

# Literary Criticism

## Mind Maps and Activities for AS and A Level English Literature

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# Teacher's Introduction

This resource serves as an introduction to literary and critical theory for students, providing them with the knowledge needed to pass and excel in their AS and A Level examinations, and prepare them for more in-depth study at degree level. The theories included in this resource are as follows:

- Psychoanalysis
- Feminism
- Marxism
- New Historicism
- Humanism
- Narrative Theory
- Postcolonialism
- Semiotics

## Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

There is no obligation to teach the theories in this particular order. For example, you may wish to teach humanism first as a number of theories stem from these very early ideas. Others may see Semiotics as a natural starting point. The order is left to your own discretion.

Equally, these theories are not static and do crossover at various points. You should encourage students to find links between the theories.

The A3 mind maps contained in this pack serve as the perfect revision material for students, supporting them with both the acquisition and consolidation of their knowledge. Each mind map introduces students to a specific branch of critical theory: the key literary theorists and texts associated with the movement, the historical contexts which informed and influenced the criticism, works of literature which lend themselves particularly well to specific critical readings, and a variety of tasks to promote further research from students. Each mind map is designed to meet the specifications of AQA A and B, Edexcel, Eduqas and OCR, addressing the assessment objectives (AOs) students are expected to fulfil in their English Literature exam. Students of these exam boards are expected to fulfil **all five assessment objectives** across their exam components.

The assessment objectives for English Literature are as follows:

- **AO1** Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression
- **AO2** Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
- **AO3** Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received
- **AO4** Explore connections across literary texts
- **AO5** Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

Through their use of critical and contextual information, and analytical tasks, the mind maps in this resource primarily address assessment objectives 1, 2 and 3. However, the exam support material that follows ensures students practise and perfect their ability to use critical theory to inform different interpretations of literary texts, and establish connections between such texts – thereby fulfilling assessment objectives 4 and 5. This material includes an informative page which educates students on how to successfully use criticism in their exam responses; annotated sample essay extracts, and a bank of example exam-style questions that require students to apply theory to texts they have studied. Towards the back of this resource, you will also find a Key Term Glossary – which collates and defines all terminology used throughout this resource – and a list of recommended Further Reading, including books and websites students of all abilities can access to enhance their knowledge. You may wish to hand copies of these out to your students along with the Mind Maps.

Answers and indicative content for all activities throughout this resource are provided at the end of the pack.

*January 2021*

# What is Literary Criticism? A Brief

In her 2016 book, *Criticism*, Research Professor Catherine Belsey makes an interesting

*'What do you think of it?' Anyone who asks you this question is addressing you with criticism from time to time, if only at the level of choosing to see this movie, or this other programme.*

So, as someone who studies and critiques literature, you are a 'literary critic'. As 'criticism' refers to **the practice of interpreting, judging and evaluating literature and its influence and surround it**. But how *exactly* do we do that? What issues and approaches do we use to critique of texts? Well, that's where 'literary theory' comes in. Literary theory – or what be known in recent years – refers to **the schools of thought and frameworks used to analyse literature and society in general**. These schools of thought come in the form of texts and theories that we use to analyse literature. For example, if you were analysing the representation of women in *Jane Eyre*, you may use **Feminist** critical theories in your reading. If you were considering the role of social class in, for example, *The Great Gatsby*, you may use **Marxist** literary

But, what's the point in literary criticism? Why do we use it in our interpretation of texts? These are the questions you need to be reminding yourself of whenever you engage with a response to a text, *especially* in your exam. Showing your awareness of a particular approach is not enough to gain you marks – you have to use criticism to further your understanding. After all, that's the function of literary criticism – **to uncover how certain contexts and how they influence readers' understandings of a text at the time of publication**. When you apply a piece of literary criticism and theory to your reading of a text, you might use it as areas to help structure your response – and to make sure you're engaging with the

## The 4 Ms of Criticism

1. **Meaning** – what is the meaning behind the text? What meaning did the text have at the time, and does this differ from our understanding of the text now?
2. **Motive** – what was the author's motive for writing their text? Did they have a purpose or inspiration guiding them?
3. **Messages** – what messages or issues can we uncover from the text?
4. **Morals** – what morals govern the text? What order or systems rule the narrative?

Anyway, this is just something to think about later on when you're more familiar with literary criticism and become more comfortable and confident using them – so let's get started, and you practise using criticism in your exam responses.

