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Telescopes and Spyglasses: Using Literary Theories in High School Classrooms

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Telescopes and Spyglasses
Using Literary Theories In High School Classrooms

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Introduction

Dear Teacher:

We are about to embark on a grand adventure together, one you will eventually bring your students on as well. We will visit seemingly strange lands, each with a different way of seeing the world. The path may be rough, but this book will be your guide, and I will be with you every step of the way.

The Common Core demands that students be able to engage with the texts they read on a deeper, more analytic level, drawing inferences from specific moments in the text that lead them to a better understanding of what that particular text means. Students are being asked to not only come up with themes and messages in texts, but also to defend them with a knowledge of the text itself. While many students will find that drawing inferences from what they read is not difficult to do, you, the teacher, will find that it is even easier for them once they have a knowledge base to build on, a vocabulary to use when explaining how they got to their theme, message, or interpretation. For student responses to be meaningful, they need to be original; different students read the same text differently. We, as teachers, need to give them the tools to engage the process of drawing inferences from what they read. That is what teaching critical literary theory does for your students. It provides them with the building blocks with which they will craft their interpretations. It provides them with a set of different frameworks with which to view the world around them, as well as the world of the text.

Many of you may already be doing this in your higher-level classes, and it is wonderful; it can be done with all of your students. With the support you can provide them, any student can gain an understanding of how different theories function and how they can impact their reading of a text. High school students should be exposed to all different types of theories so they have a way to connect with the books they read, and can see that there is more than one way to read a text, regaining control of their interpretations. Teaching literary theories explicitly allows students to take a more active role in their own literary interpretation. Literary theories allow students the chance to bring their own understanding to the texts they read, giving them a way to talk about what they read and how they interpret what they read. They guide reading with a focus, then allow for students to bring out their individual voice and interpretation within the process of making meaning. The knowledge of the presence of multiple theories would be enough to show students that there is more than one right answer, but most theories go beyond that to show how, within each theoretical school, there are infinite possibilities for meaning. Too often, students try to make their analyses fit what the teacher wants; this emphasis on personality and individuality allows students to make their analyses reflect their own understanding of the messages expressed within the text.

This handbook is structured in a way that can be directly applied to the classroom. The theories are organized and ordered to build on one another; the skills that your students learn from one will help them complete the tasks of the next. Each chapter provides information about the theory, how to conduct a reading following the theory's guidelines, and how to introduce the theory to your students. One good way to use these theories is to introduce them all at the

beginning of the year, with the understanding that you and your students will be engaging with them more over the course of the year. The first chapter in the book covers New Criticism, the theoretical school most students take for granted as the way to read for English class. Everything discussed in this book stems from the New Critical concept of close reading; they build on each other as the chapters go on. The second theory is Psychoanalysis, asking students to read closely while looking for psychological development in particular. The third is Marxism, in which students read closely while looking out for class and economics. After that comes Feminism, which takes pieces from both Psychoanalysis and Marxism to talk about the experience of females. From there, each theoretical school adds more specific strategies, for reading and for writing, building on those that came before, culminating in Deconstruction, which your students will be prepared for, since they have been building their analytical skills slowly over time. They have actually been using it, without realizing it, in many of the theories they've mastered leading up to it.

This structure can be followed either by a single teacher over the course of the year or by a team of teachers throughout high school. Each theory can be applied to a unit already in place, as most can be applied to any book. To demonstrate this concept, we will be using F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby to explain how to read and how to write in the style of each literary theory. Each section includes a short description of each theory, information on how to read within the context of the theory, and information on how to help students write critical analyses.

I am glad you've decided to join me on this journey. This is just a book, words on a page. Without readers who are willing to explore the ideas I present, it would fade away into the unknown. Without teachers like you, these worlds would remain uncharted territory for students. This book will arm you with the tools you will need as we take this voyage together.

Welcome aboard.

How To Introduce Critical Literary Theory:

- The first step in being able to critically analyze texts is to analyze ourselves. What biases do we bring to texts? What assumptions do we have about what we are about to read? We need to give our students opportunities to “connect their everyday lives and interpretation of the events that encompass them to the texts they read in school” (Hall & Piazza, 2010, p. 93). Introduce a topic to the class and have students go out into their community to learn about it. In their article, Hall and Piazza give the example of racism. The teacher they discussed had her students go into their communities and learn about different perspectives of issues of race after having the class discuss whether or not they believed racism still existed and wrote a short response that showed where they stand. “If texts and curriculum are decentered from the lives of our students, than many may not see the relevance in engaging critically with the ideas they are presented” (Hall & Piazza, 2010, p. 94).

New Criticism

What is New Criticism?

New Criticism was a theoretical school that focused on interpreting and critically engaging with a self-sufficient text, independent of all outside factors. New Critics reject the emphasis on author biographies as well as historical context, both of which were widely used in their time. New critics also reject the Intentional Fallacy, the mistaken belief that the author's intention is the same as the text's meaning. They also believe that readers should not confuse a text with its effects or the emotions it produces, something they refer to as the Affective Fallacy.

New Criticism aims to appreciate texts on their own; they believe that a critic must investigate how a work creates meaning within itself, because it has governing principles that deserve to be analyzed. Readers who assume a New Critical stance are asked to look at every detail, both for its own sake and in its connection with the work as a whole; however, critics need to differentiate between which elements are important to their interpretation and which are not. In making this decision, critics need to pay attention to how the elements come together to create literature with a meaning. New Critics also pay attention to formal elements in the work, such as narrative voice, setting, plot, and word choice.

Literature is written in literary language, which is deliberate and different from everyday language and defamiliarizes objects. Defamiliarization is the way figurative language changes how we view the world around us, making ordinary occurrences unfamiliar again, making the ordinary extraordinary. When discussing language, New Critics also investigate the meaning behind word choices, including a word's denotation, connotation, history, and any allusion the word is making. All words in a literary work are chosen for a reason; to assume the meaning of a work can be found by translating it into everyday language is to commit the Heresy of Paraphrase.

New Critics believe that everything in a work of literature is carefully calculated to contribute to the unity of the work, and that it is the job of the critic to explain this unity, or how the work functions as a coherent whole. This includes unifying all elements into a single central unified meaning; it is up to the critic to read closely to determine this meaning. In all great works of literature, there is complexity, or multiple and conflicting meanings running through the text. One way a work gains complexity is through tension, or elements that resist one another, and it is the job of the critic to resolve this tension. New Critics must examine how their unifying theme holds any opposing elements together.

How to Do a New Critical Reading:

When reading with a New Critical lens, you will focus on reading closely. Reading closely means reading as if you are on the pages of the book, picking everything apart with a fine-tooth comb. As a reader, you are looking at each and every detail presented to you within the story that you believe contributes to the overall meaning of the piece. Because you are determining meaning as you read, you will need to take notes on what you believe is significant, not to the plot but to the meaning of the work, as you read. You can come back to these notes later to determine this meaning.

As you are reading, you will be taking notes on what is important to a theme while you are still unsure of what this theme is. I know this sounds confusing; it will come to make sense, I promise. If you are reading closely and actively, your notes will lead you toward the unifying theme and meaning of the piece as a whole. As you read, take notes on uses of imagery, metaphor, allusion, and other literary devices and word play that sticks out to you as being important. You should also look for tensions between the elements, contradictions, and paradoxes within the piece as well as any irony and ambiguity.

For example, I might take note of a passage that describes Daisy and Tom as rich drifters. On page 6, Fitzgerald writes, “They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the phone, but I didn’t believe it—I had no sight into Daisy’s heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game.” This passage stuck out to me, with the contradiction between assumptions (that rich people stay in their mansions forever: but here are Tom and Daisy, restlessly relocating with their riches). It would also cause me to question their characters as well: they don’t have to chase a job, so what is it that they’re chasing? How will Tom’s desire for “dramatic turbulence” factor into the events of the novel?

I would also take note of a sentence at the bottom of page 51: “The reluctance to go home was not confined to wayward men.” I might pick this out because it makes me think. It follows a passage where everyone, at the end of the night, is getting into arguments. Usually, if you’re in a fight with a significant other because they were doing something inappropriate, you’d tell them it’s time to leave. So this question makes me wonder: What is it about Gatsby’s parties, in particular, that makes people not want to go home?

How To Teach New Criticism:

- Extended Reading Strategies
 - To teach New Criticism using reading strategies, start by teaching your class the concepts and tenets of New Criticism explicitly. This knowledge will function in conjunction with previously learned reading strategies to aid in constructing meaning from the text and taking an analytical stance. Teaching theory alongside reading strategies will help frame New Criticism as a metacognition strategy students can use to construct meaning. Refreshing students on some reading strategies will help make this fusion easier for students, as the two need to work together to provide structure and framework for conducting a New Critical reading. (Eckert, 2008)
 - Another way to structure this is to teach one strategy for students to use along with New Criticism when they read. This can help students gain a better understanding of each individual tenet, such as close reading. To teach close reading explicitly with reading strategies, you can create a worksheet with multiple columns for students to fill in as they read. In one column, students should write out the quote, symbol, or concept that drew their attention as well as the page or line number. In a second column, they should reword the quote, or explain the concept in more detail. In a third column, students should explain why

this quote, concept, or symbol in significant. Notes like this will help students learn to read closely, like a New Critic, while engaging a reading strategy they may have encountered in other classes.

