speech (where and when...what important things were happening that prompted the speaker to deliver this speech?), the purpose of the speech, the rhetors ethos, how rhetorical strategies were used in the speech (use your highlighted speech as a reference) and the speech's effectiveness. Explain how this speech helped create the world we live in today for women.
- Be sure you speak clearly, make eye contact with the camera, and have a distraction-free background.
- You may use notecards, but be sure you are looking at the camera for most of
the video; you will need to practice and memorize most of it and use notes to keep yourself on track if necessary.

- Create a Works Cited page in MLA format for any sources you use for the information you deliver in your speech. Attach that document to this assignment.
- Upload the video you created, the highlighted speech you chose, and the works cited page to this assignment on Google Classroom.
Appendix E

Women Who Influenced the Suffrage Movement in Ohio

You will read about six influential Ohio women who impacted the women’s suffrage movement in our state and then compose a summary of their contributions.

Read the Cincinnati Article: 6 Women Who Made Suffrage a Reality and Cleveland and Northeast Ohio Suffrage History from the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History.

Then, continue your research of Ohio suffragists by searching the internet for more information about the six women featured in the article. There are links embedded in the articles that will give you a good start but don’t be afraid to expand your research. Some of these women have very little written about their achievements, which is something to think about.

Keep track of the websites you get your information from, including the two cites listed above. You will need to include an MLA Works Cited page with your response.

You will compose a 500-word summary of the information you gathered from the internet in an organized multi-paragraph response on a Google Doc and attach it to the assignment in Google Classroom.
Appendix F

Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction

Hallie Quinn Brown’s Biographical Sketches

You will read about three women from Hallie Q. Brown’s Homespun Heroines and analyze their unique ethos, explaining how it was effective regarding their lives from the information provided in the profile. One must be Sojourner Truth, and the other two will be yours. Sojourner Truth’s name is already in the first space. You will need to fill in the other two. Each response must be at least 150 words.

1. Relate the profile on Sojourner Truth in Brown’s biographical sketch back to her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech regarding her ethos and its effectiveness.
2. Choose two other women from Homespun Heroines and read their profiles. Then, relate their experience and achievements to ethos, noting their style and effectiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Suffragist</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sojourner Truth</td>
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Appendix G

Belle Sherwin and Bettie Wilson

Read The Making of a Suffragist: Belle Sherwin and Women Activism to learn about Belle Sherwin, and check out the following links to learn about Bettie Wilson. Little is known about Bettie Wilson besides this information on OhioMemory.org:

Portrait of Miss Bettie Wilson of Cincinnati, Ohio. Wilson (1850 - 1929) was included on the "Ohio State Honor Roll" from the League of Women Voters of Ohio, ca. 1930, which listed prominent Ohio women in the suffrage movement. Her brief biography from the Honor Roll reads: "Miss Wilson, who was a convincing speaker and never lost an opportunity to push the cause of suffrage, was a teacher in the public schools of Cincinnati for forty years. She was elected in 1896 to the school board of Hartwell before it was annexed to Cincinnati, and from 1910-20 served as an officer of the Hamilton County Suffrage Association."

…and this information from OhioRepublicanWomenStrong.org:

Bettie Wilson – Cincinnati, OH. Betty taught for 40 years in Cincinnati public school; was elected to the school board. She was an officer of the Hamilton County Suffrage Association. She ran unsuccessfully for the state House of Representatives twice.

Create a Google Slideshow, Prezi, or Microsoft Sway presentation about these two women. You may respond to the articles above and your research however you choose concerning their lives, accomplishments, and effectiveness. You may also conduct further research on these women to add to your response. Perhaps you will research and/or comment on Wilson's two unsuccessful runs for a seat in the House of
Representatives. Upload your presentation of choice to the assignment on Google Classroom. Your presentation should be about 6-10 Google Slides or the equivalent if using Prezi or Microsoft Sway.
Florence E. Allen and Pauline Perlmutter Steinem

Read Florence E. Allen, Cleveland's Most Famous Woman Almost No Clevelanders Today Have Heard Of and The Inspiring Pauline Perlmutter Steinem.

Write a 400-word response on this document below; you may respond however you choose about their lives, accomplishments, and effectiveness. You may also conduct further research on these women to add to your response.
Creative Writing
From a Suffragist’s Mind

Choose a speech from this link and write a diary/journal entry from the perspective of the woman who delivered the speech.

Remember, since you are essentially speaking as this person, you will write in the first person, using the pronouns “I,” “our,” “my,” etc.

In your writing, reveal what the speaker was feeling/thinking before, during, and after the speech, her motivations and hopes for the speech’s effect on her audience/society, and her plans for women’s suffrage efforts and beyond.

Write your 400-word minimum journal entry below.
Women’s Suffrage Unit

Gender Equality Speech

British actress Emma Watson (Hermoine Granger from the Harry Potter movies) delivered a speech to the United Nations titled “HeForShe: Gender Equality is Your Issue, Too.”

After you read and watch Watson’s speech about why gender equality is still controversial and why men should be equally involved in securing equal rights, reflect on how young people must use their voices to speak out for a cause they believe in.

Just as the convincing women in history that we learned about made a lasting impact on our world, so can you, whether you are male or female.

Assignment

You will write a persuasive speech about any issue you choose that relates to gender equality today and deliver it to the class.

If you’re unsure where to begin, research the reasons for gender inequality in our modern world. Check out this list of 10 causes of gender inequality for some ideas. Pick a topic that you feel passionate about or has already impacted your life, or the life of someone you know, in some way.

Follow these guidelines:

- You have been invited to speak at the United Nations as the newest UN Women Goodwill Ambassador.
- Compose a creative title for your campaign that is descriptive of the topic you are speaking about.
• Your speech should have a formal tone throughout, as your audience will be a group of people you hope to persuade to take action for this cause. You can use humor but do so appropriately.
• Review the many speeches you have read over the past few weeks, noting how these convincing women used persuasive language and rhetorical appeals to persuade their audiences. After all, women have the right to vote today because of their campaigns and speeches.
• You must use any combination of rhetorical appeals in your speech at least ten times. On your Google Doc, you will highlight any use of ethos in green, pathos in pink, and logos in yellow.
• Delivering your speech should be between 3 and five minutes long. Practice and time yourself before you deliver the speech to the class.
• You should follow the following steps in organizing your speech:
  1. Attention: Grab the audience's attention. Just as you would start an essay with a strong hook, you should also consider getting your audience's attention.
  2. Need: Persuade the reader to empathize with and understand the need for gender equality. If they don’t connect to fight for equal rights for women, they won’t make an effort to bring change. Be sure to appeal to both men and women in your audience. Use specific examples in your explanation. This is a great place to include rhetorical appeals. A blend of all three will produce a persuasive argument.
  3. Satisfaction: In this part of your speech, you will outline a solution to the problems you’ve explained with gender inequality.
  4. Visualization: This is where you explain how your audience will benefit from a world where women and men have equal rights. Again, be specific and utilize rhetorical strategies in your language.
  5. Action!: Issue a challenge to your audience. Giving clear action steps within an urgent time frame will motivate your audience to take action for the cause of gender equality.
Project 2

Vampires, Vampire Fiction, and *Interview with the Vampire*

**Introduction**

Vampires have fascinated humans for centuries. In fiction, vampires seduce readers and viewers with mystery, supernatural immortality, and alluring seduction. Vampire fiction emerged centuries ago in British literature, and there continues to be an appetite for these stories due to their unlikely connection to the modern human experience. Over the years, vampires have evolved into complicated and relatable beings and continue to draw audiences to this genre in literature and film. Themes such as loneliness and isolation, lost childhood, class, race, gender, family, sexuality, cultural distinctions, and one possible answer to the question of the afterlife are woven through these stories, just as they are through contemporary times. The 1994 film *Interview with the Vampire*, directed by Neil Jordan and based on the novel by Ann Rice of the same title, addressed these themes and contributed to the public's fixation on vampirism, which continues to have a strong pulse in today's popular culture.

**The Rise of Vampire Fiction**

Vampire fiction has been a popular genre in literature and film for centuries, appealing to a global audience because of its relatability to emotional human desires and struggles. In the 19th century, the genre was a relatively new idea often associated with and influenced by several cultural factors, including attitudes toward death and the supernatural, increased production and interest in Gothic literature, and the influence of
mythology and folklore in society. Additionally, the mysterious lives of vampires, often portrayed as rebellious in society, often gave readers a chance to imagine circumstances that rejected social constructs.

John Polidori’s short story "The Vampyre" (1819) is considered the first modern vampire story in English literature. Written at the same time as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it offers a different kind of monster tale. “The Vampyre” features an aristocratic vampire, Lord Ruthven, who preys on innocent victims and helps establish many tropes and themes that will define vampire fiction in the centuries to come. In the story, the narrator describes Lord Ruthven as “dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society.” (Polidori 7). Perhaps one of the biggest draws to this story, and the character Lord Ruthven, was the fresh take on the darker side of aristocrats in early 19th-century British society. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) is another important and influential example of vampire fiction, featuring a female vampire who preys on young women. Written a quarter of a century after *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is possibly the most famous vampire novel ever. It is about a charismatic and powerful vampire who preys on unsuspecting victims in Victorian England, concealing his dark side under aristocratic status. In his essay, “Tamed Monsters and Human Problems in Cimena’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1994)” Professor P. Stuart Robinson writes of Count Dracula:

His nobility adds to the dissonance of the malignant atmosphere of scarcely concealed desire and aggression. The Count is a veritable paragon of civility. The idea of a beast lurking beneath the surface of the conventions of polite
society is a powerful one. Monstrosity is nurtured not only by difference but also by the terms of its appearance, by being conspicuously out of place. (Robinson 109)

*Dracula* was influential, as it helped establish many elements of vampire fiction that are still used today. Robinson credits this film, explaining, “*Dracula* (dir. Terence Fisher, 1958), adapting Stoker’s novel, was a particular box-office success and spawned a string of sequels. It was arguably pivotal in distilling and dispersing the cultural archetype of vampirism and the operative conventions of an increasingly consolidated horror subgenre” (Robinson 109). Vampires were seen as symbols of forbidden desires and repressed sexuality and were a threat to the appropriate social order of the time. Vampire fiction offered a way for people feeling detached from and confused by society’s structures and expectations to understand and explore these fears through the supernatural characters and events in these stories.