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# Using Literary Criticism: How to Criticism in Your Essay

Now, it's time to use everything you've learned about literary criticism. However, movements, name-dropping critics, and loosely relating theories to texts will not do in the exam. To ensure you aren't doing any of the above, all you need to bear in mind is:

**'How does reading the text through the critical lens of 'x' affect and change our understanding of it?'**

By answering this question, you'll not only ensure your application of critical theory is correct and useful, you'll also achieve all the assessment objectives (AOs) you are expected to meet in the exam. Across the two sections of your exam – in either just one section or both sections – you'll be expected to meet all the AOs in one way or another, so it's important to practise your application of them all. As a reminder, the English Literature AOs are as follows:

- **AO1** Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts; use relevant terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression
- **AO2** Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
- **AO3** Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received
- **AO4** Explore connections across literary texts
- **AO5** Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

It sounds like a lot of different factors to take into consideration and to remember, but if you find a way that works well for you and is memorable, you'll achieve a lot of these AOs all in one go. For example, if you use context to offer different interpretations of a text – already achieving AO3 and AO4 – you can also identify connections between literary texts you have studied – whether that be the same text or the movement or genre the text belongs to, or by linking the two extracts provided for the exam – already achieving AO4. As long as you're referring back to the question and using it to guide your reading of the text this way, then that's all the AOs ticked off! One suggested approach is the

## The PEEL Paragraph Structure

- **Point:** Make a point
- **Evidence:** Support it with examples (quotes) from the text
- **Explanation:** Explain how this evidence proves your point
- **Link:** Link this point to the one you'll make in the next paragraph

And don't be afraid of having your own opinion – these critics base their whole theories on their own reading of texts and their own opinions, too! Examiners are looking for your own personal interpretation, so it's a prime opportunity for you to offer an opinion and one specific reading of a text, or your own. Anyway, the easiest way to see how these AOs work together – and how to achieve simple marks in the exam through a bit of close reading – is to look at an example

## Remember

Find the relevant AOs you are expected to meet in the exam specification, but also at the start of your response. They will be clues in the question, or in your response. Make sure you are expected to meet them all when revising, and before you enter the exam.

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# Sample Essays

## Sample Essay Extract 1: A Marxist Reading of *The Great Gatsby*

1. Below is a high-grade sample essay extract. Annotate the essay, identify the PEEL structure, and where the student meets the assessment objectives (AO1, 2, 3 and 5)

- a) Discuss the presentation of social class in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. (AO1, 2, 3 and 5)

Fitzgerald's presentation of social class in 'The Great Gatsby' is a critique of the American Dream, which promised equal opportunities for all Americans, whatever their social status. A Marxist reading of Fitzgerald's presentation of social inequality within the American Dream of the 1920s. As literary critic Terry Eagleton identifies in his 1999 book *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 'Karl Marx's school of thought can be used to identify the precise relations between different classes in a society [...] grasping that the classes stand in relation to the mode of production'. As a result, a Marxist reading through the critical lens of Marxism can 'explain the literary work through an evaluation of 'forms, styles and meaning'. Upon evaluation, the inequality present within society manifests itself in the form of social locations throughout Fitzgerald's novel, specifically the juxtaposition of East Egg and West Egg. East Egg – as we come to understand – is home to the old money classes, who have long occupied powerful positions in society as a result of their extensive hereditary wealth. In contrast, West Egg is home to the new money classes. The white palaces of East Egg, '[glittering] on a bare water' are the home of Tom and Daisy Buchanan.

**Tip:** If you need to change the tense of a direct quotation to make it seamlessly flow in your sentence, put square brackets around the amended word

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most-esteemed residents, and the archetypal representations of which prevails there. Across the bay lies East Egg's 'less fashionable' West Egg – home of the novel's eponymous character, Jay Gatsby. Nick Carraway. Through his familial ties with his cousin, Daisy, home's location 'at the very tip of' West Egg, Nick Carraway provides a bridge into class divisions, through his movement between East Egg's 'old money' and the new money of the self-made social climbers of West Egg, such as Jay Gatsby. Carraway's position among the two conflicting classes is a unique one, by virtue of his status as a descendant of a family of 'well-to-do people' who were 'prominent' within 'this Middle Western city for three generations'. His friendship with the newly rich, morally-questionable criminal, Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald reminds us, Carraway remains 'within and without' the class system. This observation follows a trip to The Valley of Ashes, the industrial wasteland ground of the American working class – the Marxian proletariat – 'where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and darkness serve as a grave contrast to 'the white palaces' of the glittering wealth. Fitzgerald's juxtaposition of the hard labour of the 'valley men' with the hedonistic lifestyle of society's upper class – depicted in the previous chapter – serves a stern social critique which aligns it with the condemnation of the suppression of the proletariat within a capitalist society.