- Another way to teach New Criticism through critical thinking is to teach critical thinking skills with a focus on how New Critics read. Before introducing the idea of New Criticism, the work to be analyzed, or even the idea of close reading, have students try out close reading strategies on other texts. One way to do this involves informational texts. Find a few articles and give one to each student. Tell them that their job is to determine what the main point of the article is, and find support for it within the article; this is very similar to the New Critical concept of close reading. Have students make notes on the paper as they engage it on their own, then meet in groups based on what article they read. Inform students that they may not all have the same opinion. Following this activity, you can introduce the concept of close reading and, from that starting point, the other concepts of New Criticism.
- Teach As Groundwork For Other Theories
 - Inform students that the techniques they apply in New Criticism are the foundation of the other theories to come, after briefly introducing the rest to them. Wilson includes a lesson involving colored lenses to demonstrate this point. Using blue and red film to look at a board covered in words written in green, red, blue, and pink marker, have students make observations based on what they see with each lens, as well as when they are not wearing any lens at all. This lesson is meant to show how different theories highlight different patterns as well as the multiplicity of critical theories (Wilson, 2014).
- Use Essential Questions
 - To allow students to feel comfortable with inquiry and to engage them without limiting them, we as teachers can craft broad essential questions for each unit that students must answer, using the methods of New Criticism. “I must craft essential questions carefully, sacrificing several that I considered important but that (if I was honest) had only one acceptable answer in my mind” (Wilson, 2014, p. 71).

Writing Your Own:

In the introduction of your New Critical analysis, you can talk about specific elements of the text that contribute to its meaning, or an instance that epitomizes this meaning and why that moment or anecdote is important to understand the meaning of the work.

When I write my New Critical analysis, I need to identify the unifying theme I have chosen so readers know what is driving my analysis and so I have a focus. As I go back through my notes I made as I read, one theme I see being expressed is, “No one is ever satisfied with where they are.” This theme is broad enough to have a universal human significance but specific enough to keep my analysis focused on the relationship between characters and their places.

I would support my claim with the notes I made as I read. I would talk about times when characters are looking to change where they are, such as when Gatsby reaches across the bay to the green light and the promises of East Egg. I can argue that the way Gatsby, living in his

mansion with all the money and clothes and material goods he could ever need, cannot be satisfied by his life and continues to want more. He goes to the edge of his dock at night to stare at the green light, which he knows comes from Daisy's house, always reaching for it, never satisfied with what he has. I would also note other instances when this happens or is alluded to, such as when Myrtle alludes to wanting to go West with Tom, or when Tom and Daisy are traipsing aimlessly around the globe. The entire premise, which begins with Nick moving from the Midwest to New York, can be used to argue my claim as well.

Guiding Questions:

- How are the events of the plot recounted---for example, in sequential fashion or as a flashback?
- What is the effect of telling a story from this point of view?
- What recurrences of words, images, and sounds do you notice? Do the recurrences make a pattern, or do they appear randomly?
- How does the narrator's point of view shape the meaning?
- What images are extended or elaborated?
- Where do several images work together to create meaning?

Vocabulary:

- **Self-Sufficiency:** Independent of the author's biography, historical context, or the effect it has on the reader
- **Intentional Fallacy:** Mistaken belief that the author's intention is the same as the text's meaning
- **Affective Fallacy:** Confusing a text with its effects or with the emotions it produces
- **Defamiliarization:** The way figurative language changes how we view the world around us, making ordinary occurrences unfamiliar again
- **Heresy of Paraphrase:** Assuming the meaning of a poem can be found by translating it into everyday language
- **Unity:** The work is a coherent whole
- **Complexity:** Multiple and conflicting meanings running through a literary text

Psychoanalytical Criticism

What is Psychoanalytical Criticism?

Psychoanalysis started as a medical practice, not a literary theory. Over time, theorists came to apply the assumptions of Psychoanalysis to literary criticism, to psychoanalyze characters in texts as if they were real people.

Psychoanalytic critics believe that there are core issues that define our beings in fundamental ways. Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, came up with a theory of a tri-partite psyche. He believed that the human psyche was divided up between the Id, the Superego, and the Ego, which were constantly at war with one another. The Id was believed to be a reserve for our animal instincts, devoted to the gratification of prohibited desires, centering on instant gratification. The Superego, conversely, is our social programming, created by social values, expectations, and taboos, telling us what we should and do not do, centering on internalized morality we learn from our parents. The Ego mediates between the Id and the Superego; it mediates between the psyche and the real world, channeling the desires of the Id into actions acceptable to the superego.

Jung, a student of Freud, also believed that the self had three parts: the Shadow, the Anima, and the Persona. The Shadow, according to Jung, is everything we don't like about ourselves; our dark sides, which we refuse to accept as part of ourselves. The Anima is the part of ourselves we keep hidden from others; it mediates between our Ego and our inner reality, it decides how we act and what we do. The Persona, as defined well by Kate Chopin in her novel *The Awakening*, is "that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world." It mediates between our Ego and the outside, choosing which parts we show which people.

Lacan, a post-structuralist psychoanalytic critic (for more on Post-Structuralism, go to chapter #), believed our reality was divided into three orders. The first is The Imaginary. This order is marked by a sense of unity with the world around us; infants in this stage believe the world revolves around them, not recognizing that the entire world isn't an extension of themselves. The second order is The Symbolic. This order is marked by language and lack; we learn to understand the differences that make language and gender differentiation possible, allowing us to make sense of our reality, where we all lack wholeness because we have accepted the rules of our society and our culture. The third order is The Real, which is essentially unachievable and traumatic. Entering into The Real would require us to recognize our lack and our loss, making us even more fragmented than we were to start with. The Real is the space beyond signification; beyond ideology, language, and culture, there is nothing. Entering into The Real causes us to recognize this, an experience that is inherently traumatic.

Lacan believed that every person has to go through a period where they recognize their lack, which he referred to as The Mirror Stage. In the Mirror Stage, unformed subjects, often babies, see their own reflection and realize that they are separate from the outside world; they acknowledge that the reflection is both them and not them. This realization forces infants to lose their sense of unity and security they had when they felt connected to everything. It also creates the illusion of wholeness of self, because babies see their reflection as complete, like other objects they see in reality. The Mirror Stage is the process of the formation of the Ego, the shift

from primary narcissism and identification with the mother as self to identifying with others outside the mother/child dyad and therefore recognizing both the mother and the self as individuals. It deals with shifts in cathexis, the concept that a certain amount of psychical energy is attracted to something. In primary narcissism, the child cathects all of its libido onto itself; after the Mirror Stage, people are able to cathect their libido onto others unless they enter into secondary narcissism, the turning around of the libido onto the ego, which has been withdrawn from the objects it had previously been cathected to. After the Mirror Stage, the subject is aware that the concept of the coherent self is an illusion and enters into the Symbolic, needing language to mediate experience and shape reality; the illusion of unmediated experience is gone forever.

Psychoanalytic critics assume that psychoanalysis can interpret texts about human behavior. They do this through character analysis, which comes out of the driving force behind psychoanalysis as a medical practice: to understand motives and relationships and to explain our growth and development on the level of humanity as a whole. Lacan viewed the self as fragmented and broken because the unconscious is structured like a language. In the Post-Structuralist tradition, he saw the unconscious as a chain of signifiers, all leading to more signifiers without any signified that would give the whole system stability. As we develop, we develop our personality in a way to create an illusion of a unified self, which we can never achieve. Thus, we create a desire for pleasure and material things in an attempt to return to the state of unity we had as infants.

How To Do a Psychoanalytical Reading:

If you were my student, and I was explaining how to read through a psychoanalytical lens, I would show you how I would do the reading. For this section, I will continue my analysis of place in The Great Gatsby with a psychoanalytical approach.

On page 2, Nick sets us up to look at difference in place by saying, “When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever...” If I were doing a psychoanalytic reading of this text for the first time, I would underline this statement because I recognize something Freudian about it. This desire for “moral attention” sounds like something the Superego would want. The language Nick uses here invokes a sense of military discipline, with phrases such as “in uniform” and “at... attention,” which, when applied to the world as a whole, sounds like something an over-extended Superego might say. It sets me up to think about psychoanalyzing Nick, as well as look for why this might happen to him when he is in the East. The fact that he is coming back and then writing this narrative calls my attention to the place too: what is it about the structure of New York that makes Nick’s subconscious unhealthy? It sets me up to use what I know about Freud, because it might be the most applicable approach for this analysis. I could use any of the concepts outlined above to conduct a psychoanalytic analysis, but the narrative seems to be pointing toward Freud.