During the 19th century, when vampire fiction became popular, several social constructs and beliefs influenced the portrayal of vampires and the themes explored in vampire fiction. One of the notable social constructs was the value of strict compliance to living by a moral code of ethics. One of the ways the Victorian era was distinguished was by strict ethical principles and societal expectations that were highly valued, such as virtue, sexual repression, and social propriety. Vampire literature often played on these ideas, portraying vampires as seductive and dangerous figures who threatened social order and moral and ethical values, which audiences loved. Additionally, the 19th century was a period of a revival of interest in the supernatural, mystic, and spiritualism. People were charmed by the unknown and the possibility of otherworldly forces.
Vampire fiction played into this fascination, offering vampires as creatures of the night with mysterious abilities and connections to the paranormal realm.

Another aspect of this period was the significant social and economic distinctions, signified by a rigid class system. Vampire fiction often explores themes of power, control, and the disruption of social hierarchies. As immortal beings with a voracious thirst for blood, vampires could be interpreted as the privileged elite exploiting the lower classes. As the 19th century was marked by European colonial expansion and encounters with foreign cultures, vampire fiction sometimes used vampires to represent exotic or foreign elements threatening the established order, drawing on the fascination with the “other.” Vampires were often depicted as creatures from Eastern Europe or Transylvania, as *Dracula* is most famous for, playing to the fear of the unknown and the dangers of the unfamiliar to British members of society. In Dracula, Johnathan Harker is an English traveler to Transylvania and encounters Dracula, displaying this specific fear. In the honors thesis, “The Evolution of the Vampire Other: Symbols of Difference from Folklore to Millennial Literature” authored by the University of Mississippi student Kate Buckley, a description of Johnathan’s experience in connection to societal fears and potentially destructive issues of the time clarifies this topic. Buckley states, “Jonathan’s relationship with Dracula embodies Victorian fears of humanity’s potential savagery and its association with capitalist and imperialist greed, anxieties aroused by the Industrial Revolution, the expansion of the British Empire, and scientific theories about human evolution” (Buckley 24). This aspect of society’s fears and anxieties influenced how vampires were portrayed in literature and provided a
backdrop for exploring various themes, trepidations, and anxieties prevalent during the 19th century.

Gothic literature, also popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, featured supernatural elements, including ghosts, monsters, and vampires. It helped establish the now common literary patterns, such as the idea of the vampire as a seductive and dangerous figure. At the same time, there was incredible scientific progress, particularly in medicine and biology. Vampire fiction blended these two things, combining technological medical advancements with supernatural elements. The Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century and continued to grow and progress well into the 19th century, profoundly impacted Britain and the United States (Industrial Revolution). However, Britain experienced an earlier and more significant industrial transformation. As a result, British audiences were exposed to technological innovations earlier than their American counterparts. There was a widespread belief that scientific advancements could unravel the world’s mysteries, including the supernatural. Gothic and vampire fiction capitalized on this curiosity, often using scientific language and visuals to create an atmosphere of rational exploration into these unknown worlds. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is an example of the growing fascination with the human body and its functions and human interest in the anxiety about the limits of scientific technology, which contributed to the success of vampire stories. Vampire fiction often played on these anxieties by portraying vampires as immortal creatures who defied scientific explanations. Scientific and medical advancements in medicine, anatomy, physiology, and chemistry were incorporated into the narratives, with characters using
innovative technologies, medical procedures, and scientific knowledge to combat vampires or reveal the secrets of immortality.

The vampire genre continued to evolve and gain popularity in the 20th century and became more complex, with literary and film productions ranging from horror to romance to comedy. Also, during this time was the emergence of the “sexy vampire,” which recognized an aspect of vampirism that had already existed and enhanced it tremendously, drawing more attention and obsession to these immortal beings. The 1980s saw a swell of sexualized vampire films, including *The Lost Boys* (1987) and *Near Dark* (1987), which presented vampires as young, attractive, and defiant. Anne Rice’s novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) is a staple in vampire fiction, showing vampires as sensual and complex creatures. Director Neil Jordan’s 1994 film adaptation of the book brought the characters to life on the big screen, with young 90s Hollywood heartthrobs Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt in the starring roles as the seductive, beautiful, and sexy vampires Lestat de Lioncourt and Louis de Pointe du Lac. Both characters are alluring, which is a crucial element of the story. Lestat is drawn to Louis’s desirable appearance and soft tenderness when he first sees him as a human and turns him into a vampire. Louis was also drawn to Lestat, sensual and alluring, which sealed his eternal fate. In the film, the characters acknowledge how they are irresistible and can lure in their human prey.

Lestat: “No one could resist me, not even you, Louis.”

Louis: “I tried.”
Lestat: “And the more you tried, the more I wanted you.” *(Interview with the Vampire)*

The intrinsic homosexual undercurrent and the sexualization of the film certainly contributed to its audience's appetite for it, and this angle on vampire fiction propelled the genre forward to the next century.

In the 21st century, vampires continue to thrive, with offerings such as the famous *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer, which was also adapted into a series of films, and the HBO series *True Blood*. The vampire has also been incorporated into other genres, such as romance and young adult fiction. It is a versatile and durable figure in popular culture, relatable to many consumers worldwide.

Professor Nick Groom is the author of *The Vampire: A New History*, a non-fiction book exploring vampires’ history in literature and pop culture. In an interview in *Modern Explorers Magazine*, he discusses why the obsession with vampires is not going away but, instead, is becoming more relevant. Explaining modern culture’s interest in vampire fiction, he says, “It's interesting how contemporary vampires, 21st-century vampires, are different because they are responding to our own anxieties today” (Decu). The struggles that vampires have faced in the past, for example, the feeling of isolation and loneliness, and the struggles that contemporary vampires face, such as the creation of untraditional and nonnuclear families, are also concerns of modern society. “We need to have mirrors; culture provides us with mirrors in which we can see versions of ourselves. And vampires are a very powerful way of getting us to think about how we can coexist with others who aren’t like us” (Decu). It makes sense that vampires
become a way, or a catalyst even, for people to navigate and understand relationships with other people.

By acknowledging readers' and viewers' deep-seated fears and anxieties, vampire fiction helped shape the imagination and establish the vampire as one of the most enduring figures in literary and cultural history. The rise of vampire fiction is a complex phenomenon that reflects a range of cultural and historical factors and becomes more diverse, with authors from various backgrounds and cultures contributing to the genre. The popularity of vampire fiction continues today, with new works and adaptations being produced regularly. Throughout their various depictions, vampires have remained immortal beings and are often portrayed as experiencing loneliness and isolation due to their supernatural nature and separation from human society.

**Immortality**

The theme of immortality is a central factor of vampire fiction, and it is explored in depth in the film *Interview with the Vampire*. For vampires, immortality is both a gift and a curse.

On the one hand, it permits them to experience the world in a way that humans cannot, allowing them to be a part of centuries of history and acquire a vast knowledge of the world through human and immortal experiences. However, this also requires them to accept responsibility for their actions and impact on the world. For example, in the movie, Louis rejects the idea of taking human lives to sustain himself and wrestles with the moral implications of his actions, which as a young vampire, he sees as murderous.
However, feasting on human blood is a part of this immortal life. Lestat tries to comfort and guide Louis through this struggle, telling him, "It's so easy you almost feel sorry for them. You'll get used to killing. Just forget about that mortal coil. You'll become accustomed to it, all too quickly" (*Interview with the Vampire*).

On the other hand, it also means that they must bear the pain of watching humans they love or once loved age and die while they remain forever unchanged, unable to sustain any sense of attachment or belonging. They must learn to cope with their immortal existence's profound loneliness.

Immortality can also create a desire for freedom and an end to their eternal life, as vampires may grow tired of their existence and long for a way out. Louis, in particular, struggles with his endless life. In the original novel *Interview with the Vampire* by Ann Rice, he confesses to a priest, “I am not mortal, father, but immortal and damned, like angels put in hell by God. I am a vampire” (Rice 144). Louis is equating his immortality with sin in general and his damnation to earth to the damnation of condemned angels to hell. The life of an immortal being inevitably leads to loneliness and despair. As mortals die and the world keeps turning, they remain alive and unchanged, isolated from the chance to form lasting human connections.

**Loneliness and Isolation**

Historically, vampires were often described as monstrous creatures that preyed on humans, and their loneliness and isolation resulted from their inability to form meaningful relationships. They were often depicted as lone creatures that lived in seclusion, scorned by society, and hunted by those who feared them. In some cases,
vampires were portrayed as cursed beings doomed to wander the earth alone for eternity, unable to find peace or companionship.

In modern fiction, vampires demonstrate more complex personalities and have been portrayed as struggling with their immortality and the isolation that comes with it. As Nick Groom stated in his interview with Vasile Decu regarding the reasons for a continued fascination with vampire stories, this aspect of their lives reflects modern human society. People see their struggles through the fantasy of these immortal and lonely characters, and they can relate. Modern vampires often try to blend in with human society while maintaining their supernatural abilities, which can be a source of power and seclusion. This is illustrated in well-loved stories like the *Twilight* series films and the series *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017).