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2. This student would like to mention their achievement of AO5 by quoting a piece of evidence to enhance their understanding of the social classes in *The Great Gatsby*. Find the credit reference or literary organisation – The British Library Online ([www.britishlibrary.org](http://www.britishlibrary.org)) is always a good place to start – that would provide a different interpretation of social class. Use your criticism to write a few lines that would conclude the paragraph.
3. Using the above essay response as a starting paragraph, now answer part of the question by writing up the essay's next paragraph, focusing on another text you have studied.

b) Compare the presentation of social class in *The Great Gatsby* to the presentation of social class in another text you have studied. (AO1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)



## Sample Essay Extract 2: A New Historicist Reading of Hamlet

1. Below is a high-grade sample essay extract. Annotate the essay, identify PEEL structure, and where the student meets the assessment objectives (AO1, 2, 3, and 5)

### Key Term

**Allusion** – Reference to another work, significant person, or historical event within a text

- a) Discuss the presentation of the supernatural in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Refer to one other text you have studied. (AO1, 2, 3, and 5)

Shakespeare's presentation of the supernatural in *'Hamlet'* chiefly comes in the form of Hamlet's father's ghost, who makes an appearance in Act 1, Scene 5, and reveals to Hamlet the circumstances of his murder at the hands of his brother. From describing the effect of the deadly poison through 'the gates and alleys of [his] body', to comparing his treacherous brother to a serpent in a biblical allusion to the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, the ghost's conscience to 'thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting'. The father makes repeated use of natural imagery throughout the scene, and the dramatic irony emphasises the treacherous circumstances surrounding the 'unnatural murder', and his brother's 'foul, strange and unnatural' death. As a result, Shakespeare's presentation of the supernatural appears to be a commentary on bitterness, injustice, murder and punishment, with the ghost pleading with his son to 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder'. Shakespearean audiences were familiar with the concept of the supernatural as the result of an untimely death, a business unfinished, or the desire for revenge. However, there's one aspect of this particular scene that Renaissance audiences would have found particularly unusual. At the start of the scene, Hamlet's father's ghost explains to his son that

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for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confine  
 Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and  
 Shakespeare's reference to Hamlet's father trapped 'fast in fire'  
 murder be 'purged' through revenge, conjures a traditional image  
 state of eternal, unearthly punishment for his soul. However, as  
 purgatory may have been (in 1600) to Shakespeare's contemporary  
 audience, as Greenblatt argues in his study 'Hamlet in  
 which have been an unconventional and unsettling reference to  
 religious culture of the period. Greenblatt's observation...

2. Write a short paragraph using Stephen Greenblatt's 2001 study, 'Hamlet in  
 alternative interpretation (e.g. New Historicism) into the above reading. (8)

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## Sample Essay Extract 3: Reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*

Below are several short sample essay extracts from readings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. Each extract uses a different branch of literary criticism to analyse the poem.

### Narrative Theory

Tzvetan Todorov's literary theory identifies a five-part narrative structure that literary texts conform to: Equilibrium, Disruption, Quest, Climax, and Resolution. That flouts this theory is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Coleridge's text conforms to the first four parts of Todorov's narrative theory. In the poem, Coleridge provides us with an Equilibrium, with the Mariner's promise to tell a story of a voyage to the South Sea. However, as Todorov predicts, a Disruption soon enters, in the form of the murder of the Albatross. The Quest narrative begins in the Mariner and the crew's search for the Albatross, which is quickly complicated by the Night-mare-in-Death, and the consequential death of all but the Mariner. Following the lifting of the ship's curse, the resurrection of the crew, and the Mariner's return home, following his acknowledgement of the beauty of Nature and the power of the supernatural, the narrative reaches its Resolution. However, it's the final part of Coleridge's narrative with which Todorov would disagree – in which he is doomed to wander the land telling the tale of his journey – denies the narrative its Resolution. This final part of Todorov's narrative theory, as it remains the sole source of catharsis for the reader – provides a satisfying resolution, to the events and dilemmas raised in the narrative. The denial of Resolution in the narrative could be a form of moral instruction to anyone who, like the Mariner, may commit a crime against nature and the sacred existence represented by the Albatross.

#### Key Term

**Catharsis** – Experience of the reader/audience of a text in which they experience a release of tension created by the narrative.

1. Consider the response above. How does the extract highlight the dangers of Narrative Theory? And how could the student strengthen their analysis?

### Semiotics

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics proves a useful lens for analysing Coleridge's use of symbolism, specifically his concept of the Signifier, and the combination of the Signifier – the image or word of an entity itself – and the Signified – the meaning and importance behind it – provides the entity with a recognised meaning. Through an application of Saussure's thinking, the symbols and figures within the poem take on a greater meaning – serving as landmarks of morality as the Mariner promises to tell his story. The image of the lighthouse appears particularly important to the narrative. In the poem, the Mariner's ship '[drops] [...] Below the lighthouse top'. In Saussurean theory, the Signifier appears an icon of safety at sea, but by making the lighthouse the central focus of the Mariner's journey, Coleridge elevates its meaning to a symbol of morality. Upon the reader's return to the lighthouse at the end of the narrative, we can see the trials and moral teachings experienced by the Mariner since his last encounter with the lighthouse.

2. Consider the strengths and weaknesses of the above exam response. How could the student strengthen their analysis of the text?