As I go through the text, I would take note of some other times when I see Freud’s structure of the subconscious. I might take note of the difference between East Egg and West Egg. Perhaps the expectations of Old Money in East Egg are aligned with the Superego, and maybe the excessive partying and freedom in West Egg, and at Gatsby’s in particular, are aligned with the Id. I would continue taking notes that both confirm and deny this idea: for example, Tom is

prone to anger and is a compulsive cheater, signs that his Id may not be in check, and Gatsby, while throwing parties that are the pinnacle of reckless abandon, seems to be above all the drunken antics that exemplify the Id running unchecked.

I might also look at Gatsby's behavior, especially when it comes to Daisy. I might pay special attention to the moment when he meets Daisy again: the way he wants to cut Nick's grass and fill the house with flowers, and how he almost leaves multiple times, only coaxed back by Nick. He seems to be looking for someone he can use as a moral compass: he wants Nick there to justify his actions to himself.

Another spot I might pay attention to is when Daisy is reconsidering her impending marriage to Tom, in a flashback. She wears the string of pearls from Tom, throws them out when she gets a letter from Gatsby, then puts them back on to marry Tom. I might mark this spot in my book so I could come back to it later, because maybe it could lend some insight into Daisy's character, her thought processes, and the state of her subconscious.

How To Teach Psychoanalytical Criticism:

- Create Videos
 - To help students understand the concepts, you can have them help teach them to the class by making a set of instructional videos.
 - Send groups of students out, with some background information, to make videos for each individual concept. These groups can then present and share them with the class to teach their classmates.
- Focus on Characters
 - *Internal Monologue:* The use of creative drama is a fun way to show students how to read between the lines and discover hidden narratives and drives. With four student volunteers, two students will have a conversation while the other two give internal commentary that may or may not align with the situation in "real life." This activity can be altered to a representation of Jung's self (6 students: the 2 Persona talk, the Animas and Shadows give commentary)
 - *Subconscious Arguments:* Again, with the use of creative drama, you can show students the way Freud perceives the subconscious. Students form two lines facing one another, one representing the Superego and one representing the Id (students should be aware of their roles). Each student will take a turn reading off a dilemma, and walking between the lines, each student member of the subconscious giving advice they believe is characteristic of their role. At the end, the student will make a decision, playing the Ego and making a compromise between the two sides.
 - *Stream of Consciousness:* In a writing activity, have students write constantly for five minutes without a prompt (this amount of time is supposedly long enough for their subconscious to take over). Then, have them go back through it and do a form of psychobiography, applying the criticism they are supposed to use as they read literature to their own writing. Have them explain what they found to a partner to prepare them to write a critical paper from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Writing Your Own:

So, now that you've finished the book, taking notes about what you think is important, you have to go back through those notes to start writing your critical paper on The Great Gatsby. For me, I've decided that I want to focus on place and how it affects characters, the places being different portions of the Freudian subconscious.

In my paper, I'm making the claim that the East Egg/Superego v. West Egg/Id feud is manifesting itself in issues for the characters. As I determined in the earlier section, I will start by stating that the restrictions, standards, and expectations for behavior of East Egg make it a representation of the Superego, and that the endless partying, excessive freedom, and wildness of New Money gotten through illegal means in West Egg make it a representation of the Id.

I would then go on to explain how the conflicts between these two portions of the subconscious within the text manifests itself in the unhappiness of the characters. The people who live in East Egg are dominated by their repressed Ids while the people in West Egg, specifically Gatsby, suffer because their Superegos have been overextended. I would discuss how Gatsby's fear at meeting Daisy again comes from a fear that he will never live up to her moral standards, as he comes from a land without any moral code whatsoever. I would also discuss Daisy's attachment to Gatsby as an element of danger and freedom, which she is drawn to because she comes from a land of excessive repression. Finally, I would discuss Nick's fragmentation as he looks back on his experiences of the previous summer; he was torn apart, trying to keep the balance between and the secrets of Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Myrtle, and Jordan. He felt an obligation to each of them, and it ended up tearing him apart. He tried to play the role of the Ego and was not up to the task; this led him to where he was at the end of the summer, retreating to the Midwest, his home, and thus the military discipline of the Superego, created by morality we pick up by watching our parents.

Guiding Questions:

- Freud:
 - Where do you find evidence of the Id, Ego, and Superego at work?
 - Does the character have any internal monologues or dreams? If so, what do you learn from them about the character that is not revealed by outward behavior or conversation?
 - Are there conflicts between what is observable and what is going on inside the character? Are there any revealing symbols in them?
 - Who is telling the story, and why does the narrator feel constrained to tell it?
- Jung:
 - What similarities do you find among the characters, situations, and settings of the text under consideration and those in other works that you have read?
 - Is the narrative like any classic myths you know?
 - Where do you find evidence of the protagonist's persona? Anima? Shadow?

- Does the protagonist at any point reject some parts of his/her personality and project it onto someone or something else?
- Lacan:
 - Where do you recognize the appearance of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and/or Real orders?
 - Is the character aware of the lack or absence of something significant in the self?
 - Are there objects that symbolize what is missing or lacking?
 - Do you find examples of the Mirror Stage of the developing psyche?

Vocabulary:

- **Tri-partite Psyche:** Freud's theory of the subconscious as being made up of three parts: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego
- **Id:** Psychological reservoir of instincts; devoted to gratification of prohibited desires of all kinds
- **Superego:** Social programming formed by social values, expectations, and taboos
- **Ego:** The conscious self that experiences the external world through the senses; plays referee between Id and Superego
- **Shadow:** The part of our personality that we have rejected
- **Anima:** The part of our identity that is hidden from others, our way of relating to our internal reality
- **Persona:** The part of our identity we construct for others, our way of relating to the outside world
- **The Imaginary:** The realm of the image; is characterized by illusion, narcissism, alienation, and aggressivity
- **The Symbolic:** The order of language and social law; characterized by death, absence, and lack
- **The Real:** What is outside language, symbolization, and signification; has an essentially traumatic character
- **The Mirror Stage:** Lacan's theory of the formation of the subject, through the recognition of one's image in a mirror and realizing that it is simultaneously "me" and "not me"
- **Primary Narcissism:** An early stage in which the child directs all its libido onto its own self
- **Cathexis:** The concept that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to something
- **Secondary Narcissism:** The turning around upon the ego of libido withdrawn from its previous attachments

Marxism

What is Marxist Criticism?

Marxism is a political, social, and economic theory, fathered by Karl Marx, that claims economics is the base on which the superstructure of social, political, and ideological realities are built. Marx believed that all societies will “evolve” toward a classless society with a socialist government, after the working class rises up against the dominant class.

Marxism believes that culture reproduces the class structure of society. Analysts look for ways the text reinforces capitalist, imperialist, or classist values, which can be done through form or content. The bourgeoisie, the ones who control the world’s economic, natural, and human resources, can manipulate the culture to maintain their position of power. These forms of entertainment glamorize the current state of society, whether or not the readers understand it is happening, therefore stabilizing their hold on the power. They also engage in conspicuous consumption, or consuming for the sake of consuming to impress others. In their insecurity as consumers, they are urged to compete with those within their class to maintain their status as members of the dominant group. The proletariat, or the majority of society who perform manual labor that essentially benefits the bourgeoisie, end up engaging in commodification, or relating to objects and even people in terms of anything other than their use value or utility. These other ways of valuing objects are their sign value, or ability to impress, or their exchange value, or value upon resale. The commodification of people rises out of alienated labor, in which laborers become dissociated from both their work and the products of their labor, and end up being seen as machines rather than human beings, because they do not directly profit from their work.

Marxist critics apply theory to literature through the belief that ideology is at work in all cultural productions. Critics look for places where the text is ideologically conflicted. According to Marxism, an ideology is a body of ideas that defend the status quo and actively promote the values and interests of the dominant group or society and pass themselves off as the natural way of seeing things. The dominant class manipulates those below it into accepting its ideology through a process called interpellation, where it pulls individuals into the ideology. We are all already interpellated into ideology. For example, we are all brought into the ideology of gender norms because, as soon as we are born, we are wrapped in either a pink or a blue blanket, noting our gender as feminine or masculine based on our biological sex (more on gender and gender binaries in chapter 5). Societies that claim democratic freedoms impose and reinforce a set of standards for cultural behavior through hegemony, a set of seemingly stable cultural rules people are supposed to follow that is perpetrated by all parts of society, especially the media. For example, women may be portrayed in the media as weak or staying in the home to serve the hegemonic function of keeping women dependent and out of the workplace (more on gender roles and the role of women in chapter 4). The ruling class is able to create cultural ideology that makes their system, the one that allows them to remain in power, appear logical and natural to the lower classes, making them think what they want them to think. In his theoretical essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser, a Poststructural Marxist theorist, claims that 1) ideologies are fictions we use to relate to reality and 2) institutions have rituals believers perform, which gives the ideology a material existence (for more on Poststructuralism, see chapter 7). However, not all ideologies are bad things: they can promote a better world for all, or they can perpetrate the repression of the system.