In many modern vampire stories, the protagonists seek to overcome their loneliness and isolation by forming connections with other vampires or with human characters who accept them for who they are. These relationships can provide a sense of belonging and purpose. They may also offer the possibility of romantic or sexual intimacy, which can be a powerful antidote to the solitariness of immortality. However, in other narratives, vampires may *embrace* their loneliness and isolation, seeing it as a necessary aspect of their existence. They may distance themselves from human society and choose to live alone, either in remote locations or in secret societies with other vampires. This is a way of avoiding the pain of forming relationships that are inevitably brief in the context of immortal life and may also be a way of embracing the power and independence that comes with being a vampire.
In the movie *Interview with the Vampire*, loneliness, and isolation are central themes explored through the experiences of Lestat, Louis, Claudia, and the larger vampire community. Lestat experiences a deep sense of loneliness, and the desire for companionship and connection leads him to transform Louis. However, even this relationship ultimately fails to provide the lasting companionship that Lestat craves. His isolation is reflected in his relationship with Louis, whom he first admires and later resent for his thoughtful and reflective nature.

On the other hand, Louis is introspective and struggles with the moral implications of his vampiric existence. His aloneness stems from his inability to find meaning and purpose in his immortal life, and his attempts to find companionship with other vampires are often hindered by his guilt and sense of moral responsibility. Claudia experiences an unusual form of isolation as she struggles to find her place in the world of vampires. She is rejected by many of the other vampires because she is doomed to her childlike state forever, and her relationship with Lestat and Louis is laced with tension as they struggle to reconcile their desire to protect her with the necessary realities of their existence as immortal beings. All of these circumstances contribute to a lonely existence.

*Interview with the Vampire* is a powerful and raw exploration of the theme of loneliness and isolation, offering a haunting depiction of the emotional toll of immortality and the struggle to find companionship and connection in the world. Claudia has a unique situation, as she is just a child when she is transformed, which robs her of her childhood, thus compounding her loneliness.
Claudia’s Lost Childhood

Claudia’s experience of being turned into a vampire at age ten highlights the emotional toll of vampirism and how it can be, at times, a double-edged sword. These occasions highlight how vampirism is emotionally complex. While she gains eternal life and the ability to perform supernatural acts, she is robbed of the ability to experience childhood’s joys and grow and develop naturally as a human being. At first, she does not understand her new existence, and Louis must explain it to her, all while knowing she is cursed with immortality.

Louis: "You see that old woman? That will never happen to you. You will never grow old, and you will never die."

Claudia: "And it means something else too, doesn't it? I shall never ever grow up." (Interview with the Vampire)

While navigating this new life, Claudia continually works to adapt and understand. Her attempts to find companionship with other vampires are often hindered by their rejection of her as a disgrace, highlighting how there is judgment and causes of isolation and loneliness even within the vampire community.

Claudia is depicted as an intelligent and clever young girl as a human child. However, after becoming a vampire by Louis and Lestat, she is forced to confront the harsh reality of how she came into her new immortal existence.

Claudia: “You... fed on me.”

Louis: “Yes. And he found me with you, and he cut his wrist and fed you from it, and you were a vampire and have been every night thereafter.”

Claudia: “You both did it.”
Louis: “I took your life... He gave you another one.”

Claudia: “And here it is, and I hate you both.” (Interview with the Vampire)

She is resentful and angry, cannot age or grow, and is doomed to remain a child forever despite her intelligence and emotional maturity. She struggles with these emotions throughout the film and alternates between positive and negative feelings toward Louis and Lestat. Claudia says to Louis, “Locked together in hatred. But I can't hate you, Louis. Louis, my love, I was mortal till you gave me your immortal kiss. You became my mother, and my father, and so I'm yours forever” (Interview with the Vampire). Claudia's relationship with Lestat and Louis also reflects her lost childhood. She is protected and exploited by the two older male vampires, who struggle to reconcile their desire to care for her with the reality of her vampiric nature.

Lestat and Louis desire a family with Claudia that consists of the three of them; constructing families is one way vampires combat loneliness and isolation. With the two older males as her parental figures, their nontraditional family unit provides a place for Claudia’s unique situation. She is trapped in a child’s body yet possesses an adult's intelligence, maturity, and emotional complexity. Despite this family, she feels alone in her existence. Her childhood was stolen and replaced with immortality and isolation. This facet of the film shows the power struggles that can be found, in part, in all families, specifically in a complex family structure.

**Vampire Families**

The theme of the vampire family is an important element of Interview with the Vampire's narrative. In the film, vampires create new family members by turning
humans into vampires through the exchange of blood. This process creates a bond between the two and forms the basis of the family unit. Despite the circumstances that brought Claudia to her new life of immortality, the relationship between Louis and Claudia is genuine and protective. Louis continually feels responsible and remorseful for initially taking Claudia’s life (before Lestat does the deed of her transformation) and endlessly reassures her of his affection.

Louis: “Do you think I would let them harm you?”

Claudia: “No, you would not, Louis. Danger holds you to me.”

Louis: “Love holds you to me.” (Interview with the Vampire)

These non-nuclear families provide a sense of community and belonging for vampires who might otherwise feel alone, just like modern non-traditional families are created or cobbled together by people who feel forced out or isolated from their nuclear families. Creating a “chosen” family can help provide needed structure and acceptance. For vampire families, it provides a structure for the vampires to interact with each other and navigate their existence.

The creation of families also creates power dynamics within the community. The vampire who turns a human has a certain level of control over the new vampire, which can create tension and conflict within the family unit. In Interview with the Vampire, this is particularly evident in the relationship between Lestat and Louis, where Lestat's control over Louis creates tension and conflict. Lestat sees himself as the leader, proudly responsible for creating Louis and their family. While struggling to understand Louis’ guilt over drinking human blood, he argues, "Feed on what you will. Rats, chickens, poodles, I'll leave you to it and watch you come around. But just remember,
life without me would be even more unbearable” (Interview with the Vampire). Lestat views his role in Louis' life as a positive one. However, Louis struggles with growing resentment, sometimes hatred, and eventual pity toward Lestat throughout their relationship.

In the broader world of vampire fiction, the creation and function of vampire families vary. Some vampire stories feature large, extended families with complex power dynamics and political maneuvering (such as covens like the Cullen/Hale family and the Volturi in the Twilight series.) In contrast, others focus on smaller, more intimate groups of vampires. The idea of the vampire family also connects to the theme of immortality. Immortal vampires must create new family members to continue their existence. Creating a family unit provides a sense of continuity and purpose for the vampires, as they can pass on their legacy to future generations. Regardless of the specifics, the idea of the vampire family is an important and recurring theme in the genre, mirroring the importance of community and inclusion that humans desire, even among those who exist outside of conventional society.

**American vs. European Vampires**

The film takes place primarily in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries but also features scenes in New Orleans in the 20th century. During the Romantic period, vampires were a popular topic in literature, folklore, and mythology in America and Europe. While there were some noteworthy similarities between American and European portrayals of vampires during this era, there were also some striking differences.
One notable difference between American and European vampires during the Romantic period was their origin stories. In Europe, vampires were often portrayed as undead beings that rose from the grave to prey on the living, often due to a curse or an evil spirit. In “Byron and Greek Vampires,” author Matthew Gibson gives an example of one such story and comments on Lord Byron’s inspiration for his vampire poetry. He writes, “Translating Calmet, Southey presented many reports describing the ‘vroucolacas’ of Greece, one of which, from the Island of Milo, reports a vampire that emits a stream of blood after being unearthed and decapitated after 40 years. Byron also takes these superstitions and legends and fashions them into a Gothic tale” (Gibson 18). “The Giaour,” a poem that includes one of the first mentions of a vampire in the English language during the Romantic Era, along with much of Byron’s work, is associated with Greece and is founded on folklore and mythology. Arizona State graduate student Rosemary Kristine Smith analyzes Byron’s work in her thesis titled “Drink of Me, and You Shall Have Eternal Life: An Analysis of Lord Byron’s The Giaour and the Greek Folkloric Vampire.” She remarks, “However, the original Romantic vampire—that is, the creature whose motif pervades the Romantic movement—was tied much more closely to the folkloric vampire myths that predate the movement. The Giaour is no exception” (Smith 6). Byron’s “The Giaour” is also renowned for conjuring the monster, the vampire, which created such interest and excitement in Western Europe during the seventeenth century. On the other hand, American vampires were more likely to be portrayed as living humans who gained supernatural abilities through supernatural or magical means. How a vampire was “created” inherently gives the creature a different prevalent tone.
European vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* are also depicted as aristocratic and refined, with a taste for the finer things in life. In the chapter titled “Bleeding Gold” from Nick Groom’s book *The Vampire: A New History*, the author discusses the cultural factors that contributed to the rise of vampire fiction in the 19th century. One reason is opposition to societal expectations. While aristocratic members of European circles were expected to act distinctively and appropriately, vampires provided a vehicle to explore a rebellion against this idea. Groom explains, “Vampires are, more usually, often oddly classless. Lord Ruthven, for instance, may be an aristocrat, but his lifestyle is not markedly lavish or luxurious, and he travels without servants” (Groom 160). Appearing noble and proper externally, but harboring a secret lifestyle full of indulgence and self-preservation, appeals to readers and allows them to fantasize about such behavior in their lives, even though they may never act upon those fantasies.

Another difference between American and European vampires during this period was their physical appearance. European vampires were often depicted as gaunt and pale, with sharp fangs and glowing eyes. They were also often associated with bats or other nocturnal creatures. Contrarily, American vampires were often portrayed as more glamorous and seductive, with pale skin and piercing eyes that could hypnotize their victims. This was illustrated by the strategic casting for *Interview with the Vampire*, released in 1994. Tom Cruise (Lestat) and Brad Pitt (Louis) were both chosen as People Magazine’s “Sexiest Man Alive” in the 1990s, which contributed to the film grossing $105 million in America and $224 million worldwide (“Interview with the Vampire (1994) - Financial Information.”). The special effects, makeup, and movie star appearances
combined to produce beautiful, mysterious, and sensual vampire characters that seduced American audiences for weeks at the box office.

Overall, the portrayal of American and European vampires during the Romantic period and those depicted in *Interview with the Vampire* are similar in that they are both powerful, seductive, and cursed beings. They were also associated with darkness and the supernatural and were believed to have the power to shape-shift or control the minds of their victims. However, there are also differences in their cultural associations and attitudes toward race, class, sexuality, and the social undermining of power and authority, reflecting the differences between American and European cultures.