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## Feminism

### Key Term

**Pejorative** – Used to express contempt, and to describe something or someone

While no significant female characters feature in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the poet uses femininity to define the supernatural figure of The Night-mare, the 'skeleton ship' which taunts the Mariner, and the water which surrounds the ship. This figurative language, as seen in the simile 'The water, like a witch's oils', suggests a power of feminine supernatural power which elevates the power of the sea, and the Mariner and crew. By comparing the body of water to a component of the witchcraft apparatus, Coleridge gives it an air of evil, and devilry. The figure of femininity cannot be ignored, and is developed even further in Coleridge's *Life-in-Death*. Coleridge presents his supernatural figure, Life-in-Death – with the help of her partner, Death – murders the rest of the ship's crew. The presence of 'Her lips [are] red, her looks [are] free, / Her locks [are] yellow' in the poem's description characterises The Night-mare Life-in-Death as overtly powerful. Her red lips, her roaming gaze, and the opulence evoked by her hair all contribute to the power of the female subject. However, Coleridge's use of the colour red also suggests the danger posed by The Night-mare Life-in-Death, solidified by the poet's reference to the deadly infectious disease 'leprosy'. This final reference not only likens the subject to that of the socially outcast leper, but arguably cements Coleridge's use of the feminine in his poem. However, the power of The Night-mare Life-in-Death in her dealing of retribution to the all-male crew – is undeniable, and can be seen as a character in an empowering light, and a figure of morality.

- 2** 3. The end of the above essay introduces the start of an alternative interpretation of the feminist critics featured in this resource, or another of your choice. Complete the above analysis concerning Coleridge's presentation of women.

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# Applying Critical Theory to an Un

1. Below is an extract from Chapter 4 of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. Using the theories included in this resource, analyse and annotate the below extract. Choose a character of your own choosing. In your annotations, you will want to be aware of language, form or structure your chosen critical theory takes as its focus. The objectives you are expected to meet in your exam. You may conduct additional research and its context to inform your analysis. As a reminder, the theories you have studied are:

- Psychoanalysis
- Feminism
- Marxism
- New Historicism
- Humanism
- Narrative Theory

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a motion agitated its limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of their arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his eyes a deep blue; his whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his ghastly features, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which were set, his shrivelled and straight black lips.

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The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished the task, my dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and after a sleepless night, traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep, I lay down, and lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw off my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I beheld my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw it crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; I covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became cold. As the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created.

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# Applying Literary Criticism to Your Text

Each and every literary text is open to a variety of interpretations. Here are a number of questions and activities that will help you get into a critical frame of mind, and experiment with different readings of the text you are studying. Your answers to these questions do not all have to be in full form – even just a few bullet points featuring direct quotations from your text can form the beginnings of a rough essay structure. Use what you have learnt in this resource to stretch your muscles – and very best of luck in the exam.

## Generating Ideas

1. Conduct a psychoanalytical reading of one of the characters in your text. Which Freudian school of thought to develop your interpretation?
2. How are women presented in your text of study?
3. Using the Internet and other online resources, find a reading of your text of study. Summarise their argument in just a few lines, and pick out one key quotation that could feature in your exam.
4. What is the key historical context surrounding your text of study? How does this influence your understanding of the narrative?
5. How important is education/ knowledge to the characters or society depicted in your text? Used as a source of power? Track the educational/moral progression of one character using Humanist theory to guide your interpretation.
6. Compare the first and last chapters/scenes/stanzas of your literary text. What is the structure of the narrative? Using Todorov's theory, does the final chapter/scene represent Resolution? If so, how? And if not, why do you think the author chose to end the text in this way?
7. Are any characters in the text outcast from society? In terms of Postcolonial theory, are they 'othered' in presentation? If so, how – and why?
8. Choose five key symbols, icons or signs from the text you are studying, identify their Saussurean Signifier, and their Signified meaning. What importance do they have to the whole?

## Exam Practice Questions

In your chosen text of study...

1. Discuss the role and importance of gender in your text.
2. Consider the presentation of social class.
3. Explore the ways in which the author presents the theme of knowledge.
4. Consider the presentation of dreams and/or desire.
5. To what extent is the society presented one of equality?
6. Discuss the role and importance of race/nationality/ethnicity.
7. In what way does the author use symbolism to shape meaning within the text?
8. How is the theme of love and/or conflict presented?