Marxist theorists believe that a literary work can only be understood in its full context. One way to apply this to texts is through the use of Historical Marxism, a materialist conception of history that claims that material circumstances, or the economic conditions of society, generate the historical circumstances, or the ideology of society. The historical context of a work and the ideology and circumstances of the author are just as important as the form and content. Works are written within the context of the group ideology and the times in which they are written.

Literary Marxist theorists also believe that everything is a product of circumstance. One way to apply this to texts is through the use of Dialectical Marxism, a concept of history that claims two opposing forces constantly in conflict because of material goods shape the course of events and changes throughout history. This tension is called dialectical materialism. The tension between opposing forces creates change by finally synthesizing and then finding a new force to oppose the new, synthesized force, the cycle of change continuing from there. Marxists believe that the economic structure shapes society, with the means of production as the base and the institutions created by the social, political, and ideological systems are the superstructure.

Another application of Marxism to literature is the belief that culture cannot be separated from the socioeconomic system that created it. Literary Marxist critics look for ways the works reflect the socioeconomic conditions of its origins. For example, if the work portrayed a capitalist system, the critic would look for instances of alienation and fragmentation created by the economic system. The dominant class is able to use forms of entertainment and culture to structure society to their advantage.

An alternative way to interpret texts in an analysis is to see literature as an active agent. Analysts look for ways a text critiques capitalism, revealing the contradictions inherent in a capitalist society and calling the proletariat to realize their oppression and rise up, calling for a change. They also look for ways the text might critique organized religion. Theorists who believe literature can enact social change claim that the working class can portray their own culture in literary works, creating a new superstructure and moving toward a change in the base.

How to Do a Marxist Reading:

If I had to explain how to do a Marxist reading of a text, I would continue my example analysis of place in The Great Gatsby. As I read, I would take note of times in the text where place and class were tied. For example, on page five, I would underline the sentence, “I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them.” I would pay close attention to the words “less fashionable,” “superficial,” and “bizarre and... sinister contrast.” These, together, highlight the class difference, even among the rich—and how seriously they take their distinction. I would continue taking notice of these divisions, and how they are portrayed using difference in place.

I would also look at instances where I notice specific Marxist themes, such as conspicuous consumption or commodification of the working class. I would take note of the way Myrtle conducts herself when in the city with Tom, putting on airs that signify money, affecting the attitude she thinks she should have. I would also underline the description of the Valley of

Ashes—“where ashes take the form...of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air”—looking at the way the language shows the commodification of the working class, blurring the lines between the workers and their surroundings.

How to Teach:

- Literature Circles
 - While most works of literature can be analyzed using most lenses, you can make it easier for students by selecting works that are more applicable to Marxist criticism. One genre that fits this lens is utopia/dystopia.
 - To differentiate for your students, you can choose different dystopia novels, including both modern ones and classics based on the ability level of your students.
 - Literature circles work well with a unifying theoretical school driving the discussion because, while all students are reading different things, they are all analyzing them in the same way.
- Propaganda
 - To get students to read closely to determine the ideology behind a work, you can have them analyze advertisements
 - This will help them learn to identify hegemony and interpellation in works, and begin to think about what the works want them to think about the status quo, how it is working to maintain society as it is
- Creating an Unbiased Understanding
 - Because Marxism led to Communism as an economic and political system, many students may be resistant to it when applied to literature.
 - To achieve unbiased understanding of how it can be applied to literature—and to show them they don’t have to be Marxists to do a Marxist reading of a text—choose one less-threatening piece, like social class.
 - While, with the other theories, it is helpful to give students all the information at once, it will be helpful to give them the pieces of Marxist theory gradually, perhaps over the course of a week instead of one day. This will help them to understand what they are actually doing, allowing them to keep an open mind about the theoretical school as it applies to literature.

Writing A Marxist Analysis:

Now that you’ve finished the book and taken notes on class difference, ideology, and oppression of the working class, you need to go back through those quotes to find similarities and an arguable point for your critical analysis of The Great Gatsby. I’ve decided to use my paper to argue that the separations between places represent the separations between the classes in society. I will highlight the class relations and how the lines are drawn by where they live: East Egg, West Egg, and the Valley of Ashes.

I would explain how East Egg is the “Old Money,” and thus the highest class, how West Egg is “New Money,” and thus the lower of the upper classes, and how the people of the Valley of Ashes are of a much lower class. Then, I would show the way Old Money and New Money interact with one another, focusing on the way Tom treats Gatsby. I would go on to show the

way the upper classes treat the members of the lower class. This portion would include Myrtle's conspicuous consumption and the commodification of the inhabitants of the Valley of Ashes. I would highlight times when people care more about things than other people or even themselves, such as when Myrtle tries to cover a tapestry when she is bleeding profusely or the time Nick discovers Gatsby's library of unread books.

A Marxist analysis needs to end with an interpretation of what all of this means: it cannot merely be a statement of class divisions, but needs to have an agenda. To that end, I would conclude my analysis by saying that the geographic lines drawn between the classes in the novel could be reflected in the geographic and class lines drawn in our society today.

Guiding Questions:

- Which group, the powerful or the powerless, are you encouraged to admire?
- Why do the powerful people have their power?
- From what is the power in the narrative derived? Is it inherited, based on money, a result of violence, etc.?
- What does the setting tell you about the distribution of power and wealth?
- Does the depicted society value things for their usefulness, for their potential for resale or trade, or for their power to convey social status?
- Where do you see characters making decisions based not on abstract principles, but on the economic system in which they live?
- Does the work criticize repressive systems?

Vocabulary:

- **Bourgeoisie:** Those who control the world's economic, natural, and human resources
- **Conspicuous Consumption:** Consuming for the sake of consuming simply to impress others within society
- **Proletariat:** Majority of global population, often living in substandard conditions, who perform manual labor that benefits the rich
- **Commodification:** The act of relating to others or persons in terms of their exchange or sign value
- **Use Value:** The utility of a thing, what it can be used for
- **Sign Value:** The ability of a thing to impress others
- **Exchange Value:** What a thing is worth in terms of money or other things it could be replaced with
- **Alienated Labor:** Process by which workers become dissociated not only from their products but also from their labor because they do not directly profit from that labor
- **Ideology:** A body of ideas that defend the status quo and actively promote the values and interests of the dominant group or society and pass themselves off as the "natural way of seeing things"
- **Interpellation:** The way in which the dominant class manipulates those below it into accepting its ideology
- **Hegemony:** Manner in which societies that claim democratic freedoms impose upon and reinforce a set of standards for cultural behavior

- **Historical Marxism:** Materialist concept of history that claims material circumstances drive historical circumstances
- **Material Circumstances:** The economic conditions of society
- **Historical Circumstances:** The ideology of society at large
- **Dialectical Marxism:** Belief that history is the product of class struggles
- **Dialectical Materialism:** Two opposing forces that are constantly in conflict because of material goods

Feminism

What is Feminist Criticism?

Feminists in different countries respond to works from different perspectives, inspired by the influences of Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and a drive to understand a unique female experience.

British Feminists take a Marxist approach, drawing on the idea that women are an oppressed class in the patriarchy. They see Western culture as primarily patriarchal, creating a power imbalance between men and women, evident in all parts of the culture. Following in the tradition of Post-Structuralist Marxists like Althusser, they claim the ideology and hegemonic structures of society convince women that their inferior status is the “natural” way of things, thus getting them to accept this inferiority of themselves and their work. They study the power relationships between men and women and the relationship between class relations and gender relations to show how these power structures are dominated by males and are thus oppressive towards women. These feminists assume that an inequitable economic system is the base of the problem, causing inequality between men and women in the superstructure; they claim this can be seen at every level of society, and is most evident in the organization of the household and the family. (For more on Marxism, see chapter 3)

French Feminists take a Psychoanalytic approach, drawing on Lacan to focus on how the structure of language, specifically in the Symbolic Order, socializes women into accepting an inferior status. Irigaray responded to Lacan and Freud by claiming that female pleasure isn't characterized in patriarchy because it doesn't allow for multiplicity. This is because patriarchal societies are phallogocentric, basing their notion of objectivity on a male perspective. French Feminists such as Irigaray follow Mary Wollstonecraft's idea that women need to manipulate others to get things in their idea of mimicry, a subversive move in which women act according to the male ideals of femininity to thwart or undermine the traditional female role. Because they are taking a psychoanalytic approach, they also study and attempt to define the difference between the male and female subconscious, especially when it comes to voice in a narrative. (For more on Psychoanalysis, see chapter 2)

American Feminism centers on gynocriticism, a movement that examines the distinctive characteristics of the female experience. These feminists look at the way culture has internalized stereotypes about women, causing women to internalize this sexism and accept their lesser status as the truth. One way they see this is through the three trajectories for women in literature: marriage, death/suicide, and madness. They claim women seeing these storylines play out constantly in culture will eventually internalize them, thinking these are their only options in the real world. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also critique the binary between the “angel in the house” and the “madwoman in the attic.” The angel is submissive, childlike, virginal, chaste, completely selfless, has no story of her own, and only lives to care for her husband. The madwoman, on the other hand, chooses to reject this storyline and is seen as sexually voracious, refuses to stay “in her place,” and has both her own story and female autonomy. They say that these stereotypes, perpetuated by male authors, are destructive to women. Similarly, in film, Mulvey claims that women are created for the “Male Gaze,” which is scopophilic, an erotically-charged pleasurable looking. The Male Gaze comes in two forms and is always oppressive to women: in the voyeuristic look, a controlling, sadistic gaze, women are not aware of the looking;

in the fetishistic look, an erotic gaze that is compensation for something, the woman is the fetish object and stops the action.

