

Literary Criticism Primer
A Guide to the Critical Approaches to Literature

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Introduction: What is Literary Criticism?

“Literary criticism is the study, analysis, and evaluation of imaginative literature. Everyone who expresses an opinion about a book, a song, a play, or a movie is a critic, but not everyone’s opinion is based upon thought, reflection, analysis, or consistently articulated principles.” Mark Lund, 96

So often we imagine literary critics as adults who have spent years in various colleges reading texts and then publishing their brilliant thoughts. Literary scholars do exist and they often make profound comments about all types of literature---visual, performed, and written. However, a critic can be four or forty. If an individual offers a sound analysis based on connections made within the text, then the individual is a critic. For instance, to say that the film *The Lion King* is about learning to share would be a thematic stretch. To say that the movie deals with coming of age and identity themes is sound criticism.

Criticism is not limited to movies and literature. Critics review art, theatre, music and more. One critic declared that Eminem was a master of puns, that *Toy Story* was a classic tale of “identity”, and that Van Gogh’s *Scream* is a visual interpretation of an individual’s struggle to find a voice in society. Each of these critical statements was made by a student in Baltimore County Public Schools. Certainly though, a single thought does not reflect a complete criticism. To develop literary criticism or any type of academic criticism, a student needs to support his/her ideas with examples from the text. In the case of *Toy Story*, Woody is adjusting to his newfound role in sharing Andy’s affection with a second toy, Buzz Lightyear. Of course, Buzz Lightyear is convinced that he is the actual Buzz Lightyear, and he only recognizes his true identity at the climax of the movie when he leaps off of the steps, hoping that he can fly. He can’t. The remainder of the movie details the process as Buzz finds a purpose in his new identity as Andy’s toy. Thus, when the BCPS student said that *Toy Story* is a classic “identity” story, he/she was able to substantiate that claim with details and explanations from the text/film.

Whether the individual has made a career out of writing criticism or he/she is a student completing a paper for a high school course, if the individual is making a claim and able to support it with connections made within the text, then

Why do we have to analyze everything?

Why can’t we just enjoy the books we read in English?

Part of the joy of reading is the ability to discuss the literature or text with others who have shared the same experience. In other words, if you and your friends have read the *Twilight* series then talking about the books may increase your enjoyment of them. And, believe it or not, there are times when adopting a critical approach and then writing criticism can be used for an authentic audience. Last year, the University of Maryland College Park asked applicants to write about a character in literature who influenced them. One BCPS student wrote about the character, Bella from *Twilight*, commenting that Bella was a weak female character who defined herself by the man in her life. She supported this stance with examples from the text. Do you agree with the student’s opinion? How does Bella’s character compare to Katniss in the *Hunger Games*? If Bella is defined by the man in her life, what defines Katniss? You could also extend this to ask what defines Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter* series?

Literary criticism is not “reading between the lines.” Rather, it is the actual act of reading the lines very carefully, in a disciplined, and informed manner. For this reason, as part of our instruction in Baltimore County Public Schools, we teach the critical approaches in grades 6-12 so that all students have the “keys” and language to enhance their conversations about literature. The approaches to literature help the students reveal the subtle and the obvious details of a text. These same approaches can be used to discuss art, music, theatre, and even social and controversial issues and subject matter.

The following critical approaches can be applied to all areas of life from literature to an advertisement and even to political decisions. We thank Mr. Mark Lund who drafted this original document for Baltimore County Public Schools in 1996.

A Summary of the Approaches



Historical Approach:

The Historical approach seeks to interpret the work of literature through understanding the times and the culture in which the work was written. The historical critic is more interested in the meaning the literary word had for its own time than in the meaning the work might have today. For example, while some critics might interpret existential themes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a historical critic would be more interested in analyzing the play within the context of Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Likewise, a critic who analyzed *Toy Story* may be more interested in the historical significance in analyzing how the movie reflects a turning point in computer technology with this movie representing the first fully developed computer animated feature film; it ushered in a new form of art. For a text such as *The Crucible*, the historical critic might look at either the time period in which the play was set or the time period during which it was written. This allows the critic to comment on the Salem witch trials and Puritanism as shown in the play OR how the play is an allegory for

Common Questions for the Historical Approach:

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



Biographical Approach:

The Biographical Approach investigates the life of an author using primary texts, such as letters, diaries, and other documents, that might reveal the experience, thought, and feelings that led to the creation of a literary work. For example, an investigation of Aldous Huxley's personal life reveals that *Point Counterpoint* is a roman a clef: the character Marc Rampion is a thinly disguised imaginative version of Huxley's friend, D.H. Lawrence. In this same manner, an investigation of Samuel Clemens' life may reveal that Tom Sawyer is a composite character based not only on Samuel Clemens but also on his friends and relatives. And finally, if you research the biographical background of the creators for *Toy Story*, you may be surprised to find that all of them have in common a love for the first *Star Wars* episode that hit the screen in 1979. The creators of *Toy Story* admired and were inspired by the special effects presented in *Star Wars*. The following clip offers an example of the types of animation added to the movie. In fact, the chess scene in the movie is very similar to the chess scene in *Harry Potter*, both were created with animation technology. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BiKHqeFPws> ... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwjZ1J2b8UY&feature=related>

However, the technology is not the critical component in the research. The research into the creators of *Toy Story* shows that all of the creators for *Toy Story* shared a love of early animation in movies and this love led them to creating the first computer animated full length feature....*Toy Story*. This understanding into the mind of the author/creator is the basis for the Biographical Approach.

Common Questions for the Biographical Approach:

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



Formalistic Approach:

The formalistic approach began with Aristotle (384-322 BC), a philosopher of ancient Greece, who in his book *The Poetics* attempted to define the form of tragedy. Aristotle wrote that the tragic hero was an essentially noble individual who, nevertheless, manifested a flaw in character that caused him or her to fall from a high position to a low position. The flaw in character (hamartia) was a kind of blindness or lack of insight that resulted from an arrogant pride (hubris). During the course of the tragic action, the hero came to a moment of insight—today it might be seen as an epiphany. Thus the tragic plot moves from blindness to insight. As an imitation of a serious action, the tragic plot had to be written in a dignified style. The effect of the tragedy was supposed to be catharsis or the purging of the emotions of pity and fear. All of the elements of tragedy work together to produce a formal unity: this is the essence of the formalistic approach.

The formalist critic embraces an objective theory of art and examines plot, characterization, dialogue, and style to show how these elements contribute to the theme or unity of the literary work. Moral, historical, psychological, and sociological concerns are considered extrinsic to criticism and of secondary importance to the examination of craftsmanship and form. Content and form in a work constitute a unity, and it is the task of the critic to examine and evaluate the integrity of the work. Paradox, irony, dynamic tension, and unity are the primary values of the formalist criticism.

The Intentional Fallacy:

This states that an author's intention or purpose for creating the work is irrelevant in analyzing or evaluating that work. The meaning and value of a work reside in the text itself, independent of the author. Thus, if we stick with our focus on *Star Wars*---we can say that it doesn't matter what Lucas intended---Anakin Skywalker is Oedipus and the plot supports a point by point comparison between the *Star Wars* film series and the play, *Oedipus*. <http://www.screened.com/news/luke-and-anakin-skywalker-oedipus-writ-large/2323/>

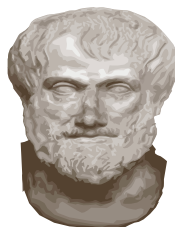
The Affected Fallacy:

This states that the evaluation of a work of art cannot be based solely on its emotional effects on the audience. Instead, criticism must concentrate upon the qualities of the work itself that produce such effects. The formalistic approach stresses the close reading of the text and insists that all statements about the work be supported by references to the text.

The Formalistic Approach deals with the form of the literature, the words of the literature, and the patterns in the literature. Analysis of figurative language and rhetorical devices falls under the formalistic approach.

Common Questions for the Formalistic Approach:

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



The Philosophical Approach

There are two levels that concern the Philosophical Approach. The first level involves the evaluation of a work and its ethical content. Philosophical criticism always assumes the seriousness of a work as a statement of values about life. The philosophical critic judges a work on the basis of his or her articulated philosophy of life. Assuming that literature can have a good effect on human beings by increasing their compassion and moral sensitivity, this form of criticism acknowledges that works can have negative effects on people as well. For this reason, philosophical critics will sometimes attack authors for degenerate, decadent, or unethical writings. The philosophical critic may find fault in a work, but rarely does this critic “ban” the work. Literary works that have caused moral controversy are: *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger and even *Harry Potter* by JK Rowling! And while books have been controversial, so are other forms of art. In fact, even today, Jackson Pollock’s art is described by some as “tomfoolery and humbug disguised as art.”(Watson, Fine Arts Views. Com) Others though, contend it is masterful. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/Decoding-Jackson-Pollock.html>

The second level of the Philosophical Approach deals with how a work reflects the human experience in the world and in the universe. Who are we? What are we searching for as we live our lives? How are we impacted by good and evil? These fundamental questions lead our philosophical analysis of any work.