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# Key Term Glossary

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**Allusion** – Reference to another work, significant person, or historical event within a text

**Archetype** – A person who appears a perfect form / template of a particular model, often depicted as the archetype of evil

**Capitalism** – Where power is held by the wealthy, and the 'means of production' are controlled by the market rather than the government

**Catharsis** – Term coined by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, referring to the emotional release experienced by a reader/audience of a text in which they experience a sense of release from the text, usually in the form of the text's conclusion

**Climax** – The point in a text in which the events of the narrative reach the peak, where the maximum intensity is reached. Narrative theorist Tzvetan Todorov identifies this as the fourth component of narrative structure, followed by the text's resolution

**Colonialism** – The act of obtaining a colony, usually by force or power

**Communism** – The political theory or an order of society in which all property and the means of production are owned and equally shared by the community

**Discourse** – Language or speech used in discussion

**Equilibrium** – A state of peace or harmony in which conflict is absent. Narrative theorist Tzvetan Todorov identifies this as the first component of any narrative structure before the text's conflict begins

**Feminism** – The belief that men and women are equal. The promotion of gender equality in politics, economy, etc.

**Hedonism** – The belief that the most important thing in life, and humanity's chief aim, is the pursuit of pleasure, whether that be physical, mental, etc.

**Hierarchy** – The system or structure of order within a society which ranks people or things by the perceived wealth, ability or productivity of the individual, e.g. In the hierarchy of gender, men are higher in social ranking than women

**Ideology** – The belief or ideas that govern people, a society, a school of thought, etc.

**Imagery** – Literary technique used by the writer to generate an image in the reader's mind

**Juxtaposition** – Literary technique in which the writer places two contrasting things side-by-side to emphasise the differences between the two

**Literary Criticism** – The practice of interpreting, judging and evaluating literature and its cultural influence and surround it

**Literary/Critical Theory** – The schools of thought and frameworks used to critique and analyse literature

**Marxism** – The ideology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as laid out in their works *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Capital* (1867). Marx's theories now serve as the founding principles of socialism, where within society, its means of production and property should all be shared equally and not owned by private individuals.

**Narrative** – The structure or series of events contained within a text

**Patriarchy** – A society of gender inequality, in which men hold the most power

**Pejorative** – Used to express disapproval, and to describe something or someone in a negative way

**Proletariat** – A term coined by Karl Marx to refer to society's working class, who have no control over the social order. It is made up of unskilled workers who work on the land and in factories

**Psyche** – Term used in psychology to refer to the soul or mind of the individual

**Psychoanalysis** – Psychiatric treatment which analyses the thoughts and feelings of the individual

**Realism** – Used to describe a literary text/approach in which the author attempts to depict life in accordance with reality. This approach was popular in the mid-nineteenth century with writers like Charles Dickens and George Eliot.

**Semiotic** – Study of the systems through which humans communicate with one another

**Utopia** – A state, place, society or area considered to be in perfect condition, or an ideal, e.g. the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Man

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# Further Reading

## The Practice of Literary Criticism

### Easy Introduction

- *Criticism*, Catherine Belsey (2016)
- 'Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism', Purdue Online Writing Lab: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject\\_specific\\_writing/writing\\_in\\_literature\\_of\\_criticism/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature_of_criticism/index.html)
- *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Jonathan Culler (2011)
- *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Penguin Reference Library
- *Beginning Theory* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Peter Barry (2010)

### More Challenging

- *Is There A Text In This Text?*, Stanley Fish (1980)
- *Literary Theory: An introduction*, Terry Eagleton (2008)

## Psychoanalysis

### Easy Introduction

- *Freud for Beginners*, Richard Appignanesi (2003)
- *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*, Anthony Storr (2001)
- 'Psychotherapy – Sigmund Freud', The School of Life, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQaqXK7z9LM>

### More Challenging

- *Sigmund Freud: Explorer of the Unconscious*, Margaret Muckenhoupt (1997)

## Feminism

### Easy Introduction

- *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, Margaret Walters (2005)
- *An Introduction to Feminism*, Lorna Finlayson (2016)
- *Why Women Read Fiction: The Stories of Our Lives*, Helen Taylor (2019)
- Podcasts: 'The Guilty Feminist', and 'The High Low'
- *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979)

### More Challenging

- *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth

## Marxism

### Easy Introduction

- 'The Communist Party Manifesto', The British Library Collections Online: <https://www.britishlibrary.org/collections-items/the-communist-party-manifesto>
- 'Marxist Literary Criticism: WTF? An Introduction to Marxism and Culture', YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nsKGt92da0>
- *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Peter Singer (2018)

### More Challenging

- *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams (1977)
- *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, edited by Francis Mulhern (2014)

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## New Historicism

### Easy Introduction

- 'New Historicism – Literary and Critical Theory', Oxford Bibliographies Online: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911>
- 'The Holberg Conversation 2016: Stephen Greenblatt', Holberg Prize, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91qS5yq2AgY>

### More Challenging

- *The New Historicism: And Other Old-Fashioned Topics*, Brook Thomas (1991)

## Humanism

### Easy Introduction

- *Humanism: A Very Short Introduction*, Stephen Law (2011)
- *Humanism: An Introduction*, Peter Burke (2010)
- *Renaissance Humanism: A History of Sources*, edited by Margaret L. King
- 'How Shakespeare Made Me a Humanist – John Bell – TEDxBlighStreet', YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdv93jny2w>