How to Do a Feminist Reading:

If I were doing a Feminist reading of The Great Gatsby, I would pay close attention to the women in the story, primarily Daisy, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle. Because of the focus on class in the novel, I might take a Marxist Feminist approach and look for differences between the way Myrtle acts and the way Daisy acts.

But first, while I'm reading, I would look for any moments when the women appear to be responding to or going along with society's ideas of femininity and what it means to be female. For example, I would pay attention to Nick's one-on-one conversation with Daisy at the beginning of the novel, especially when she says "She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool'" on page 17. I would write that passage down to return to later when I was writing my analysis.

I might also, as I read, look at the way the male characters treat the women: the way Tom treats Myrtle compared to how he treats Daisy, the way Gatsby treats Jordan and the way he treats Daisy, and the way Nick treats all three women. I might use this method to take a Psychoanalytic Feminist approach in my analysis, looking for how the women use mimicry to get what they want from the men.

How to Teach:

1. Complexity of Texts

- For students to begin to grasp Feminist criticism, they need to be encouraged to embrace and interpret ambiguous, complex, and contradictory texts. By being forced to confront what they see as a natural order, students will be given the opportunity to renegotiate how they view texts and the world, opening up alternatives to what they previously thought.
- However, you need to know your student population when choosing texts. Feminist literature may be threatening to your students; this may allow them to create a binary between what they see as "normal" or "acceptable" literature and the feminist literature you have them read. Have them apply the same methods of analysis to classic literature as well to avoid this binary and to mitigate the threats of Feminist analysis with familiarity of literary form.

2. Case Study

- To facilitate the analysis of female experience in traditional literature, you may have students view a situation from the story or novel as a case study. Students should choose a situation that involved or impacted a female character, then analyze the actions of all characters involved, propose alternative ways of acting in the situation, and the potential outcomes of these actions.
- This can be recreated as a process drama exercise, with students acting out situations that affect women, defining where the actions of individual characters

were unhelpful or problematic, and then reimagining the situation in question by changing the actions of a character or set of characters

3. Acknowledge the Politics

- Feminist literary criticism is inherently political. One way to engage this in the classroom is to have students read nonfiction works by Feminist writers: articles, blogs, etc. to help familiarize themselves with the issues they will be looking for in the works of fiction they are critiquing. NOTE: when choosing these texts, analyze them first yourself for credibility; there are many angry feminists on the Internet with blogs who are not representative of the group as a whole. Using their work in the classroom will not help your students understand the issues at hand or the aims of the group at large.

Writing a Feminist Analysis:

In outlining how I would write a Feminist analysis of The Great Gatsby, I will continue my focus on place in the novel, here combined with a Marxist approach, claiming that the different social structures in the different classes, defined by the different neighborhoods, create different ideals for femininity at different levels of social status.

For my analysis, I would focus on the different expectations for Myrtle and for Daisy. The reader sees Daisy as foolish, ditsy, and fairly impulsive, something she has said to Nick is the ideal for a woman. Daisy has always played into, and perhaps internalized, society's expectations for a young woman of her social status, culminating in the three separate times she chose other men of her class, or the possibility of them, over Gatsby, a man she loved but wasn't a member of her more prestigious social status.

On the other hand, the reader sees Myrtle as fooling no one but herself with her conduct. When we see her in the New York apartment, we know she's trying to act the way she believes society expects rich women to act, but we also know that she's trying too hard. She is trying to conform, but her class keeps peeking through. Under a Marxist Feminist assumption, because she's of a lower class, she is closer to being on equal footing with her poor husband, since he doesn't have the money, and therefore the power, to really control her. When she is with Tom, she doesn't know how to act: she hasn't been prepared to take on the submissive, inferior, ditsy ideal of a wealthy female persona.

Guiding Questions:

- Does the voice sound characteristic of a male or female writer? That is, it is personal or impersonal, subjective or objective, implicit or explicit?
- Where do you find an imbalance of power among the characters?
- What divisions of labor exist between men and women in the work?
- Are there images of motherhood or references to goddesses that suggest creativity and power?
- Do you find the female characters conforming to expected norms? Are they nurturing, giving, passive, emotional?
- According to this work, what does it mean to be female?
- What stereotypes of women do you find? Are they oversimplified, demeaning, untrue?

- What are the roles of women in the work? Are they minor, supportive, powerless? Or are they independent and influential?
- Is the narrator a character in the narrative? If so, how does the male or female point of view affect the reader's perceptions?
- Do the female characters play an overt role in decision making, or do they work behind the scenes?

Vocabulary:

- **Phallogocentrism:** The notion that objectivity is viewed from a male perspective
- **Mimicry:** A subversive move in which women act according to male "rules" of femininity to thwart the traditional female role
- **Patriarchy:** System of social organization in which men are given the power, including that to govern women
- **Gynocriticism:** Form of Feminist critique that focuses on the unique female experience
- **Angel in the House:** Ideal woman who is submissive, childlike, virginal, chaste, completely selfless, and has no story of her own
- **Madwoman in the Attic:** The demonic woman who is sexually voracious, refuses to stay "in her place," and has both her own story and female autonomy
- **Male Gaze:** A phenomenon, primarily in film, where the audience is made to look at the women portrayed through the eyes of men, in a way that is always oppressive to women, both in the nature of the look and in the fact that female audience members are being asked to take on the role of a man
- **Scopophilia:** The erotically-charged pleasure of looking
- **Voyeuristic:** Controlling, sadistic gaze when the woman is not aware of the look
- **Fetishistic:** Erotic gaze that is compensation for something; the woman is the fetish object that stops the action

Queer Theory

What is Queer Theory?

Queer Theory is an approach that rose out of the Feminist movement to focus the interest more on gender and widened the critical lens to include a discussion of sexuality. Queer Theorists approach literature and cultural productions, including sexual and gender identities, sexual practices, and types of masculinity and femininity that exist outside assumed norms.

Traditionally, these concepts are considered inherently linked, a concept called biological essentialism. Queer theorists make an essential claim that sex and gender are not the same thing. To these theorists, sex is the biology; sex is simply the male or female genitalia and the XX or XY chromosomes. Gender, however, is the identity of an individual; it is the socially accepted set of behaviors that have come to embody masculinity and femininity. According to Judith Butler, gender identities are performative. We perform our gender identities by presenting ourselves according to socially and culturally constructed ideas of what masculinity and femininity are. These constructed ideas are manifest in learned behaviors; for example, giving boys toy cars and action figures and giving little girls dolls and dress-up clothes.

Butler complicates our perceptions of gender not only by claiming that masculinity and femininity are not innate traits that come with being male or female biologically, but also by claiming that there is no normative masculinity or femininity. By this she means that there is no real, tangible cause for these identities; identity is a product of possibilities based on the way people act at different times in different places.

These claims are also applied to human sexuality. Queer theorists believe that human sexuality is experienced on a continuum. Traditionally, sexuality has been seen as a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, with heterosexuality being the norm and homosexuality being the deviancy. Queer theory claims that sexuality is actually a set of diverse possibilities on a spectrum containing heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. In this spectrum, sexuality isn't stable and static, but fluid, dynamic, and unstable. The expression of these identities are also performative, created by the learned behaviors and socially and culturally constructed ideas of what these sexual identities are.

Queer Theorists use many of the techniques of Post-Structuralism to show that gender identity and sexual orientations aren't fixed. Queer theorists claim that all identity categories rely on one another to create the illusion of a stable system. For heterosexuality to be the norm, it has to be privileged over "queer" orientations, a practice called heterosexism. It also has to be conceptualized through the definition of each gender as stable entities that rely on sexuality. To create this imagined stability, and connection to biological sex, society uses compulsory heterosexuality, a concealed system that produces gender norms so that bodies will "line up" and reproduce. Queer Theorists also use the techniques of Post-Structuralism to work against heteronormativity, the idea that the norm is to be heterosexual, and homophobia, a fear of queer people that leads to the Othering of them.

How to Do a Queer Theoretical Reading:

If I were doing a reading of The Great Gatsby using Queer Theory to guide my analysis, I would focus on the construction of gender identities, especially masculinity. I would take note of the

way the different male characters address one another and how they perform their gender identity. I would look at the way Tom presents himself, with his sports trophies and his cheating, and also the way he treats Gatsby, especially in the scene when they all go into the city. I would also look at the way Gatsby presents himself to Nick and how others perceive him, with his suits, his consciousness of his appearance, and his garish displays of wealth.