**Social Subversion, Race, Class, and Sexuality**

*Interview with the Vampire* primarily focuses on white European vampires and does not explicitly address race issues. However, it is worth noting that the film’s portrayal of vampires as white, aristocratic, and wealthy could reflect the historical role of white Europeans in colonizing and dominating other cultures. The film prominently features a divide between the aristocratic vampires, such as Lestat and Louis, and their victims, who are poorer and of lower standing. This is a comment on the class-based power dynamics that existed in the late 18th century, and to some degree, through the late 20th century societies.

Vampires have long been associated with homosexuality, lust, and blurred gender lines, and that theme runs as an undercurrent throughout the movie. The film’s narrative only *alludes* to homoeroticism among vampires, which can be seen as subverting traditional gender norms. This can be interpreted as an analysis of the
societal pressures to conform to heteronormative standards, which were strong societal expectations when Lestat transformed Louis in the late 1700s. Even in the 1880s, when the film concludes, queerness and homosexual relationships were still not widely accepted.

In general, vampires are seen as outsiders who provocatively challenge societal expectations. The vampires’ rejection of traditional morality and the embrace of their desires and needs can be interpreted as a critique of society’s expectations of the time. Sexual desire and lust are significant aspects of this monster and are part of the two opposing views of social norms and constraints: security and prison. Robinson explains the complexity of the queerness affiliated with vampire sexual appetites, noting, “The sexual—and gender—overtones are complex nonetheless. The connotations of a vampiric desire, which by nature entails no distinctions, and certainly not with respect to gender, express a clear ‘queer’ undercurrent in a broadly heteronormative culture” (Robinson 110). While not explicitly demonstrated in the film, it is inferred through the relationship between Louis and Lestat and the wider vampire community.

The newest adaptation of Ann Rice’s original novel, *Interview with the Vampire*, is the 2022 TV AMC series of the same title. In the 1994 film, Louis is a wealthy white slave owner with a kind heart, and the enslaved people are a minor footnote in the story. The 2022 TV series version, however, takes on topics that were mere undertones in the film, most prominently race and sexuality. A black actor plays the character of Louis. While making a statement about race is not the primary focus, the writing does not avoid the reality that Louis, a black male in the Jim Crow era of America, dramatically affected his life. Also, the acknowledgment of the sexual and romantic relationship
between Lestat and Louis is acknowledged and demonstrated on camera. It is just one element of their multifaceted relationship, which is toxic and complicated, just as it is in the film and Rice’s novel.

Overall, *Interview with the Vampire* contains several themes related to race, class, sexuality, and social subversion. While some of these themes are addressed more explicitly than others, they all contribute to a complex portrayal of the world of vampires and their relationships with human society. Lestat and Louis are two catalysts of the comment on these themes, and while they have other similarities, their differences drive the plot of the story.

**Lestat vs. Louis**

Lestat and Louis are the two main adult characters in *Interview with the Vampire* but have very different personalities and worldviews from one another, precisely in terms of their Romantic vs. modern and aristocratic vs. democratic qualities. Power, identity, and humanity are themes explored through these two characters.

Lestat embodies the Romantic ideal with a love of beauty, decadence, and sensuality. He enjoys the beauty found in the world and is drawn to art, music, and culture. He also sees himself as a rebel against societal norms and relishes in his desire to push boundaries and bend the lines of morality. Lestat is an aristocratic figure with a power-hungry sense of entitlement, which he sometimes lords over Louis and Claudia. He enjoys controlling those around him and sees himself as above regular people. He is also focused on wealth and status and relishes his luxurious lifestyle.
Louis, on the other hand, embodies a more modern sensibility. He is introspective, questioning, and often disturbed by the predatory nature of his existence. Throughout the film, Louis struggles to come to terms with his identity and place in the world and often conflicts with Lestat's more Romantic worldview. He also has a more democratic stance than Lestat. He is sympathetic to the difficulties of ordinary humans and sees himself as part of a larger community. The film's premise, a formal interview with an actual vampire conducted by a doubtful but curious reporter, is a clear example of how Louis is a different kind of vampire. The juxtaposition of a monster sitting for a calm, explanatory-in-nature conversation about his life is the focal point of the opening scenes, rather than the fear typically associated with human interaction with a vampire.

In his essay “Tamed Monsters and Human Problems,” Robinson explains:

The film aims to stimulate a morbid fascination with the imaginary condition of the vampire in her (super)natural state. Its horror derives less from the shock encounter with the other, the genre’s stock-in-trade, and more from how being other is—shockingly enough—experienced. Having deliberately breached the barriers of fear, customarily containing the viewer’s imagination, Jordan takes us on an unpleasant journey to the “heart of an immense darkness.” What is entailed in this departure from the traditional standpoint of dehumanizing what is too disgusting or frighteningly ambiguous in its humanity? There is certainly something refreshing and promising about such a fearless engagement with the monster, to seek understanding and reconciliation over antagonism, redolent of that definitively liberal aspiration not to recoil from difference but to embrace it.

(Robinson 113-114)
As Louis talks diplomatically and relatable during the interview scenes, he endears himself to the viewer. The differences between him and Lestat are highlighted, and he becomes a monster that the viewer roots for and can empathize with as he explains the events of his centuries-long life.

Additionally, Louis is uncomfortable with Lestat's desire for power and control and seeks a more equitable way of life. Because of these differences, they are often at odds with each other, and their once mutually sensual relationship turns into resentment, irritation, and sometimes pity and hatred. These differences add depth and complexity to their characters and contribute to the film's overall themes about the nature of power, identity, and humanity.

Conclusion

Vampire fiction is a genre of literature that focuses on supernatural creatures that are generally portrayed as beings who sustain their immortality by feeding on the living. The genre evolved and transformed throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, reflecting each era's changing cultural and literary landscape. Vampire fiction as a genre evolved from its roots in mythology and legends, adapting to the changing literary trends and cultural sensibilities of the late 18th century through today. From the Gothic aristocrat to the seductive romantic figure and from creatures of horror to subjects of diverse modern narratives, vampire fiction has remained a prominent and enduring part of literary history. The creature took on different forms from Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, to Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. The evolving genre explored unique interpretations of vampires, integrating social comment, scientific
explanations, and blending genres. The vampire genre presents the depiction of the undead being as simultaneously captivating and appalling. *Interview with the Vampire* is notable and influential mainly because it “dismantles established monster conventions” by humanizing otherworldly and supernatural elements through Louis’ interview platform (Robinson 118). The themes woven throughout vampire stories have stood the test of time in their appeal to audiences globally, as the struggles and topics vampires face are reflected in society from the 17th century through the 21st century. The genre continues to expand in literature and film as writers adapt to the times, and the immortal characters continue to be a balanced blend of glamour, sex, mystery, and danger. *Interview with the Vampire*, in its original novel format, the 1994 film adaptation, and the newest AMC TV series format have all successfully told the story of Louis de Pointe du Lac through his own words, through his interview, of how he became a vampire and reported the relatability of his immortal life to decades of viewers.
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Project 3

Wolfgang Iser: Reader-Response Criticism in Literary Theory

*Click anywhere on the image below to access the live link to the revised Sway project:*

Wolfgang Iser

German Literary Scholar: Reader Response Criticism in Literary Theory

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Wolfgang Iser

German Literary Scholar: Reader Response Criticism in Literary Theory


Introduction

William Iser

Wolfgang Iser, a prominent literary theorist and philosopher, made significant contributions to the field of Reader Response Theory. Born in Germany, Iser lived from 1926 to 2007, and his ideas revolutionized the way that the relationship between readers and texts is understood. He is best known for his groundbreaking book The Implied Reader (1972), which explores the role of the reader in the process of interpreting and engaging with a literary work. In The Implied Reader, "Iser holds that literary texts provide the foundation for their interpretation, but they also imply the action of the reader. Reading is not passive but a process of discovery; a reader questions, negates, and revises the expectations that the text establishes, filling in what Iser calls "blanks" or "gaps" in the text and continually modifying his or her interpretation" (Leitch 1451). Iser's ideas profoundly impacted literary criticism, opening new pathways for understanding the complex relationship between readers and texts.
Even today, his work continues to influence scholars, writers, and readers, shedding light on the intricate and interactive nature of literary interpretation. This theory is instrumental in understanding and carrying out literary criticism because it shifts the focus from solely analyzing the author’s purpose and meaning of the words, to the active role played by readers in understanding and interpreting the work.

This presentation showcases five artifacts that are meant to inform and engage the audience, prompting further learning and deeper curiosity about Wolfgang Iser and Reader Response Theory. These artifacts include:

1. an obituary titled “In Memoriam: Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007)”; a unique account of Iser's professional life and personal anecdotes written by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, a long-time friend of Iser's. I began the presentation with this artifact to introduce Iser as a theorist and highlight his important contribution to Reader Response Theory.

2. an essay written by Nasrullah Mambrol titled “Key Theories of Wolfgang Iser – Literary Theory and Criticism.” I chose to place this artifact second because it builds upon the information provided in the obituary and goes into greater detail about the psychology of Reader Response Theory.

3. a YouTube video of a lecture at Yale University presented by another literary scholar. This video puts Iser in the context of other literary reader response theorists. As learners, it is important to hear from various perspectives to understand Iser's profound impact in this complex field.

4. a timeline of the history of Reader Response Theory. After considering placing this as the first artifact, I decided to put this fourth because, by the time you reach the timeline, you have gained knowledge of who Wolfgang Iser is and his contribution to Reader Response Theory. Now, you can see how his work fits into the history of the theory, understanding how the scholars that came before formed and defined the role of the reader and how his work influenced later theorists and further developed this theory.