### More Challenging

- *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, edited by Jill Kraye (1993)

## Narrative Theory

### Easy Introduction

- *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Kent Puckett (2016)
- Podcast: 'Narrative First: Where Story is Always King'

### More Challenging Further Reading

- *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, Mark Currie (2010)
- *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by Matthew Garrett (2009)

## Postcolonialism

### Easy Introduction

- *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Robert Young (2003)
- *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Leela Gandhi (2019)
- 'Postcolonialism: WTF? An Intro to Postcolonial Theory', Tom Nicholas, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbLyd0mQwIk>
- *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo (2019)
- *Queenie*, Candice Carty-Williams (2019)

### More Challenging

- *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Graham Huggan (2017)
- Achebe, Chinua, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"', 1977. Rpt. in *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, background and Sources*, Robert Kimbrough (ed.), W W Norton and Co., 1988, pp. 251–261

## Semiotics

### Easy Introduction

- 'Semiotics – Literary and Critical Theory', Oxford Bibliographies Online: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911>
- *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, Thomas Albert Sebeok (2001)
- *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Michael Ferber (2007)

### More Challenging

- *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Jonathan Culler (1981)

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# Answers / Indicative Con

## Influential Critical Texts throughout History

### Activity

Student's own personal response and reading required here. Any text can be considered as the student can provide a rationale as to why.

## Psychoanalysis

1. **Research the plot of *Oedipus Rex*. How do you think Sophocles' play shaped Freud's theory that young boys have unconscious sexual desires towards their mother towards their fathers – aligns with the plot of Sophocles' play in which the eponymous kills his father, then marries and sleeps with his mother.**
2. **Below is an extract from *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. Student's own response required, but responses will include Poe's use of Gothic tropes of the 'uncanny' in the form of Madeline of Usher; the horror invoked by her bloodied face in the tomb, in which she is both conscious and corpse-like. The effect of the palpable – causing the sudden death of the brother, and the fleeing of the narrator.**
3. **Wider Reading Task – Lacanian Theory**  
Jacques Lacan's (1901–81) most famous work is *Écrits* (1977), which gathers together his theories. Unlike in Freud's theory, Lacan's understanding of 'the unconscious' is in French. Lacan points out that psychoanalysis centres around the practice of using language to represent the unconscious, which in itself should be a representation of the unconscious. However, Lacan identifies the ambiguity of language, and the difference between language and meaning.

## Feminism

1. **Quotations Task**  
A growth in confidence can be traced between the two, especially when comparing the female creative mind in Woolf, and the more tentative request from Wollstonecraft for the relationship between men and women, to solely the independent woman and her own mind.
2. **Feminist Food for Thought: The Feminine Mystique**  
'The Feminine Mystique' is the term coined by American writer and feminist, Betty Friedan, in her 1963 publication. *The Feminine Mystique* dismantles the suburban ideal of the housewife and the dissatisfaction and frustrations of domesticated women as a result.
3. **Feminist Food for Thought: Who is Germaine Greer, what is her most notable work, and why is she a controversial figure in the feminist movement?**  
Germaine Greer is an Australian feminist-writer and intellect who rose to fame following her 1970 book, *The Female Eunuch* (1970). The text lays out Greer's theories for a 'new' kind of feminism, where women like herself to find and use their voice, rather than just addressing the debates of feminist writers. Greer remains controversial, she is criticised for her unapologetic, and critical thought, particularly in her latest work, *On Rape* (2018).
4. **Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination***  
Gilbert and Gubar argue that presentations of women in such fiction as a stereotype of a perfect, domesticated Victorian woman, in favour of a darker hybrid psyche. The character of Bertha Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) represents the namesake of the study.
5. **Feminist Reading**  
Student's own choice of text here, although likely choices include Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72), Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817). Any novel by a female author is valid so long as it leads to character analysis of a female character, and the Victorian female 'ideal' outlined by Gilbert and Gubar.

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## Marxism

### 1. Marxist Readings

Students' own choice of text and reading required. All selections and interpretations provides a sound rationale which engages with the literary theory of Marxism. Likely *The Great Gatsby*, *Jane Eyre*, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*.

2. a) **Warren Montag, 'The Workshop of Filthy Creation: A Marxist Reading of Frankenstein'**  
Montag's central argument offers a reading of Shelley's novel that evaluates the monster by evaluating how the French Revolution and England's Industrial Revolution informed and shaped his monster. In Montag's reading, the monster bears many similarities to the

- b) **Reflecting on Montag's use of Marxism in his reading, how do you think this critic's original understanding of literature, particularly our interpretation of and relation to it, has been altered by his reading?**  
Student's own response and personal engagement with Montag essay required. Marxist readings alter our original understanding of texts by causing us to reconsider the historical context in which they were written. Marxist readings shed light on our concerns, and challenge our initial perception of characters, e.g. characters representing the oppressed or sympathy from the reader, while those representing the oppressor or self-serving.