How to Teach:

- Use Books Already in the Curriculum
 - Students can do queer readings of texts that do not have queer issues and characters at the forefront and are not written by queer authors by using a more general queer approach, deconstructing and disrupting presumed norms presented in the texts. Students should be taught to look for ways the structures that create identity categories are being complicated over the course of the text. (for more on deconstruction, see chapter 7.)
- Include Works Containing Characters, Issues, and Authors from the Gender, Sexuality, and Romantic Minority (GSRM)* Community
 - While there may be resistance or censorship surrounding these texts, if you feel your students are mature enough to approach these texts, use them. These will provide the best representation of the experience of people within the GSRM Community for your students
- Role Play
 - Have students portray an identity that is not their own while other members of the class try to guess their identity. Slips with identities should be handed out to the class before the activity begins. Students will write a list of ways this identity is performed, according to the portrayal of people and characters with these identities in the media. During the performance, students will write what they believe the identity being performed is and why on sheets of paper. These performances may simply be reading off the list of performance characteristics if your class is not particularly outgoing. After each individual performance, the class should vote and list what factors contributed to their decision. NOTE: This activity is meant to play on stereotypes perpetrated by the media and culture; students should be aware of this beforehand.
 - This activity can be followed by a character sketch activity, where students are asked pointed questions about a character with their assigned identity. They can use this character later for a writing activity, or simply another exercise to use to talk about performative identities. Questions for this activity can be found online, but examples are:
 - Where does your character go when he/she is angry?
 - What is your character's biggest fear? Who has he/she told? Who would he/she never tell it to? Why?
 - Your character is doing intense spring cleaning. What is easy for her/him to throw out? What is difficult to part with? Why?

How to Write a Queer Theoretical Analysis:

If I were writing an analysis of *The Great Gatsby* guided by Queer Theory, I would compare the definition of masculinity performed by Tom to the one performed by Gatsby. I would use my analysis to argue that the presentation of gender in the text is much less stable than the normative version of gender identity. I would focus this analysis on the different performances of masculinity made by Tom and Gatsby, including how Tom is rattled by Gatsby's more flamboyant performance of heterosexual masculinity, and how the use of two characters with the same perceived identity, who perform it in such different ways, complicates the established narratives for identities in our society.

Guiding Questions:

- Does the work challenge traditional ways of viewing sexuality and identity?
- What ranges of male and female identity do you find in the text?
- If the self is assumed to be constructed, what performative acts construct a character's identity?
- Does the work complicate what it means to be homosexual or heterosexual?
- Does the work depict human sexuality as more complex than the essentialist terms *male* and *female* suggest?

Vocabulary:

- **Biological Essentialism:** The belief that gender and biological sex are one and the same, that biological sex determines gender
- **Sex:** The biological male and female, determined by genetics
- **Gender:** The socially and culturally created set of behaviors and characteristics that have come to embody "masculinity" and "femininity"
- **Performative Identity:** The belief that identities are tied up in the way we portray them to others
- **Normative:** Regulated and consistent across the society or culture; what it "should be"
- **Sexuality:** Identity based on sexual attraction to others
- **Heterosexuality:** Sexual attraction to people of the opposite gender or biological sex
- **Homosexuality:** Sexual attraction to people of the same gender or biological sex
- **Bisexuality:** Sexual attraction to people of both genders or biological sexes
- **Asexuality:** Lack of sexual attraction to others, regardless of gender or biological sex
- **Heterosexism:** The privileging of heterosexual people over people who identify as anything other than heterosexual
- **Compulsory Heterosexuality:** A concealed system that creates gender norms so that bodies will "line up" and reproduce, based on the belief that the norm is to be heterosexual
- **Heteronormativity:** A cultural belief that everyone is heterosexual until proven otherwise
- **Homophobia:** A fear of people who identify as "queer"

*This term defines an umbrella community including LGBTQ+ community as well as others.

Structuralism

What is Structuralism?

Structuralists are interested in structures that exist in our reality and how we can read meaning through them. According to Ferdinand Saussure, our language is structured by basic units called “signs.” A sign is made up of signifiers and signifieds. The signified is the mental image we have of an object, and the signifier is the sound-image of the word itself, either spoken aloud or read. For example, the sign “bowl” is made up of both the sound we hear in our minds when we say or think the word “bowl” as well as the image our mind calls up when we think about a “bowl.” Any given language system is made up of a set of arbitrary signs, where meaning doesn’t reside in the sign itself but holds meaning as a matter of social convention. Speakers of English know what a “bowl” is, not because the physical object has an inherent “bowl-ness” but because it is the signifier (the word bowl) that we have assigned to that signified (a physical bowl).

When Structuralists speak of “language,” they aren’t talking about one specific language, but languages as a whole. They believe that language creates arbitrary, but inherently stable, systems that are homogenous and operate within certain rules that are fundamental to any human language. These systems are arbitrary because the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the basic transformation that makes up any human language, is culturally determined. Languages are made up of words, and even parts of words, that can combine infinitely within the rules of language itself to create meaning.

Structuralists also believe that we don’t speak language, but language speaks us. The source of meaning in language is a set of oppositions. Our languages are made up of binary oppositions, or two ideas that are directly opposed to each other. We understand things based on their difference from other things, or their differential relations. For example, we understand what a “bowl” is because it isn’t a “plate” and it also isn’t a “cup.” We are aware of what something is based on knowing what it is not. Therefore, we create meaning based on our consciousness; the objects themselves have no inherent meaning. The meaning of signifiers is based in our own minds, not in the signifieds themselves physically.

Structuralists believe that structure produces meaning. They not only look for the units of language, but the units of stories as well. Roland Barthes’ basic structure for the “myth” is: signification = signifier + signified. The signified, in Barthes’ structure of mythology, is an image that has cultural value; for example, the American flag. The signifier, then, is the concept we as a culture have of America as a land of patriotism, freedom, and equality. When we see presidential candidates in a picture where they are standing in front of the American flag, we read the signifiers and signifieds in the picture to create a signification that connects the candidates with these American ideals, making us think they themselves are patriotic and advocate for freedom and equality. Barthes’ theory was that the form a text takes, combined with the concepts portrayed by it, creates the signification of the text as a whole. According to Barthes, we have to read the signified back through the signifier to see the signification. The myth has two functions: to notify readers and to make them understand something.

How to Do a Structuralist Reading:

A Structuralist analysis of literature starts with determining the basic units of the text, which can be characters, recurring symbols, or anything else that seems to create a binary opposition or appears to be acting as a signifier in the work. In The Great Gatsby, I could choose to make these characters, groups of characters, or places. I would also look for evidence of the rules that govern these basic units.

First, though, you need to determine what these basic units are by looking at who or what follows the same rules. One way I will go about this is by looking at patterns of behavior for characters. Those who appear to follow the same rules might be in the same group, and therefore be the same basic unit of the text. For example, if types of characters were the basic units, an example of the presentation of a rule would be when Daisy's mother tells her "rich girls don't marry poor boys." This is mirrored in the fact that Tom lied to Myrtle about why he could never leave Daisy to be with her.

As you read, pay attention to things that appear to be rules governing the behavior of each important character in the work, evidence of them imposing their rules on others, or fear and anxiety when they are breaking them. Examples of this would be Gatsby's anxiety about reuniting with Daisy and Myrtle's attempt to follow the rules of the upper class when in New York City with Tom.

How to Teach Structuralism:

- Create a Language
 - In this activity, groups of students will create their own language centered around three objects. It has to have governing rules that help make meaning for speakers and listeners.
 - Student groups will then have to interact with other student groups, trying to barter items while dealing with their language barrier
 - This activity is meant to help students grasp the idea of the sign=signified+signifier creation of meaning and its arbitrary nature, as they're coming up with new signifiers for a signified they already have the sign for.
- What is it?
 - Students will be presented with a picture of a strange object, something that doesn't look like anything they know or are familiar with. This may be an actual item.
 - Students will then be asked to define what the item is. Inevitably, they will use differential relations to do this (ex: "Well, it doesn't have a bottom, so it's not a cup").

How to Write a Structuralist Analysis:

In my Structuralist analysis, I would write about the basic units, the characters, and the rules that govern them, the social expectations others have for them. Unlike most literary analyses, this analysis wouldn't be based on meaning in the traditional sense; it looks into how conceptual

meaning within the text is created. My analysis will make no claim as to what the text means as a whole, or any statement the text might be making, but only focus on how I think the text is going about creating conceptual understanding, or the way the structure of the text allows us to understand it on the surface.

