**English Stage 1**

Task 1 - Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts

**Introduction to Critical Perspectives/Literary theories**

Literary theories were developed as a means to understand the various ways people read texts. The proponents of each theory believe their theory is *the* theory, but most of us interpret texts according to the “rules” of several different theories at a time. All literary theories are lenses through which we can see texts. There is nothing to say that one is better than another or that you should read according to any of them, but it is sometimes fun to “decide” to read a text with one in mind because you often end up with a whole new perspective on your reading. https://apps.carleton.edu/people/appleman/talksworkshops/workshop\_handouts/critical\_theories/

1. Select a text that is familiar to everyone in the class or group such as:

* a shared text that has been read by everyone e.g. the set novel, a film, play or poem
* a popular text such as a film like *Star Wars*, *Shrek* or *The Great Gatsby*
* a traditional text such as a fairy story (e.g. Three Little Pigs) or a nursery rhyme.

Everyone in the class should agree to analyse the same text so the differences between readings are clear.

1. In pairs read the definition of one of the following literary theories that you will be given:
   1. Gender criticism
   2. Historical and cultural criticism
   3. Psychological or psychoanalytical criticism
   4. Sociological (e.g. Marxist) criticism
   5. Archetypal criticism
   6. Reader-response criticism
   7. Deconstructionist criticism
2. Discuss the questions provided which guide you to read the text through a specific lens or perspective.
3. Prepare and present an oral to the class in which you
   1. explain the critical perspective or theory you have been given
   2. present an analysis of the chosen story using the critical perspective

An oral response to texts should be a maximum of 5 minutes.

In this task you should:

* demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ideas and perspectives explored in the text (KU1)
* analyse the relationship between the purpose, context and audience and how they shape meaning (An1)
* use of appropriate language in the oral presentation (Ap2)
* use of evidence from the text to support the conclusions (Ap3)

**Introduction to critical perspectives**

1. ***Gender criticism***

To read a text to explore gender related issues or attitudes towards gender ask the following types of questions:

* How does the gender of the author influence the perspectives represented in the text?
* How are gender stereotypes reinforced or undermined in the text? What roles do the men and women play?
* How would readers of different genders interpret the text?

1. ***Historical and cultural criticism***

To read a text to explore the historical and cultural contexts ask the following types of questions:

* How does the time and place in which the author wrote influence the text?
* How does the culture of the author influence his or her perspective on society?
* How do characters in the texts represent the attitudes and values of the time and place (e.g. social class, racism, discrimination, stereotypes etc.)
* How would readers of at the time the text was written or in the cultural context in which it was written respond to the text?

1. ***Psychological criticism***

To read a text to explore the psychology of the author and characters in the text ask the following types of questions:

* What psychological conflicts influence the characters or the plot?
* Why do characters act the way they do? What are the fears or desires of the characters or author?
* How is the range of human emotions presented in the text?
* What moral and ethical choices do the characters make?

1. ***Sociological or socio-economic criticism***

To read a text to explore the economic and political contexts of the text ask the following types of questions:

* Who are the powerful people in the text? Who are the powerless? Who receives the most attention?
* What does the society value (e.g. material possessions)?
* What social classes do the characters represent and is there class conflict and struggle?

1. ***Archetypal criticism***

To read a text to explore the universal values, plots and characters recurring in most texts, including myths legends and symbols, ask the following types of questions:

* How are archetypal characters (e.g. a hero, ruler, innocent, orphan, magician, explorer, rebel etc) presented in the text?
* How are archetypal situations and events (e.g. battle of good versus evil, initiation into adulthood etc) presented in the text?
* How are archetypal symbols, images and themes (e.g. the snake, a sword, the garden, colours, numbers etc) presented in the text?

1. ***Reader-Response criticism***

To read to consider the theory that texts do not have a meaning but that the meaning is derived from the act of an individual reading a text consider the following types of questions:

* How do your experiences and expectations as the reader affect your reading and interpretation of the text?
* How do you, as the reader, respond to the text? Can you relate to it on a personal level?
* How has the text changed you world view or increased your interest in the subject matter?

1. ***Deconstructionist theory***

To read a text to analyse how language is being used in a text consider the following questions:

* What is the tone of the work and from what point of view is it being told?
* What stylistic features are used in the text such as figures of speech or connotative words?
* How does the close analysis of the language change the meaning of the text?