Common Questions for the Philosophical Approach:

- What view of life does the story present? Which character best articulates this viewpoint?
- According to this work’s view of life, what is man/woman’s relationship to God/god/s? To the universe?
 - What moral statement, if any, does this story make? Is it explicit or implicit?
 - What is the author’s attitude toward his world? Toward fate? Toward free will? Toward God/god/s?
 - Are the events of the world random? Are the events of the world ordered? How does the text reflect this?
 - What is the author’s conception of good and evil?
 - What does the work say about the nature of good or evil?
 - Does good exist? If so, does it prevail?
 - Does evil exist? If so, is it punished?
 - What does the work say about human nature?

Consider the Harry Potter series of books. Could you pick one of the above questions to discuss the plot and characters of one of those novels?



Psychological Approach:

The psychological approach has been one of the most productive forms of literary inquiry in the twentieth century. Developed in the late 1800's and early 1900's by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his followers, psychological criticism has led to new ideas about the nature of the creative process, the mind of the artist, and the motivation of characters.

Freud's principal ideas are essential to an understanding of modern literature and criticism. Although the works of Freud consist of many complex volumes, there are four main ideas that have been so influential that it is hard to believe they were not always with us.

The Unconscious

According to Freud, human beings are not conscious of all their feelings, urges, and desires because most of the mental life is unconscious. Freud compared the mind to an iceberg: only a small portion is visible; the rest is below the waves of the sea. Thus, the mind consists of a small conscious portion and a vast unconscious portion.

Repression

Observing the conservative, prudish upper middle classes of the late nineteenth century, Freud came to the conclusion that society demands restraint, order, and respectability and that individuals are forced to repress the libidinous and aggressive drives. These repressed desires, however, emerge in dreams and in art. The artist and the dreamer are both creators; both have a need to express themselves by creating beautiful or terrifying images and narratives. But the lust and aggression may not be represented directly. This leads to the use of symbols and subtexts in dreams and literature.

The Tripartite Psyche

We know this symbolically as the devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other. Freud developed his psychoanalytic theory around three principles: the ego, the id, and the superego. The ego is conscious and represents the face we share with the world. This part of the mind interacts with the environment and with other people in social situations. As the conscious waking self, the ego is reasonable, sane, and mature. The id is unconscious and is comprised of the basic drives of hunger, thirst, pleasure and aggression. The id is removed from reality, that is, from the outer world of society and environment. The id is the mind of the infant, demanding instant gratification, incapable of tolerating the delayed gratification that makes the ego socially acceptable. At first, Freud thought that the id had only one principle, the pleasure principle, also known as the libido or sex drive. However, he found he could not account for aggression, violence, and self-destructiveness without postulating a second principle, the aggressive drive, also known as the death wish. The superego is the final part of the tripartite psyche.

Representing parentally instilled moral attitudes, the superego may seem to look like the conscience. Like the id, however, the superego is largely unconscious. Sometimes the superego is thought to represent an idealized image towards which the ego strives. During the normal course of development an individual gains a balanced, healthy ego that handles the demands for instant gratification that are part of the id with the demands for conforming to proper belief structures that are part of the superego.

The novel, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevens represents the concrete example of the individual who struggles to balance the id and superego. Perhaps we can also look at Darth Vader and Anakin Skywalker as a similar “Jekyll and Hyde” character. One person seems to inhabit two extreme personality types. One personality type is driven by impulses and aggression (Mr. Hyde and Darth Vader) and the other is concerned with creating a better world (Dr. Jekyll and Anakin).

Consider the characters that you have read in literature. Are their personalities completely balanced and healthy? Or does one character have a stronger id or a stronger superego?

Consider television shows. Examine the characters in *Modern Family*. Which character is concerned with being right and doing the correct thing because it is ultimately important to be your very best for your family and society? Which character/s seem to give into their childish impulses? Apply this exercise to any television show or movie.

The Oedipus Complex

In Greek mythology, Oedipus was King of Thebes who, having been abandoned in childhood and consequently ignorant of his own identity, unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. In describing the psychosexual development of children, Freud analyzed the powerful feelings that develop between mother and son. Freud believed that boys develop strong attractions to their mothers during the phallic period (2-6) with a corresponding rivalry developing between the boy and his father. Usually these conflicts are resolved as the boy matures and develops love interests outside the home, but some neuroses of adult life are supposed to result from insufficiently resolved Oedipal conflicts.