I will make the basic units groups of characters, based on identity, which is determined by where they live and their net worth. I would classify Tom and Daisy as “East Eggers,” Gatsby as a “West Egger,” and Myrtle and George as “Valley dwellers.” I would also create a category for Nick and Jordan, perhaps calling them “meddling friends.” I would then strive to find the rules that govern how these units can combine within the system of the novel. In attempting to do this, I would go back through the notes I made as I read and create the rules these sets of characters follow. The “East Eggers” don’t relate with “West Eggers” or “Valley dwellers,” either sexually or romantically, without consequences; the “West Eggers” and “Valley dwellers” take on all the consequences, primarily death. The “East Eggers” never take credit for their actions. The “meddling friends” facilitate the relationships the “West Eggers” and the “Valley dwellers” have with the “East Eggers.” In my analysis, I would describe each group, what rules they operate within, and how this is evidenced in the text.

Guiding Questions:

- What seem to be the underlying rules of the text (rhythm, meter, rhyme scheme, etc.)?
- What culturally-defined images do you see at work in a text (flags, certain buildings, specific colors or locations, etc.)?
- How is this text similar to other texts you have seen before? Does it seem to be following/mimicking another, already established form?
- How do people, places, and things appear to be defined by the collective whole? For example, are there objects you recognize with names you don’t?
- Where do you see examples of the structure of the sign?
- Where do you see evidence that language is structuring the characters’ experience?
- What are the primary binary oppositions of the text?
- Is there a signifying system that seems to be governing social behavior? What is it?

Vocabulary:

- **Sign:** The basic units of our language
- **Signifier:** The sound-image of a word
- **Signified:** The concept being portrayed by a specific word; the mental image of the thing
- **Binary Opposition:** Two ideas directly opposed to each other
- **Differential Relations:** The differences between things
- **Signification:** The basic structure of the myth

Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction

What is Deconstruction?

Post-Structuralism, or Deconstruction, came about as a reaction to an earlier movement, Structuralism. Where Structuralism claimed that the human mind creates structures to create meaning in life, Post-Structuralism claims that the world isn't that simple. The two primary beliefs of critics within Post-Structuralism are that language is unstable and that language is non-referential. (For more on Structuralism, see chapter 6.)

Language is unstable because opposites are already united; people make sense of words and concepts by knowing what they are not. For example, the opposites "hot" and "cold" are already united because we cannot understand one without understanding its difference from the other. Jacques Derrida, the creator of Deconstruction, coined the term différance to describe the differences between differences. He combined the French terms "to differ" and "to defer" into this one word because he believed that meaning is always both based on differences and deferred. Because we know things based on their difference from other things, meaning is always deferred because there is an infinite number of things that each thing is not. Différance is the presence that is produced by the spatial difference and temporal delay between signifiers.

Deconstruction claims that the binary oppositions put forth in Structuralism show a privilege within the binary as well as the society and people who created it. The term that is privileged, according to Deconstructive critics, won't define itself by what it is until forced to, but rather define itself by its difference from the other, less-valued term. Therefore, Deconstructive critics flip the binary, putting the less-valued term in the privileged position to observe what happens to the meaning of the work when this change occurs. For example, if a poem is supporting a hot/cold binary, with the term "hot" in the privileged position, a Deconstructive critic may reverse the binary, putting "cold" in the privileged position, and then proceed to re-evaluate the poem to see how the meaning changes. By reversing the binary, Deconstructive critics force this term to define itself by what it is, which undermines the hierarchy created by the binary opposition. In the example provided, "hot" now needs to defend itself as a temperature, not simply the presence of heat and the opposite of "cold." This practice has the potential to create new possibilities for values, meanings, and beliefs within the system.

Language is non-referential because conflicting readings of a text are reenactments of conflict within the text. Deconstructive critics work to reveal that a text has no traditional meaning, but rather a multiplicity of meanings. They look at the way a text is related to other texts to see how this contributes to multiplicity when investigating the meaning of a work. They also work to show that a text is already dismantled by showing a text is saying something other than what it claims to be saying.

Language is unstable because difference and deferral are inherent in language itself. According to Derrida, "the field of language is one of free play." This means that there are an infinite number of variations for meaning and combinations of meanings possible within the finite field of language. For example, there is an infinite number of unique sentences that can be created in the English language, even working within the finite realm of the rules of English grammar and

words that have been accepted into the dictionary. These sentences themselves can have an infinite number of meanings, as they can be taken in any inflection. Another example: there are seven ways you can read the sentence “I never said I petted that dog” based on emphasis alone. The meaning of the sentence changes when each different word is given emphasis. In the chain of signifiers created by *différance*, meaning is always moving along a train of deferred meanings. This phenomenon is referred to as the web of textuality, with signifiers always leading to other signifiers, making meaning never exactly the same. The effect produced by these differential relations is called the “trace,” the shadow of the presence of meaning. Working within the tissue of language, the functioning of something as a text that can be interpreted, deconstruction reveals complex operations of ideologies that construct the text.

How to Do a Deconstructive Reading:

When reading, I would first look for places where Fitzgerald is creating binaries we are supposed to accept blindly. One of these binaries is the East Egg/West Egg binary. This is a binary opposition because these two rely on one another to define what they are. Together, they make up Long Island, but they become two different entities because they are defined based on the fact that they are not the same as the other. East Egg is privileged over, and opposed to, West Egg because it is seen as more cultured than West Egg, which is seen as a place where less sophisticated people get sloppy drunk and party with people they don’t even know. As I read, I’m going to point out times where this comes out, as on page 5 when Nick first introduces the binary: “I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two...” I would go through the novel, picking up more ways this binary is defined in their differences.

After I have carefully defined the primary binary opposition present in the text, I would flip the binary to analyze it. How is West Egg, the less privileged of the two, defined? How is East Egg defined in relation to West Egg? After that, I would try to find any instances where this binary breaks down. For example: Jordan is accepted in both West and East Egg; Nick is associated with both East Egg and West Egg through relationships even though he doesn’t have the money or the house to run with either; the fact that other locations not only exist but are of importance to the novel’s plot. These instances help to break the binary down entirely, proving that the privileged term is there only because culture has chosen to put it there. When the binary breaks down, we see that these are independent terms, but East Egg only is defined through comparison to West Egg, by what it is not.

How to Teach Deconstruction:

- Discuss Binaries
 - Practice with Poetry
 - Pick out poems for the class to analyze. Have them come up with a list of some binaries they see at work in the poem, such as sound/silence, warm/cold, white/black, nature/city, etc. Then have them practice deconstructing the text by reversing the binaries so the lesser-privileged term becomes the privileged one, going back through the poem with this reversal in mind, and seeing how the meaning changes.
- Act It Out
 - Deconstructive Debate

- For a Deconstructive debate, you first need to create a binary for your students to argue. For ease of topic, choose an issue that isn't too controversial for your student population and that they are familiar with enough to argue on both sides. The topic should only have two positions (possibly something that garners a yes/no type of reaction).
- In the first phase, give students a side for them to argue on. Tell them "your opinion" before they even start arguing (to mimic the privileging of one side of the binary). This should start to get students on the privileged side to argue their side based on the fact that they're not the other side while the un-privileged side will try to make a case for themselves.
- In the second phase, tell the lesser-privileged group they have made a good case and you're willing to look into their position. This should force the privileged group to actually define their position in an effort to regain their former privilege in the binary.

How to Write a Deconstructive Analysis:

A Deconstructive analysis will argue how and why stability is questionable; it is the nature of Deconstruction to be unstable and never settle on one single, unchanging meaning. If I were writing a Deconstructive analysis of The Great Gatsby, I would start by defining a conventional reading that comes from the binary between East Egg and West Egg: that the higher classes leave devastation in their wake whenever they interact with those of lower classes. I would then point out that this reading is complicated when the binary breaks down. I would then explain why this binary breaks down, analyzing the East Egg/West Egg binary itself rather than presenting an analysis of the novel as a whole. As I analyze the binary, or perhaps East Egg specifically, I will strive to show how the reasoning that created this binary is unreasonable because it is not as stable as other critics or even the text itself would have us believe.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the primary binary opposition in the text?
- What values and ideas do the hierarchies present in the text reflect?
- What do you find when you reverse the binary oppositions?
- How do the binary terms supplement each other? How does each help the reader understand its opposing term? How do they reinforce both presence and absence?
- What elements in the text contradict the hierarchies as presented?
- How would a focus on different binary oppositions lead to a different interpretation?

Vocabulary:

- **Différance:** Presence as produced by spatial differences and temporal delay; the differences between differences
- **Binary Oppositions:** Two ideas directly opposed to each other which creates a hierarchy between the terms, with the first term being privileged over the second
- **Textuality:** A web, with signifiers always leading to signifiers, and meaning never being exactly the same, either from person to person or moment to moment
- **The "Trace":** The effect produced by differential relations; the shadow of presence
- **Tissue of Language:** The functioning of something as a text that can be interpreted

Thomas, P. L., Hall, L. A., & Piazza, S. V. (2010). Challenging texts: Engaging with critical literacy: Reflections on teaching and learning. *The English Journal*, 99 (5). 91-94. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27807201>

This article sets out to show teachers how to integrate critical literacy into their classrooms. The authors are honest with classroom teachers, telling them that the change will not be easy and that they do not have all of the answers- some days are better than others. Hall and Piazza hold that texts are a means of either maintaining the status quo or enacting social change, and that students need to be looking deeper into texts to deconstruct the social hierarchies within them. They grieve that “too few students are likely to have had experiences with critical literacy in school,” and say teachers need to go beyond having students look for themes and symbolism to considering the entire message of the text. In this way, critical literacy allows students to take greater ownership of the world around them.