5. a review of Iser's book titled "The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response" by fellow Reader Response theorist Stanley Fish. I chose to end the presentation with this artifact because Fish is mentioned in the timeline of the history of reader response, and his review introduces a counterargument to Iser's theories and then rebuts that argument, further supporting why Iser's work is still pertinent and relevant today.
These artifacts were chosen to build on the readings about Wolfgang Iser from The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism and the essay "Interaction Between Text and Reader" by Wolfgang Iser. Additionally, these pieces will provide an opportunity to utilize the methods of literary criticism learned during the first two weeks of this course, including Poetics by Aristotle, Black theory by Henry Louis Gates, Kenneth W. Warren, and Toni Morrison, and genre theory by Claudia Rankine in her play The White Card. Finally, I hope these artifacts prepare us to thrive this week as we learn more about Iser and other Reader Response Theorists, Catherine Belsey, and Tzvetan Todorov.

I encourage you to consider how this theory acknowledges the reader's perspectives, experiences, and emotions as part of reading and analyzing texts. How do their individual responses shape the meaning and significance they take away from the work they have read? As you go through this presentation, think about a significant literary work you have read, either as part of your education, your job, or for pleasure. Looking through the lens of the work of Wolfgang Iser produced in Reader Response Theory, how did your perspective shape your interpretation of the literary work you have read?

A Note to Readers:

A few of the artifacts that I chose for this presentation are text-heavy--but I feel they are worth the read and help me build a more well-rounded contextual foundation as we study Iser and his work. Thank you for your patience in reading through the selections; they are not difficult to read, despite the length, as they are unique and interesting takes on the topic. Also, I have provided a Works Cited for each artifact, and a complete list of every source used in this project at the end of the presentation, should you want to check them out for yourself.

Please enjoy learning about literary theorist Wolfgang Iser.

Works Cited

Artifact 1: Obituary


This section of the Sway includes a piece written by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, a personal friend of Iser, titled "Wolfgang Iser — In Memoriam."

This artifact supplements an understanding of Wolfgang Iser and Reader Response Theory by giving the reader a comprehensive introduction to his contribution in the field of literary criticism through an explanation of his life's work and the profound mark he made in the world of literature.

I chose this artifact and decided to put it first because it not only gives a wonderful description of the importance of Iser's work, but it also offers a unique personal perspective from one of Iser's close personal friends. The anecdote at the end made me pause and think about Reader Response Theory and how my engagement with this piece specifically is shaped by my personal experience, perspective, and emotions, as I have had a relatable experience with family members in the hospital and worried about their care, loneliness, and comfort. Our experiences certainly shape how we see the world, so it stands to reason that they would shape how we interpret literature.

How does Reader Response Theory apply to you and your interpretation of this memorial of Iser's professional life and personal attributes? What events or circumstances in your life have given you the lens with which you engage with this text? I encourage you to think about these things as you read this memorial text. I feel this is an appropriate activity to begin this presentation: acknowledging and applying Reader Response Theory.
Works Cited


Wolfgang Iser—In Memorium

In losing Wolfgang Iser (1926–2007), the world has lost one of the greatest thinkers of our time. The Hebrew University, for its part, has lost a friend, a scholar whose contribution to both the Center for Literary Studies and Partial Answers has been invaluable. He initiated and participated in many projects of the Center, later published in book form. He also wrote the seminal opening essay for the first issue of Partial Answers, and another for the June 2006 issue (4/2). In losing Wolfgang Iser, I personally lost an extremely dear friend, and am still totally devastated by it.

I have no presumption to convey the richness and complexity of Iser's contribution to literary and cultural studies in this brief obituary and shall only try to outline his groundbreaking intellectual trajectory. I choose to focus on one thread in his thinking, namely the role of absence and negation, both because of its intrinsic importance and because it was the subject of the project at the Institute for Advanced Studies where we first met Iser in person.

Wolfgang Iser is the founder of the theory of aesthetic response which, together with Hans Robert Jauss' historical study of actual reactions of readers to works of literature, constitutes Reception Theory — a German school of thought entertaining many affinities with, but also important differences from, American Reader Response. Iser's theory of aesthetic response focuses on the impact of literary texts on their implied readers. He conceives of literature as an experience, a process, rather than as a corpus of autonomous objects. Similarly, he regards reading as an active interaction with texts rather than as their passive consumption. In The Implied Reader he defines the literary work as a space between two poles "which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader" (274). The interaction between the two, studied in The Implied Reader (1974) and The Act of Reading (1978), as well as in numerous essays, [End Page 141] is enhanced by gaps, indeterminacies, and negations which stimulate the activity of the reader's imagination. "If one sees the mountain," Iser says, "then of course one can no longer imagine it, and so the act of picturing the mountain presupposes its absence" (1974: 283). Gaps and indeterminacies prevent stasis,
provoke the reader's constant desire to fill them in, gesture toward the inaccessible without tampering with its inaccessibility, thus keeping alive the dynamics of reading. While blanks leave open the connections between different textual perspectives, spurring the reader into coordinating them, negations invoke familiar and determinate elements of knowledge only to cancel them out. What is canceled, however, remains in view, and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitudes to what is familiar or determinate (see his recent How to Do Theory, 2006: 65). Dynamism is valorized by Iser at least partly because it turns limitations into advantages. Just as the (metaphoric) mountain sets the imagination in motion, so the reader's inability to achieve a balance of consistent clues has the advantage of provoking further engagement with the work. Similarly, the incapacity of any realization to exhaust the full potential of a text gives rise to both plurality and productivity in reading.

If Iser's early work explores literature through the interaction between the text and the reader, his later work uses literature as an instrument for exploring the human imagination. In this second stage of his oeuvre, Iser founds a literary anthropology, considering it as "both an underpinning and an offshoot of reader response criticism" (1989: vii). The governing question shifts from "How literature?" — namely how literature affects the reader while simultaneously being realized by him — to "Why literature?" — that is, what functions literature (or, more precisely, fiction) performs in relation to the human makeup. While the question changes, the emphasis on the transformation of shortcomings into opportunities, and with it the role of absence and negation, remain central. In The Fictive and the Imaginary (1993) Iser dwells on three main human limitations: our non-coincidence with ourselves, the opacity of others, and temporal finitude. These are turned into advantages by fictionalizing acts. The impossibility of being present to ourselves stimulates an incessant process of testing out illusory presences and alternative understandings. The gaps in our knowledge of other people cause us to construct our own conception of the way the other experiences us, our reactions to the other being based upon these projections. We later discover that these are projections, i.e. "images" of a reality that exists but remains unknowable. Unknowability initiates further construction and further interactions. By dramatizing and provoking inexhaustible attempts to understand the other and fashion the self, literature also seems to offer an expansion beyond temporal finiteness. Although such an extension does not literally postpone death, "appearance," "fiction" may be the only "pragmatic extension" possible.

There is another sense in which absence is central to literature. Arguing against a view of literature as a representation of reality, Iser declares: "Literature brings something into the world that is not there" (2006: 67). It is my fantasy that "the problem of how such emerging virtual realities, which have no equivalent in our empirical world, can be processed and indeed understood" (58) is the core of Iser's new, monumental, and — sadly — unfinished book on emergence. Whether my fantasy does or does not correspond to reality, it is clear from glimpses we were
fortunate enough to receive of his work on emergence that it would have become a third stage in Iser's trajectory — a trailblazing and provocative contribution to the ways we think about literature and culture. I can only hope that the parts that have been written will be made available, and perhaps someone will be able to use Iser's notes to complete this unfinished manuscript. Indeed, this would add another dimension to the concept of interaction between reader and text.

Iser is not an easy theorist to read. Indeed, I myself expressed a slight misgiving concerning the difficulty of his writing in a review of his The Range of Interpretation (2000), published in Partial Answers (1/2, 2003). In personal conversations, Iser often jokingly praised himself for having consistently refrained from writing a textbook ... until Blackwell succeeded in seducing him. The result is How to Do Theory (2006) — a book that is concise, relatively reader-friendly, and surprising in its choice of theories and their representatives.

I am afraid that the foregoing sketch has failed to do justice to the work of this great scholar. Nevertheless, instead of further elaborating on his contribution to both theory and the reading of specific texts, I wish to conclude with a personal episode that exemplifies his giant-stature not only as a scholar but also as a human being. When Wolfgang (and the shift to the first name is appropriate here) was first in Israel, at the Institute for Advanced Studies, I was suffering from a dislocated hip, limping with the help of a cane, and experiencing a great deal of pain. Hip replacement operations had not yet become routine in Israel, especially not for young people (as I was then). Wolfgang and his wonderful wife, Lore, visited us at home one day and must have noticed how difficult it was for me to cope with two small children in this situation. As soon as [End Page 143] they returned to Germany, Wolfgang phoned me to say that they know the Director of a hospital in Switzerland, who also chaired the Surgery Department, and they could arrange for me to have the operation there. Two months later, I had the operation performed in Switzerland and during my sixteen days in the hospital (my family stayed in Israel) not one day passed without a representative of the Iser family visiting me, a 45 minute drive in each direction for them. Not only were they essential mediators between me and the nurses who spoke only the local dialect of German; they literally saved my sanity during this difficult and lonely period. One day Wolfgang brought me his recently published book on Tristram Shandy, suggesting that we discuss it at our next meeting. I was very far from able to concentrate, but I felt I had to rise to the occasion. I read the book, and our very interesting conversation about it was truly therapeutic, in the sense of giving me the feeling that even in the hospital my mind was still functioning. I am sure my story is only one example of acts of kindness the Isers showed to other people. Their combination of great minds and infinite human generosity arouses the love and admiration of all those who know them.
Artifact 2: Interpretation of Wolfgang Iser's Work

In this section, the artifact showcased is a piece written by Nasrullah Mambrol titled, “Key Theories of Wolfgang Iser – Literary Theory and Criticism.”

This artifact supplements our learning this week about Iser and his work in reader response as it delves deeper into these theories.

I chose to put this artifact second because it goes into greater detail of his ideas and the meanings and psychology behind the theory and more specific explanations and examples of how a reader's perspective can really shape their interpretation of a text. In his book, The Range of Interpretation, Iser sums up the meaning of his theory and the magic of reading a book. He writes, "When we (as readers) fill in the gaps that the writer has peppered throughout the book, we form a meaningful bond with the book. We are not just pulling information from it; we're participating in a reciprocal relationship, creating and deriving meaning in an extravaganza of interpretation" (Iser).