### 3. Marxism Timeline

Student's own research required; therefore, choice of date may vary. However, recommended dates are:

- 1921: Formation of the Communist Party of China. The social, economic and political landscape of China was transformed by the rule of communist leader Mao Zedong from 1949 to 1976.
- 1924: Joseph Stalin succeeds Lenin as ruler of the Soviet Union. With Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union's dictatorship saw rapid industrialisation and famine sweep the nation.
- 1946–49: Chinese Communist Revolution leads to creation of the Chinese Communist Party.
- 1989: Fall of the Berlin Wall sees the collapse of various communist regimes across Europe, leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

### Further Reading: More Cogs in the Marxist Machine

Independent research task for students to complete, but for guidance:

1. Engels – Collaborated with Karl Marx on the foundations of his school of thought, edited *Communist Manifesto*, and editor of *Capital*. Engels remained a key interpreter of Marx's critical understandings of Marxism for over a century.
2. 'Reflection Theory'
3. '... the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist.'
4. Text in which Althusser criticises modes of capitalist reproduction, coining the term 'Ideological State Apparatus' for institutions such as schools, churches, media organisations, and even the family, which are passed over to state control. ISAs are now used by the state to promote their values and control.

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## New Historicism

### Michel Foucault

#### 1. a) Key texts

Foucault's most influential texts remain:

- *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975)
- *The History of Sexuality* (1976)
- *Power/Knowledge* (1980)

#### b) Recurring themes

For example, sexuality, punishment and freedom

#### c) Influence on New Historicism

In his studies, Foucault challenged preconceived ideas and understandings of concepts such as sexuality, punishment and freedom. In turn, Foucault challenged the critical Historicists use to ground their interpretations and analysis of literature.

#### 2. Summary of Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001)

Greenblatt examines the ghost of Hamlet's father to explore the religious and cultural significance of Purgatory from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance period. Greenblatt addresses the historical and the religious practices surrounding it, and, therefore, the profound effect it had on contemporary audiences.

#### 3. Bloom's criticism of New Historicism

Bloom was renowned for being outspoken, opinionated and incredibly judgemental in his criticism, which he gathered together in what he called his 'School of Resentment', which included Feminists and Marxists, to name but a few. In his ground-breaking text, *The Western Canon*, Bloom criticises New Historicists for – what he perceives as – expanding the literary canon, which he believes. Bloom, New Historicism reduces literature to 'social energies'.

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## Humanism

### 1. A Humanist Reading: Key Questions

Student's own choice of text, but likely questions (each to be made specific to the text they have chosen) include:

1. How does the power of 'x' change as a result of events in the narrative?
2. What education or experiences does 'x' live by, and to what extent do they influence throughout the narrative?
3. To what extent does the moral message of the story reflect Classical teachings?
4. Overall, is the character development a positive or negative journey in the text?

### 2. More's *Utopia*: The Fundamental Ideas

Student's own response and choice of extracts or areas of focus, but some key examples:

1. More's narrator, Raphael Hythloday, argues that thieves should not be sentenced to death; there is no moral education involved in this punishment; instead, it just encourages them to violate one of the Ten Commandments ('do not kill'); therefore, going against Classical teachings.
2. More advocates communal property – encouraging sharing in society, and eradicating dangers that come from monetary value / economic power.
3. Punishment for breaking the law is enslavement, rather than the death penalty, because it is more useful to society.

### 3. Niccolo Machiavelli: *The Prince*

- a) Italian philosopher, writer, and diplomat – serving as a senior official, secretary.
- b) 1532
- c) Machiavelli is warning the reader of the dangers of trying to use theory or idealism; the two are incongruent. This will not enlighten, empower or educate an individual in a world that does not live by the moral code he has learned.
- d) Humanism's practices, especially its adherence to Classical texts and ideologies, and education full of ideals, and not of reality.

### 4. Debate Task

Student's own opinion, interpretation and reading required. However, arguments for:

#### For Humanism

1. Has the power to better individuals, and society as a whole.
2. Empowering movement which does not constrain the individual or limit their potential.

#### Against Humanism

1. Depending on the structure of institutions in society – along with the class system – only the top branches / classes / privileged members of society, hence punishing the greater divide/inequality in society.
2. Humanist ideals can be seen as just that – ideals, which the reality of society and what is happening.

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## Narrative Theory

### 1. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957)

- Archetype: 'The symbol in this phase is the communicable unit, to which I give a typical or recurring image.' (p. 99)
- 'I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and our literary experience.'
- An audience's recognition of an archetype within a text provides meaning – then as Barthes' semic, symbolic and cultural codes.

### 2. Barthes' Narrative Codes

Student's own choice of text – all responses are relevant so long as the student uses key components of the text in line with Barthes' terminology.