The Oedipus Complex has been very controversial and some psychoanalysts have modified or reject it. Alfred Adler, one of Freud’s pupils, reinterpreted the Oedipus Complex when he developed his own theory of the Inferiority Complex. Adler believed that the primary motivation for human beings is not the libido, as Freud has posited, but the will to have power and the confusion for gaining power. For Adler, then, the Oedipus Complex is essentially a power struggle between the boy and the father, in which the boy tries to overcome feeling of inferiority by successfully capturing the mother’s attention.

Consider the following:

Which Shakespearian play involves a young prince who struggles with his feelings regarding his mother? This young prince is often compared to Oedipus.

Can you think of any Disney movies that deal with a young male character in conflict with feelings regarding his father?

Other Psychologists:

The psychological approach in literature focuses on the motivation of the character. For instance, what motivates the different characters in the novel, *Seedfolks*? What motivates Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*? All of these characters have very different life experiences that develop who they are and the face that they share with the world.

Freud was not the only psychologist to offer insight into personality and character motivation. Other psychologists have created theories that help understand why people behave the way they do. Consider the following psychologists.

Alfred Adler:

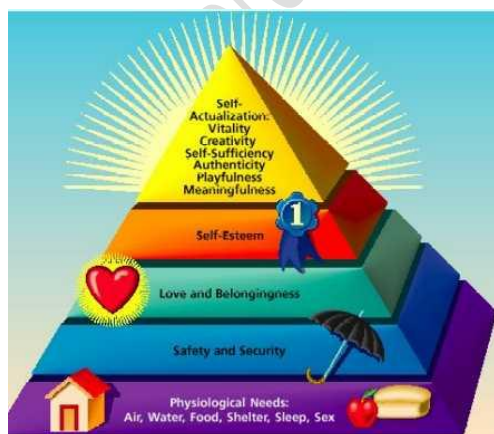
Birth order was significant to Adler. He felt that the manner in which you are coddled or the manner in which you are treated has a significant impact on your success as an adult. Adler also felt that based on young experiences, children develop a narrative about who they are and they live out this narrative. Think about the character, Scout, from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What would Alfred Adler say about her?

Carl Rogers:

Examining Self was critical to Rogers. He believed that a healthy person had a closely linked Ideal Self and Real Self. If a person had a significant discrepancy between the Ideal Self and Real Self then the individual would have an unhealthy self image and personality. While it is normal to attempt to live up to your “ideal person” –it is critical to understand your limitations and the “real” strengths and weaknesses in your personality. Consider the story, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* or *The Necklace*. In both cases, the main character has an unhealthy view of their “Real” self and act under the illusion that they actually are existing as their “ideal” selves.

Maslow:

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs helps explain how a person’s ability to be emotionally secure is linked with having a strong, secure foundation that includes a safe home environment and food. Once the basics of life are secure, then a person can advance to a belonging stage and then it is possible for an individual to work toward a state of Self-Actualization .



Consider the characters that you have read about in literature or that you have seen in movies. Where would you place the characters on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? Where would you place Atticus? Where would you place George from *Of Mice and Men*? Can you identify textual evidence to support the level you identified?

B.F. Skinner:

Skinner was a behaviorist known for developing his theories involving reinforcers. He felt that individual personality was formed based on positive and negative reinforcers and that using positive and negative reinforcement could alter an individual's behavior. Skinner was quoted as saying: "Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten." What do you think he means? Can you think of a character in literature who was a product of either positive or negative reinforcement? Consider what is learned about Boo in the first chapter of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Consider what Scout learns during her first days in school. What type of reinforcement does the teacher use with Scout? How does Scout react? What type of reinforcement does Atticus use with Scout? How does Scout react to Atticus?

Common Questions for the Psychological Approach:

- What motivates the characters' actions?
- What is the nature of the creative process that led to this literature?
- How do the theories of various psychologists apply to the plot or characters?
- What level of Maslow's hierarchy is motivating the actions of various characters?
- How does the family dynamic play out in the plot and character relationships?
- Which psychological theory can be applied to the characters?
- Is there evidence of the unconscious, repression or the tripartite psyche?
- Are any of the characters demonstrating a particular complex?
- What is the nature of the interpersonal relationships among the characters?