Some questions to ponder while reading this artifact include: How can a reader interpret a text truly objectively? How can one argue for or against the idea that the interpretation of everything we read is so influenced by our experiences, perspective, and emotions that there is no concrete meaning? If this is true, how does that affect literary analysis? What role does the author of the text actually have in delivering the message they want to send into the world through their work?
Wolfgang Iser’s (1926-2007) theories of reader response were initially presented in a lecture of 1970 entitled *The Affective Structure of the Text*, and then in two major works, *The Implied Reader* (1972) and *The Act of Reading* (1976). After examining a number of English novels in *The Implied Reader*, Iser outlines his approach in a section of this book entitled *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach*.1 Iser begins by pointing out that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also “the actions involved in responding to that text.” He suggests that we might think of the literary work as having two poles: the “artistic” pole is the text created by the author, and the “aesthetic” pole refers to “the realization accomplished by the reader” (IR, 274). We cannot identify the literary work with either the text or the realization of the text; it must lie “half-way between the two,” and in fact it comes into being only through the convergence of text and reader (IR, 275). His point here is that reading is an active and creative process. It is reading which brings the text to life, which unfolds “its inherently dynamic character” (IR, 275). If the author were somehow to present a story completely, the reader’s imagination would have nothing to do; it is because the text has unwritten implications or “gaps” that the reader can be active and creative, working things out for himself. This does not mean that any reading will be appropriate. The text uses various strategies and devices to limit its own unwritten implications, but the latter are nonetheless worked out by the reader’s own imagination (IR, 276).
To explain this process, Iser draws on Roman Ingarden’s concept of “intentional sentence correlatives,” according to which a series of sentences in a work of literature does not refer to any objective reality outside itself. Rather, the complex of these sentences gives rise to a “particular world,” the world presented in the literary work (IR, 277). Iser’s point is that the connections between various sentences or complexes of sentences are not established by the work itself, but are determined by the reader. A sentence in any literary work, claims Iser, characteristically “aims at something beyond what it actually says.” Iser reminds us of Husserl’s observation that a group of sentences creates an expectation in the reader; but what tends to happen, says Iser, is that in truly literary works these expectations are continually modified as we go on reading; indeed, a good literary work will usually frustrate our expectations. When we read expository texts (of science or philosophy, for example), we look for our expectations to be confirmed. But we regard such confirmation in literary works as a defect, since we are likely to be bored if a text merely rehearses what we already know and if our imagination is not called upon to work (IR, 278). The text produced by our response when reading is called by Iser its “virtual dimension,” which represents the “coming together of text and imagination” (IR, 279).

Iser draws attention to two important features of the reading process. The first is that reading is a temporal activity, and one that is not linear. As readers, we cannot absorb even a short text in a single moment, nor does the fictional world of the text pass in linear fashion before our eyes (IR, 277, 280). Whatever we read sinks into our memory and is “foreshortened”; it may be evoked again later against a different background, enabling us to develop connections we had not anticipated: “the reader, in establishing these interrelations between past, present and future, actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections. These connections are the product of the reader’s mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not the text itself – for this consists just of sentences, statements, information, etc.” (IR, 278). As readers, we occupy a perspective that is continually moving and changing according to the way we make sense of the accumulating fictional material. Moreover, our second
reading of the same text will proceed along a different time sequence: we already know the ending, for example, and we will make connections that we had earlier missed. The text thus created by our reading is a product of our processes of anticipation and retrospection (IR, 281).

Though our expectations are continually shifting, and images are continually being modified in their significance, we will "strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern" (IR, 283). According to Iser, this consistency of images or sentences and coherence of meaning is not given by the text itself; rather, we, as readers, project onto the text the consistency that we require. Hence, such textual consistency is the product of the "meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook" (IR, 284). We attempt to understand the material of the text within a consistent and coherent framework because it is this which allows us to make sense of whatever is unfamiliar to us in the text (IR, 285).

This search for consistency has a number of implications. Firstly, it makes us aware of our own capacity for providing links, our own interpretative power: we thereby learn not only about the text but also about ourselves. The non-linear nature of the reading process, says Iser, is akin to the way we have experiences in real life. Hence the "reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience" (IR, 281). As Iser states, the manner "in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror" (IR, 280–281). On the other hand, by making certain semantic decisions and ruling out others, for the sake of a consistent reading, we acknowledge the inexhaustibility of the text, its potential to have other meanings that may not quite fit into our own scheme. Indeed, our desire for consistency involves us to some extent in a world of illusion: as we leave behind our own reality somewhat to enter the reality of the text, we build up a textual world whose illusory consistency helps us make sense of unfamiliar elements. The consistency is illusory because we "reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning" (IR, 285).

Iser sees the polysemantic nature of the text and the illusion-making of the reader as "opposed factors," but both are necessary in the process of reading: if the illusion were destroyed completely, the text would be alien to us; and if the illusion were all embracing, then the polysemantic nature of the text would be reduced to one level of meaning. Hence we try to find a balance between these two conflicting tendencies. According to Iser, however, the "dynamism" of the text, its sense of life-likeness, presupposes that we do not actually achieve this balance. Even as we seek a consistent pattern in the text, we are also uncovering other textual elements and connections that resist integration into our pattern (IR, 285). In other words, even "in forming our illusions, we also produce at the same time a latent disturbance of these
illusions.” It is the reader’s attempt to conduct this balancing operation, oscillating between consistency and alien associations, between “involvement in and observation of the illusion...” that forms the esthetic experience offered by the literary text” (IR, 286). In seeking a balance, we start out with certain expectations, and it is the shattering of these expectations that lies at the core of our aesthetic experience. The very indeterminacy of the text, the very fact that parts of it are unformulated or unwritten, is the driving force behind our attempt to work out a “configurative” meaning, a meaning that is consistent and coherent (IR, 287). It is the very shifting of our perspective that makes us feel that a novel is true to life, and we ourselves impart to the text this dynamic life likeness which allows us to absorb unfamiliar experiences into our personal world (IR, 288).

Following an insight in John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1958), Iser believes that in reading a text, we undergo a process of organization similar to that undertaken by the creator of the text. In other words, we must recreate the text in order to view it as a work of art. And this act of aesthetic recreation, says Iser, is not a smooth or linear process and it actually relies on continual interruption of the flow of reading: “We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation” (IR, 288). Two factors govern this process of recreation: firstly, a familiar repertoire of literary patterns, themes, and social contexts; secondly, strategies that are used to “set the familiar against the unfamiliar.” It is the “defamiliarization” of what the reader thought she knew which creates the tension between her intensified expectations and her distrust of those very expectations (IR, 288). Hence it is the interplay between “illusion-forming and illusion-breaking that makes reading essentially a recreative process” (IR, 289).
The bases of the connection between reader and text, then, are: anticipation and retrospection, hence the unfolding of the text as a living event and consequently an impression of life-likeness (IR, 290). During the reading process, the work’s efficacy is caused by its evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar; in other words, the reader thinks her assumptions are affirmed by the text; she is then led to see that these assumptions are overturned and she enters the assumptions of the textual world itself, her reorientation marking an expansion of her experience, which learns to incorporate unfamiliar perspectives (IR, 290–291). Reading, for Iser, reflects the way in which we gain experience: once our preconceptions are held in abeyance, the text becomes our “present” while our own ideas fade into the past. We suspend the ideas and attitudes governing our own personality so that we can experience the “unfamiliar world of the literary text” (IR, 291).

But how does this happen? Many critics have suggested that the reader “identifies” with certain attitudes or characters in the fictional world. Iser’s explanation of such identification derives in part from Georges Poulet’s essay “Phenomenology of Reading” (1969). Following Poulet, Iser insists that in reading, it is the reader, not the author, who becomes the subject that does the thinking. Even though the text consists of ideas thought out by the author, in reading we must think the thoughts of the author, and we place our consciousness at the disposal of the text. According to Poulet, consciousness is the point at which author and reader converge, and the work itself can be thought of as a consciousness which takes over the mentality of the reader, who is obliged to shut out his individual disposition and character (IR, 292–293).

Iser modifies Poulet’s insights to urge that reading abrogates the dualism of subject and object that constitutes ordinary perception, and this division now takes place
within the reader’s consciousness. Though we may be thinking the thoughts of the author, our own personality and disposition will not disappear completely but remain as “a more or less powerful virtual force,” and in reading there will be “an artificial division of our personality.” We, as readers, “assume” the individuality of the author as a division within our personality, thereby establishing the alien “me” and the real, virtual “me.” Indeed, it is this relationship between the alien themes of the text and the virtual background of familiar assumptions that allows “the unfamiliar to be understood” (IR, 293–294). Someone else’s thoughts can only take shape in our consciousness if our own unformulated faculty for deciphering those thoughts is brought into play and achieves formulation. In this way, reading is a genuinely dialectical process with myself being infused by the author’s subjectivity and perpetually negotiating between the illusionary world of the fiction and the real world of which my own subjectivity is a part (IR, 293–294).

The production of meaning in literary texts not only entails our discovering unformulated or unwritten elements of the text; it also gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity, to formulate ourselves and to expand our experience by incorporating the unfamiliar (IR, 294). Hence, for Iser, the reading process mimes the process of experience in general: the aesthetic dimension of a literary work is located in the act of its recreation by the reader, a process that is temporal and also dialectical insofar as it allows the assumptions of the reader to interact with those of the text, yielding knowledge not only of the text but also of the reader herself.