The first thing teachers need to do when implementing critical literacy in their classrooms is analyze their own biases. By first thinking critically about what influences how they think, teach, and select texts for their class, teachers can make sure that what they are teaching is able to help students think critically about what they read. Hall and Piazza also stress the importance of learning about students’ perspectives and having them analyze their own biases through exploration of their beliefs, looking at where they come from or why they think this way. When students think critically about their own assumptions and biases, they are one step closer to thinking critically about the texts they read. They stress that critical literacy is a practice all members of the classroom engage in together. Thus, the classroom becomes a place where students can express their ideas freely and can learn that the process of thinking critically about one’s beliefs and what one reads is a life-long one, rather than something that exists solely for the duration of one teacher’s class.

The authors provide some advice for teachers to explain critical literacy to students. When students are used to guessing the opinion of the teacher, it can be both confusing and frustrating when they are asked to think for themselves. Hall and Piazza describe critical literacy as “fumbling around and trying to make sense of the literature we read and the things we have experienced.” This explanation could help students understand that their confusion is normal, and these theories are applicable to the real world. The authors explain that critical literacy allows students to better understand their world and to transform it, which continues the emphasis that these theories aren’t just for literature: they are for everything. Students can use the theories they learn to apply to literature and apply them to their own lives and the world around them, using the lenses to examine their opinions, assumptions, and biases, as well as those of the people in their lives and in society as a whole. Using critical literacy in this way allows students to gain a broader perspective on what they are learning in class, allowing them to become fuller participants in our democratic society.

Eckert, L. S. (2008). Bridging the pedagogical gap: Intersections between literary and reading theories in secondary and postsecondary literacy instruction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52 (2). 110-118. doi: 10.1598/JAAL.52.2.2

This article sets out to address the differences in how secondary and postsecondary teach. In an effort to close this gap, the author aims to implement the use of literary theories as a way to extend reading strategy instruction into high school English language arts classrooms, focusing on the reading of literature.

One way she plans to implement literary theories is through explicit instruction of theory. When students are expected to use theory, but don't have the vocabulary with which to talk about the texts they read, Eckert says the students are in a lose-lose situation: they are being "protected" from language they are penalized for not using.

Another suggestion for implementing literary theory in English language arts classrooms is through the use of reading strategies transfer. This transfer is what allows students to take what they learn about how to read literature and apply it to other texts in other content areas. Eckert claims that the use of literary theory will help students achieve this transfer by giving them a framework within which to do metacognitive analysis of texts.

Eckert claims that teaching literary theories explicitly allows students to make the jump from passive reading to active interpretation. With the assumption that interpretation is a higher order skill that, in practice, is hardly different from reading in terms of cognitive processes, readers have to work harder to interpret what they read. To do this, they need some prior knowledge, which comes from metacognitive reading strategies and an understanding of literary theory. She also claims that teaching all types of literary theory explicitly will allow students to actually learn how to interpret texts, rather than perpetrating the idea that students might "catch on" to the teacher's way of interpreting texts. Instruction such as this encourages students to apply these theories to other types of texts, as well as to question everything that is presented to them, within a framework meant to allow them to respond articulately.

To form a connection between reading instruction and the teaching of literary theories, Eckert emphasized a reader-response approach, claiming that, to make reading more of an active skill, all readers need to make the text have a personal significance. Readers fill in the blanks when they read, seeing meaning where they expect to see it. Instruction in theory allows students to pay specific attention to different aspects of a work to pull different meanings from it.

At the end of the article, Eckert gives examples for connecting literary theory to reading strategies. These include connecting text-based literary theories such as Structuralism and New Criticism to phonemic decoding and grammar literacy as well as sociohistorical approaches such as those in the field of cultural studies, Marxism, and feminism to historical fiction or popular adolescent literature.

Wilson, B. (2014). Teach the how: Critical lenses and critical literacy. *English Journal*, 103 (4). 68-75.

This article aims to teach students how to identify important parts of a text through the use of literary theory. Because Wilson is choosing, as the teacher, to no longer point out the pieces of literature her students should use to construct meaning so they can begin to interpret what they read on their own, she is teaching her students literary theory so they can gain the thinking skills necessary for literary interpretation and analysis. She claims that by giving students explicit instruction in the literary theories and the vocabulary to go with it, literary analysis becomes more possible for high school students. She also believes that, given lenses with which to view the world, students gain critical literacy and critical thinking skills that aren't just applicable to literature. Teaching students to use literary theories as critical thinking skills allows them to be used in other contexts. Literary theories teach students to recognize what materials to use when creating meaning within a text.

Wilson provides three different strategies for implementing literary theory in the high school classroom. The first is to teach a few theories explicitly at the beginning of the year and come back to them throughout the school year. Another is to create a unit around a novel or group of many shorter works that allows students to engage multiple theories. The third is to use the theories to frame the course, introducing them all at the beginning and then going in-depth on each one throughout the year.

To teach literary theories, she first creates several essential questions for the text that have multiple valid answers to encourage student inquiry. These scaffold student reflection by helping them interpret the choices an author makes through a particular lens. She also designs activities that necessitate student-led discussion about meaning, with the teacher only jumping in to scaffold the development of ideas. She introduces literary theories to her students by telling them that all observations were valid, using the different theories to determine what stands out, what patterns are apparent, and what the greater meaning is.

Wilson goes into how she introduces Marxism into her classroom, noting that students in our capitalistic society may resist Marxist readings. She stresses the importance of teaching students to hold an unbiased understanding of the theory before using it. She teaches the theory to her students in stages, talking about social classes one day, relating it to their lives then literary theory, and then teaching students that they can comprehend the theory and apply it to literature without becoming Marxists.

Dobie, A. B. (2009). *Theory into practice: An introduction to literary criticism*. Boston: Wadsworth.

In this book, Dobie goes through the many different literary theories and explains how to implement them as well as their history. Each theory has its own chapter. At the opening of each chapter, she introduces the history of the theoretical school, talking about key theorists and different ways the criticism can be applied. She then goes into how to use the theory in these different ways to interpret the text, including key questions to think about at different stages of the reading or in different uses of the theory. To do this, she uses a sample critical essay on a work; the reader needs to read both in order to understand the criticism as presented.

She explains the theories deeply throughout the chapters of the book, so I am using her book to inform the theoretical background of my chapters, while I use the previous three articles to inform the pedagogy of teaching the theories to students. I am using her key questions specifically, choosing a few from each chapter that I find most applicable to my own understanding of the theories as well as those I find most helpful for informing high school students trying to grasp the concepts of the theoretical school. I found that expounding and explaining these choice questions helps guide both reading and writing the critiques.

Because this book is written in language that is lofty and technical, I am infusing a translation of her explanations with my own personal experience with the theories. I am not relying solely on her text for the explanations of the theories; I am using her text to check my facts while I write from my own understanding of the theories, which was formed by many sources, including this book.

Fitzgerald, F. S. (1925). *The great gatsby*. New York: Scribner.

This book is set in the American 1920s in New York City and the surrounding areas, including Long Island and Queens. The events of the novel occur over the course of one summer. The narrator, Nick Carraway, moves to New York for the summer to learn the bonds business; he ends up learning more about the culture of the city than anything else. He is next-door neighbors with Jay Gatsby, a man who is famous for throwing lavish parties. Nick learns that Gatsby has built his wealth through criminal activity, having been poor earlier in his life. Gatsby has harbored a love for Nick's cousin, Daisy Buchanan, who he dated when he was a young, poor soldier. Daisy is married to Tom, a man Nick knew in college, who is cheating on her with a woman named Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle is poor and married to George Wilson, a man who runs a car repair shop in Queens. Daisy and Gatsby are eventually reunited, with the help of Nick, and they begin to have an affair. At the end of the novel, all affairs are discovered and the characters' lives implode: Daisy gets drunk and angry and kills Myrtle in a car accident, George thinks Gatsby killed Myrtle and kills Gatsby and himself, and Tom and Daisy run away from the mess with their young child and their wealth. Nobody but Nick and another man who practically lived in Gatsby's home show up to his funeral, despite the fact that many people are invited and it is announced in the papers.

I chose to use this text throughout my book because I believe it can be interpreted in many different meaningful ways, thanks to the application of different literary theories. There are a lot of different things going on in the novel, and I think that, by focusing on different aspects in the context of the many theoretical schools, I can create multiple different analyses of the same text. By pulling this one text through the different literary theories, I hope to show that there are many different ways to read one text, and that there are multiple valid interpretations of the same work.