Sociological Approach:

Sociological criticism focuses on the relationship between literature and society. Literature is always produced in a social context. Writers may affirm or criticize the values of the society in which they live, but they write for an audience and that audience is society. Through the ages the writer has performed the functions of priest, prophet, and entertainer: all of these are important social roles. The social function of literature is the domain of the sociological critic. It is important to note that Charles Dickens, one of the earliest novelists, wrote short stories and novels that helped reveal social problems in England especially as related to the crimes of child labor and to the excessive taxing of the middle class:

<http://entertainment.time.com/2012/01/29/counting-down-dickens-greatest-novels-number-8-hard-times/>.

Even works of literature that do not deal overtly with social issues may have social issues as subtexts. The sociological critic is interested not only in the stated themes of literature, but also in the latent themes. Like the historical critic, the sociological critic attempts to understand the writer's environment as an important element in the writer's work. Like the moral critic, the sociological critic usually has certain values by which he or she judges literary works. Consider social issues that are reflected in the *Hunger Games* trilogy. Consider the social issues reflected in *To Kill a Mockingbird* or in the novel, *The Cay*.



Marxist Criticism:

To understand the Sociological Approach, a student must understand some of the principals related to the studies of Karl Marx, one of the most important theorists of the relationship between society, politics and economics. Marx wrote his theories during the nineteenth century, a time marked by huge shift in the middle class. Marx criticized the exploitation of the working classes, or the proletariat, by the capitalist classes who owned the mines, factories and other resources of national economies. Marx believed that history was the story of class struggles and that the goal of history was a classless society in which all people would share the wealth equally. This classless society could only come about as a result of a revolution that would overthrow the capitalist domination of the economy.

Central to Marx's understanding of society is the concept of ideology. As an economic determinist, Marx thought that the system of production was the most basic fact in social life. Workers created the value of manufactured goods, but owners of the factories reaped most of the economic rewards. In order to justify and rationalize this inequity, a system of understanding or ideology was created, for the most part unconsciously. Capitalists justified their taking the lion's share of the rewards by presenting themselves as better people, more intelligent, more refined, more ethical than the workers. Other concerns for Marx included the role of religion in the lives of the workers. Some of the Marxist quotes reference that religion, any religion, has a tendency to make the worker complacent. He was known to say that people

make religion and that religion does not make a people. He also described religion as the opiate of the people. Marx had other significant comments for journalism and the media. He felt that the agents of media could create a “false consciousness” meaning that the media could create reality or truth even if it was false. He was suspicious of large government institutions and felt that government agencies may be in place to support the upper class in society.

Thus, Marx was an advocate for common man. When Marxist theory is applied, it looks at how the role of the common man/woman is presented and the struggles they face. Consider this poem by Langston Hughes. How does Hughes show the struggles of the tenant?

Ballad of a Landlord

Landlord, landlord,
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don't you 'member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?
Ten Bucks you say is due?
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on-till you get through.
You ain't gonna be able to say a word
If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He's trying to ruin the government
And overturn the land!

Copper's whistle!
Patrol bell!

Arrest.
Precinct Station.
Iron cell.

Headlines in press:
MAN THREATENS LANDLORD
TENANT HELD NO BAIL
JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL!

Consider the uniqueness of each stanza? Why is one stanza italicized? Why is the last stanza in all capital letters? Use Marxist theory to interpret the poem.

As you consider the Sociological Approach, keep in mind that Marxist theory is one narrow approach to a broad approach that essentially deals with the relationship between people in society and branches of society. Let these questions guide your analysis of literature.

Gender Approach/Feminist Approach:

This approach is a sub-category of the Sociological Approach. It examines the role and image of women in literature, media, art, and other forms of text. Likewise, we can also apply an analysis of men and their stereotypical roles throughout time and how they interact with women and how their image and roles are presented in text. Consider the men in *Of Mice and Men*. Consider Curly's Wife and her image and role in the novel. Consider the relationship between Okonkwo and his wives? If you want to apply the concept to film, consider the role of women in the *Star Wars* series? Or consider the female characters in *Toy Story*. How do the male and female characters interact in *Toy Story*?

Common Questions for the Sociological Approach:

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



The Archetypal Approach:

The archetypal approach to literature evolved from studies in anthropology and psychology. Archetypal critics make the reasonable assumption that human beings all over the world have basic experiences in common and have developed similar stories and symbols to express these experiences. Their assumption that myths from distant countries might help to explain a work of literature might seem a little far-fetched. However, critics of this persuasion believe it is valid.