But if the text at one level “mirrors” the reader, and if it is the reader who makes the connections between a text’s various elements, what is to stop the reading process from being entirely subjective and even impressionistic? While Iser acknowledges and even insists that “the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations,” and that the reading process will vary from individual to individual, he also urges that such variation can occur only “within the limits imposed by the written as opposed to the unwritten text.” He compares the variety of possible readings with the way two people might gaze on the same constellation of stars: one might “see” a plough and the other a dipper. The “stars” in a literary text, says Iser, “are fixed; the lines that join them are variable” (IR, 280, 282). One might also argue in Iser’s defense that his concept of the reader as split between two personalities, the author’s and her own, also disables complete arbitrariness of interpretation since it is a prerequisite of the reading process that the reader’s preconceptions are held in suspension or, at the very least, compelled into dialogue with the assumptions and attitudes in the text.

In fact, this possible charge of uncontrolled subjectivism is confronted in Iser’s The Act of Reading.2 In this book, Iser enlists two basic arguments against such a charge. The first argument is based on the nature of meaning, and the second hinges on the question of whether a truly objective interpretation is possible. The meaning of a literary text, says Iser, is not a fixed and “definable entity” but a “dynamic
happening” (AR, 22). It is, in other words, an event in time. Every fictional structure, according to Iser, is two-sided: it is both “verbal” and “affective.” The verbal structure of effects embodied in the text “guides the [reader’s] reaction and prevents it from being arbitrary”; the affective aspect is the realization in the reader’s response of a meaning that has been “prestructured by the language of the text” (AR, 21).

However, though the textual structures guide the reader’s response, they do not completely control it: some elements of the text are indeterminate and their meaning must be worked out by the reader. It is this mixture of determinacy and indeterminacy that “conditions the interaction between text and reader, and such a two-way process cannot be called arbitrary” (AR, 24). In this way, literary texts initiate “performances” of meaning “rather than actually formulating meanings themselves.” Indeed, the very aesthetic quality of a text, says Iser, lies in this “performing” structure, which could not occur without the reader (AR, 27). Hence, not only is “meaning” an event in time, but also it is located in the interaction between text and reader. Iser effectively extricates the notion of meaning from its status as a spatial concept, as an entity somehow hidden in the textual object, and sees it as a temporal concept, as a relation that is produced in the reader’s consciousness.

Again, we might object: even if we grant that the text somehow guides the reader’s reaction, could not the meaning thereby generated in the mind of a given reader be entirely subjective and private? Iser acknowledges that what is private is the reader’s eventual incorporation of the text “into his own treasure-house of experience” (AR, 24). However, such arbitrariness is limited by the fact that the act of understanding a text is “intersubjective”: though readers may draw very different conclusions from what they read, they will often respond to the same things: “a literary text contains intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning-production, but the meaning produced may then lead to a whole variety of different experiences and hence subjective judgments” (AR, 25). The point is that the process of “meaning-production” itself will occur within a range limited by the textual structures; different readers may then draw widely diverging conclusions from this range of meanings. Iser sees this intersubjective model of reading as an advance over objectivist theories which presume that a text itself contains a single hidden meaning or set of meanings that can be discovered by the critic.

Iser points out that such objectivism is based on an “ideal standard” to which literary works should conform: and, far from being objective, this ideal standard is open to dispute. Who, moreover, defines this standard? The critic? But the critic, says Iser, is hardly infallible; he is another reader who will bring his own background and dispositions into play when judging the meaning or value of a literary work. Such “objective” judgments, then, may rest on intensely private foundations (AR, 24).

In The Act of Reading, Iser further elaborates his important concept of the “implied reader.” He points out that when critics talk about literature in terms of its effects, they
invoke two broad categories of reader: the “real” reader and the “hypothetical” reader. The former refers to an actual reader whose response is documented, whereas the hypothetical reader is a projection of all possible realizations of the text (AR, 27). Iser sees both of these concepts as deficient. The documented response of real readers has often been thought to mirror the cultural norms or codes of a given era. The main problem Iser sees with this approach is that any reconstruction of real readers depends on the survival of documents from their era; and the further back we go in history, such documentation becomes increasingly sparse, and we must reconstruct the real readership of a text from the text itself (AR, 28). On the other hand, Iser points out that the “hypothetical” or what is sometimes called the “ideal” reader is often nothing more than a creation of the critic’s mind. Moreover, the code of an ideal reader would be identical to that of the author, thereby making reading superfluous (AR, 28–29). Since the “ideal reader” must encompass all the potential meanings of a text, Iser acknowledges that such a concept might be useful in order to “close the gaps that constantly appear in any analysis of literary effects and responses” (AR, 29).

Iser evaluates newer models of the reader that have arisen in more recent years, models that have sought to break free of the traditional restrictive models cited above: the “superreader” of Michael Riffaterre, the “informed reader” of Stanley Fish, the “intended reader” of Erwin Wolff, and the “psychological reader” of Norman Holland and Simon Lesser. Iser has criticisms of all of these models. Riffaterre’s concept of the “superreader” refers to a “group of informants” who converge at “nodal points in the text,” and their common reactions establish the existence of a “stylistic fact” (AR, 30). Iser acknowledges the value of Riffaterre’s concept in showing that stylistic qualities cannot be constrained within the province of linguistics but must be discerned by readers. But he points out that Riffaterre hopes to guard against inordinate variation of response among readers by appealing to the “sheer weight of numbers.” Also, his concept depends on the historical position of a group of readers in relation to the literary work (AR, 30–31). Iser sees this weakness also in Fish’s concept of the “informed” reader, characterized by Fish as a competent speaker of the language, having “mature” semantic knowledge and possessing “literary competence.” What he views as positive in Fish’s model is its demand that the reader engage in a process of selfobservation while reading, and its stressing, like Riffaterre’s model, the insufficiency of a merely linguistic model (AR, 31). Iser insists that the reader’s role is larger than that of the fictitious reader, who is only one aspect of the former. His critique of the psychological models of reading is centered on his objection that they do not adequately describe our reading of literature as an aesthetic experience: the text tends to lose its aesthetic quality and is merely regarded as material to demonstrate the functioning of our psychological dispositions (AR, 40).

According to Iser, all of the models cited above are restricted in their general applicability. His concept of the “implied reader” is intended to overcome these restrictions. In analyzing responses to a literary work, he says, “we must allow for the
reader’s presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation.” It is this reader, who is somehow lifted above any particular context, whom Iser designates the implied reader (AR, 34). The implied reader is a function not of “an empirical outside reality” but of the text itself. Iser points out that the concept of the implied reader has “his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader.” He defines the implied reader as “a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him.” The implied reader, then, designates “a network of response-inviting structures,” which prestructure the role of the reader in the latter’s attempt to grasp the text (AR, 34).

Iser explains that there are two aspects of the concept of the implied reader: “the reader’s role as a textual structure, and the reader’s role as a structured act.” By the first of these, Iser refers to those elements in a text that help a reader to “actualize” unfamiliar or new textual material. The text must be able to bring about a standpoint or perspective from which the reader will be able to do this. For example, in a novel, there are four main perspectives: those of the narrator, characters, plot, and the fictitious reader. The meaning of the text is generated by the convergence of these perspectives, a convergence that is not itself set out in words but occurs during the reading process. During this process, the reader’s role is to occupy shifting perspectives that are to some extent prestructured, and then to fit these various viewpoints “into a gradually evolving pattern” (AR, 35). The components that prestructure the reader’s role are: the different perspectives represented in the text, the perspective from which the reader holds these together, and their point of convergence (AR, 36). Indeed, the second aspect of the concept of the “implied reader” is the “reader’s role as a structured act.” By this, Iser means the reader’s active role in bringing together the various perspectives offered in the text; the text itself does not bring about this convergence. Iser sees “textual structure” and “structured act” – the two aspects of the “implied reader” – as related in the manner of intention and fulfillment (AR, 36).

Iser also sees the notion of the “implied reader” as explaining the tension that occurs within the reader during the reading process, a tension between the reader’s own subjectivity and the author’s subjectivity which overtakes the reader’s mentality, a tension between two selves that directs the reader’s ability to make sense of the text. The reader’s own subjective disposition, says Iser, will not be totally left behind: “it will tend instead to form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending.” Every text, says Iser, constructs its work, in varying degrees unfamiliar to possible readers; these readers, therefore, must be placed in a position to actualize the new perspectives. It is part of the reader’s role to be a fictitious reader, and her existing stock of experience will provide a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed (AR, 36–37). Given that the text’s structure allows for different realizations and interpretations, any one
actualization, says Iser, “represents a selective realization of the implied reader” and it can be judged against the background of the other realizations “potentially present in the textual structure of the reader’s role.” As such, the notion of the “implied reader” performs the vital function of providing “a link between all the historical and individual actualizations of the text.” In short, the “implied reader” is a “transcendental model” which allows us to describe and analyze the structured effects of literary texts (AR, 37–38).

Iser’s concept of “negativity” is important in his analysis of the reading process. All of the text’s formulations, he says, are punctuated by “blanks” and “negations.” The former refer to omissions of various elements between the formulated “positions” of a text; “negations” refer to cancelations or modifications or contradictions of positions in the repertoire of the text. These blanks and negations, says Iser, refer to an unformulated background: this fact he calls “negativity.” It is negativity that enables words to transcend their literal meaning and to assume multiple layers of reference (AR, 225–227). Negativity, urges Iser, is the basic force in literary communication, making possible: (1) an understanding based on the reader’s linkage of individual positions in a text, directed in part by blanks and negations; (2) deformations of organized structures of familiar knowledge and their remedy or the reader’s search for the underlying cause of those deformations; here, negativity is a mediator between representation and reception, enabling the reader to construct the text’s meaning on a question–answer basis. In this sense, negativity is the “infrastructure” of the literary text; (3) since literature presents something (knowledge or perspectives) that is not already in the world, it can reveal itself only through negativity, through the dislocation of external norms from their real context. In other words, everything that has been incorporated into a literary text has been deprived of its reality, and is subjected to new and unfamiliar connections. Negativity is the structure underlying this invalidation or questioning of the manifested reality (AR, 229). The reader must formulate the cause underlying this questioning of the world, and to do this, she must transcend that world, observing it, as it were, from the outside.