Carl Jung, a student of Freud, came to the conclusion that some of his patients' dreams contained images and narrative patterns not from their personal unconscious but from the collective unconscious of the human race. It was Jung who first used the term archetype to denote plots, characters, and symbols found in literature, folk tales, and dreams throughout the world. Some of the principal archetypes are described in the following paragraphs.

The Hero and the Quest:

According to Joseph Campbell, the story of the hero is the monomyth, or the one story at the bottom of all stories. The hero is called to adventure. This means that the hero must go on a quest. The first stage of the quest is separation: in this stage the hero separates from familiar surroundings and goes on a journey. The second stage of the quest is initiation: the hero may fight a dragon, conquer an enemy or in some other way prove his or her courage, wisdom gained in the initiatory phase. Often the initiation involves a journey to the underworld, and the return phase is regarded as a kind of rebirth. This links the myth of the hero to the next archetypal motif. This motif can be applied to many of our contemporary films. For instance, if you consider the animated feature film, *Nemo*—would you classify the movie as a Quest or a Coming of Age film? If you consider the movie from Marlin's perspective then perhaps it can be viewed as a quest...in search of his son and restoring their father-son relationship. If you consider the story from Nemo's perspective then perhaps it is a coming-of-age tale as Nemo discovers who he is and what is important to him.

The Death and Rebirth Pattern:

Many myths from around the world reflect the cycle of the seasons. Sometimes myths require a sacrifice so that the seasons can continue. A sacrificial hero (in myth it is usually a god or king) accepts death or disgrace so that the community can flourish. Although the sacrifice is real, it is not necessarily to be regarded as final: the god who dies in the winter may be reborn in the spring. Characters like Oedipus and Hamlet and even Harry Potter who sacrifice themselves to save their kingdoms/worlds are based on the archetype of the dying god. Consider how this pattern is played out in the last Harry Potter movie: *Deathly Hallows Part II*.

Mother Earth/ Father Sky:

A surprising number of cultures regard the earth as the mother of all life, and she is sometimes seen as the original divinity who was wedded and superseded by the archetypal male divinity, the sky god. The offspring of the earth mother and the sky father are all of the creatures that inhabit the world. Earth mother characters in literature are characterized by vitality, courage, and optimism. They represent embodiments of the life force. The character, Shug Avery in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* represents a modern version of the earth goddess: she gives Celie the courage to live. Think of the mother and father characters in literature that could be considered Mother Earth and Father Sky characters.

Stock Characters/Archetypal Characters:

Just as there are repeated archetypal patterns in literature, there are repeated types of stock characters. These characters appear throughout literature. Consider the following list: hero, villain, innocent, wise sage, mother earth/goddess, clown, fool, dolt, devil, temptress, damsel in distress, knight in shining armor, goddess, and more.

Consider these questions for helping understand the archetypal approach:

- What patterns emerge in the literature?
- What universal themes are present?
- What situations seem common across cultures and time periods?
- What mythological archetypes emerge?
- Are there stock characters present? What makes them "stock"?

Applying the Approaches to Visuals



http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128_migm.html

The Library of Congress has a collection of photographs that relate to most historical events. Each of the Smithsonian Museums contains a collection of art work that provides a range of subjects for students to analyze. The Baltimore Museum of Art also includes online access to art work that can be analyzed using one of the critical approaches: <http://www.artbma.org/educators/atg/archive.html>.

Applying the Approaches to Articles on Controversial Subjects or Topics or Non-fiction

Use the BCPS data bases including Opposing Viewpoints to read articles about controversial topics. Use the approaches to help examine the issues. The approaches are merely a lens for considering a topic from all points of view. Consider how the artwork, photograph or article can be examined psychologically, archetypally, sociologically, historically, and even formalistically.

For instance, examine the various ways of looking at the following topics:

Topic: Healthcare: What is the history of healthcare in our country? Does the issue mean something different for men or women? How does the healthcare issue relate to different classes within our society? If an individual does not have healthcare where does that put him on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Other Topics: Global Warming, Handgun Control, Federal Budget, etc.

Documentary: Examine any appropriate documentary. The documentary, [Supersize Me](http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/super_size_me) http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/super_size_me, examines how the fast food industry encourages large portions and what that means for the consumers. What does this documentary say about our society? Select questions from the Sociological Approach to discuss the video.