Hence negativity provides a “basic link between the reader and the text.” Iser sees it as characteristic of a work of art that it enables us to transcend our own lives, entangled as they are in the real world. Negativity, then, as a basic element of communication, is an “enabling structure” that gives rise to a fecundity or richness of meaning that is aesthetic in character. Each decision we make as readers must stabilize itself against the alternatives that we have rejected, alternatives which arise from an interaction between the text and the reader’s dispositions. The richness of meaning derives partly from the fact that there are no rigid criteria of right and wrong, but this, according to Iser, does not mean that meaning is purely subjective: the “very existence of alternatives makes it necessary for a meaning to be defensible and so intersubjectively accessible.” Moreover, as we gain insights from a literary work, we do not merely use
these mechanically to complement our previous insights, or our previous understanding of earlier parts of the text; rather, an interaction occurs that leads to a new meaning. Hence the production of meaning of literary works does not take place according to “regulative or constitutive rules” but is “conditioned by a structure which allows for contingencies.” Iser acknowledges that it is the reader’s own competence that will enable the various possibilities of meaning and interpretation to be narrowed down: it is the reader who provides the “code” that will govern her communicative relation with the text, rather than there being a preexisting code between text and reader already in place. In the latter case, literature would have nothing, or at least nothing valuable, to communicate (AR, 230).

What Iser is reacting against in his account of the reading process is what he considers to be the “classical norm” of interpretation, and the implications of this norm. According to Iser, the aim of conventional, classical interpretation was to uncover “a single hidden meaning” within the text. Meaning was considered as “representative,” having a direct reference to the outside world; and hence the literary work was considered to be a vehicle for the expression of truth (AR, 10–12). Beyond this, interpretation aimed to instruct the reader as to the text’s meaning, value, and significance (AR, 22). Such a model of interpretation promoted the treatment of a literary work as a document, testifying to characteristics of its era and the disposition of its author. What this model ignored, according to Iser, was the status of the text as an event as well as the experience of the reader (AR, 22). Iser sees his own project as emerging from a more modern constellation of approaches which rejected the idea that art somehow expresses or represents truth and which focused more on the connections between the text and either its historical context or its audience (AR, 14).

And yet, Iser points out, various elements of the classical norm have persisted, even within approaches that aim to reject it. The New Criticism, for example, “called off the search for meaning,” rejecting the idea that the literary work contains “the hidden meaning of a prevailing truth,” and focusing on the interaction of elements within the text. Nonetheless, elements of the classical norm have crept into this new approach: the New Critical values of harmony, order, completeness, and removal of ambiguity differ from the classical norm only inasmuch as these values are freed from their subservience to the expression of truth. In the New Critical approach, qualities such as harmony are considered valuable in their own right. In many modern conceptions of art Iser sees the classical values of symmetry, balance, order, and totality as occupying a central role. Why this obstinate persistence of the age-old classical norm, even within the texture of theories that claim to subvert or transcend it?

The main reason, according to Iser, is that consistency is essential to the very act of comprehension. And the very fact, acknowledged in modern theories, that a reader cannot grasp a text all at once obliges her to engage in the process of “consistency building” to make sense of the text (AR, 15–16). The meaning of the text is not formulated by the text itself but is a projection of the reader. Hence as readers we have
recourse to the classical values of symmetry, harmony, and totality, values that enable us to construct a frame of reference against which we can make unfamiliar elements accessible. The fragmented or disjointed nature of the literary work – leaving many blanks, gaps, and connections for the reader to work out – conditions “consistency building throughout both the writing and the reading process” (AR, 17). So, in historical terms, the task of the critic has altered: instead of explaining how a text, with all its qualities of harmony, order, and totality, contains a hidden meaning, she must now acknowledge that consistency-building, as a “structure of comprehension,” depends on the reader rather than the work. The critic must explain, then, not the work itself (which is an abstraction from the entire situation of reader interacting with text) but “the conditions that bring about its various possible effects.” In other words, what is needed is not instruction passing from critic to reader in the meaning of the text but an analysis of the reading process (AR, 18–19). It is here that Iser’s own work is designed to intervene.

Notes

Artifact 3: Lecture


This section showcases a YouTube video published by Yale University showing a recorded lecture from September 1, 2009. The lecture is from a course titled "Introduction to Theory of Literature" by Professor Paul Fry. The part of the lecture that focuses on Wolfgang Iser begins at 19:44, where this video clip begins.

This artifact supplements the understanding of this week’s readings about Iser and Reader Response Theory because Fry’s lecture further examines the relationship between reading and interpretation. It also gives additional context to the theory through a comparative analysis of several theorists, including Wolfgang Iser, as Fry explores the difference between meaning and significance, the relationship between understanding and paraphrasing, and the nature of the gap between the reader and the text. Wolfgang Iser’s essay, "The Reading Process," explains the nature of textual expectation and surprise and the theory of their universal importance in the narrative.
The lecture concludes by considering the fundamental, inescapable role that hermeneutic premises play in canon formation (“Configurative Reading.”).

I chose this artifact as the third piece as this gives a scholarly take on Iser's work. Dr. Fry earned his Ph.D. from Harvard and has been a professor of English at Yale since 1971 (“Paul Fry | English.”). I have included it as it is valuable to hear about a literary theorist's work from various perspectives to gain an overall understanding of Iser's profound impact in this complex field.

As you engage with this artifact, I encourage you to imagine that you are a student sitting in on this lecture at Yale University. What is your takeaway from Fry's lecture on Iser's "The Reading Process," and how does this information fit in or challenge what you already know about Iser and Reader Response Theory? Particularly, Fry explains Iser's theory as the reader "negotiating the text." What does this mean to you in your experience reading literary work? Now that you understand the theory, how can you connect your reading of work to "negotiating?"

Works Cited

“Paul Fry | English.” Yale English Department,


“Configurative Reading.” YouTube.com, Yale Courses, 1 September 2009,


Click on image to access YouTube Video.
Artifact 4: Timeline


The fourth artifact is a timeline of the history of Reader Response Theory and is made up of two parts: a visual timeline PDF and an accompanying YouTube video that is linked at the bottom of the timeline page. I've embedded it below, along with a link to the original web page, where you can hover over each section for a closer look.

This artifact is an appropriate and interesting addition to the presentation because it describes the origin of Reader Response Theory and takes us through the development of multiple theorists and their work. Here is a description of the points included on the timeline and additional information about the theorists and their work throughout history.

• Beginning with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), this timeline explains how his work in psychology laid the groundwork for recognizing the role of the reader's psychological processes during the act of reading and influenced later scholars and literary theorists.

• In 1938, American theorist Louise Rosenblatt introduced the concept of "transactional theory" in her book Literature as Exploration, emphasizing the critical interaction between the reader and the text, noting the reader's personal perspectives and responses to the literary work.

• Wolfgang Iser's work further expanded on Reader Response Theory, proposing that the reader actively contributed to the text's meaning by filling the text's gaps with their
own interpretations and experiences in his 1972 book The Implied Reader.

• Norman Holland, another American literary critic, added his ideas of psychoanalytic theories to Reader Response Theory, attributing the reader's emotions and desires to the meaning of a text with his book The Dynamics of Literary Response.

• In 1978, American literary theorist David Bleich published Subjective Criticism, proposing that readers' responses to a book are subjective and influenced by their personal contexts, challenging the notion that any text has a single objective meaning.

• Stanley Fish continued this development in Reader Response Theory with his idea of "interpretative communities" in his 1980 book titled Is There a Text in This Class? describing the role of culture and community in how a reader interprets and gives meaning to a text.

At the bottom of the timeline graphic is a concluding paragraph, "The Theory Drives On," which mentions that Reader Response Theory applies to all art, literature, and film forms. This leads me to wonder, in what ways do you feel that this theory is applicable in your life as you consume text and media? Do you believe the phrases, "No one watches the same movie" or "No one reads the same book?" Moving forward, how will this theory shape the way that you read and consume art, literature, and film?

Note to the Reader:

As you study each theorist, hover over the name of each theorist for more details and a closer look.

Works Cited


The following link will take you to the timeline website. Hover over the name of the theorist in each section of the timeline for a closer look.

Reader Response Timeline Link

1 - This video is also linked on the timeline.
Artifact 5: Review by Stanley Fish


This supplements our learning this week because it expands and illuminates a small part of the reading about Wolfgang Iser that caught my attention. The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism states, "As Stanley Fish remarks in an essay titled 'Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,' despite the sometimes contentious debates in contemporary literary theory, there has been relatively little disagreement with Iser's work" (Leitch 1452). The title of this essay was intriguing to me, so I found and read it and believe that it deserves a place here. Also, Stanley Fish was mentioned in the previous artifact, the Timeline of Reader Response Theory, and his work drew me in during my research, so I wanted to include a piece that showcases how his work expands upon Wolfgang Iser's foundation of this theory.

I chose this piece because it provides a counterargument to Iser's theories and then rebuts that argument, further supporting why Iser's work has stood the test of time despite being a part of a controversial topic in the world of literary criticism. In the essay, Fish ends by explaining how Iser accomplishes this, stating, "But asking hard questions is not something the theory encourages, and indeed its weaknesses from one point of view are its strengths from another. By defining his key terms in a number of ways, Iser provides himself in advance with a storehouse of defensive strategies" (Fish 13).

As you engage with this last piece, consider the language that Iser uses in his books to support his theories, as explained in this essay by Stanley Fish. As teachers, how can we actively teach, read, and respond to texts knowing and understanding Reader Response Theory, specifically how Iser explains it in his work and how Fish presents
the ways in which Iser is successful in doing so? How can this benefit us in our practice? How might it hinder or complicate the objectivity that is sometimes necessary to analyze texts for the purposes of things like standardized testing, where an answer is expected to fit into a box to be correct, or else it counted as wrong? Do these ideas challenge the way your present literary analysis to your students?

Works Cited


Click on the link below to access the Journal Article Review

Works Cited

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“Configurative Reading.” *YouTube.com*, Yale Courses, 1 September 2009,


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