### 3. Todorov's Narrative Structure

*The Lord of the Rings*, J R R Tolkien:

- Equilibrium of the Shire
- Disruption as the ring is passed from Bilbo to Frodo, alerting the Nazgûl to its presence
- The quest to destroy the ring begins
- Frodo and Gollum reach Mount Doom to destroy the ring
- The world is destroyed; equilibrium is returned as the evil in Middle Earth is vanquished

*Cinderella*

- Although things are not necessarily happy for Cinderella at the start of the text, normality and routine is established
- The Fairy Godmother appears disrupting the narrative
- Cinderella journeys to the ball, where she meets the Prince and loses her glass slipper
- The Prince rides through the kingdom searching for the maiden the glass slipper
- Equilibrium is established by the marriage of Cinderella and the Prince, providing a new normality

*Romeo and Juliet*

- Although the Capulet and Montague families are in conflict with one another, life and business continues as usual
- Romeo and Juliet's encounter disrupts the norm of the narrative
- Romeo and Juliet begin their quest to be united and married
- The death of Tybalt draws the narrative to its climax, leading to Juliet's 'death'
- Equilibrium is restored and exceeds that depicted at the start of the narrative by restoring peace to the city

*A Christmas Carol*

- We are introduced to the equilibrium of Victorian London, with Scrooge set in his ways
- The arrival of the Ghost of Scrooge's former business partner, Jacob Marley, disrupts the narrative
- Scrooge sets out on a moral quest with the ghosts of Christmases Past, Present and Future
- Scrooge's encounter with his own death draws the narrative to its climax, as he is reborn
- Equilibrium is restored and exceeds that depicted at the start of the narrative, with Scrooge's kindness and generosity

*Of Mice and Men*

- Equilibrium of George and Lennie's travelling partnership is established
- The pair are disrupted by their arrival at their next job
- George and Lennie venture through their employment on the farm, overcoming Lennie's behaviour
- Curley's wife is murdered by Lennie, providing the climax of the narrative
- Although a sad and unfortunate ending, the narrative ends after George shoots Lennie, restoring equilibrium on the farm

### 4. Research task – responses will vary.

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## Postcolonialism

### 1. Wider Reading and Research

- Spivak is an Indian academic and a postcolonial, feminist critic
- 'The Subaltern' refers to an individual who is deemed as 'inferior' in status to the dominant. This can include on counts of gender, race, culture, class, etc. Spivak's 'Subaltern' refers to the silencing of women with female ethnic minorities appearing particularly vulnerable to such silencing

### 2. Postcolonial Readings

Student's own choice of text. All responses relevant so long as they make use of Said's theory and using it to close-read passages from their text. Typical responses to the texts may include:

- Jane Eyre*: Character of Bertha and/or comparison to the character of Jane. Like an exotic animal, descriptions of her 'darkness' and violent nature. Nature of her confinement in her home of Jamaica.
- The Tempest*: Descriptions of Caliban as a savage creature, enslaved to the power of the island and took it from him. Prospero's enforcement of his language and education.
- Heart of Darkness*: Whole text is heavy with descriptions of indigenous people, Marlow's way up the Congo River through the African continent. Marlow's company for its role in brutal murder the natives (whom are referred to by Marlow as 'niggers').

## Semiotics

### 1. Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism began in the late 1960s and seeks to unpick the 'simplicity' and 'stability' of language. The fundamental argument of poststructuralists is that the meaning of a text is indefinitely deferred, and, therefore, any attempt to structure meaning and interpretation limits interpretation itself.

### 2. Saussure: The Signified and Signifier

Student's own response required, but examples may include:

- Gun – Danger; threat, power, violence, injury, murder, etc.
- Crucifix/Christ
- Book – Literature; fiction, knowledge, learning, intelligence, narrative
- Apple

### 3. Kristeva and Semiotics

In her 1984 publication, *The Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva combines her poststructuralist semiotics, creating the term 'semanalysis'. Semanalysis overthrows the sign system of Saussure. Instead of Saussure's signifier and signified, Kristeva uses the 'symbolic' and 'semiotic'. The semiotic represents the emotional side of language, influenced by our bodily responses. The symbolic represents the structured, codified understanding of language. Therefore, semiotics is not a static system and more of a process.

### 4. Jonathan Culler and Semiotics

- Culler champions semiotics, and believes it to be the best framework for literary criticism.
- Culler challenges the belief enforced by New Criticism – that the success of literary criticism is to find new interpretations of texts.
- Students own opinion and response. They may agree, and promote the idea of multiple readings and perspectives on literature. They may also disagree, instead of finding themselves to various differing interpretations, the loss of an exact or precise sense of meaning.

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## Sample Essay Extract 1: A Marxist Reading of *The Great Gatsby*

### 1. Essay annotation

Fitzgerald's presentation of social class in 'The Great Gatsby' is intrinsically linked with the American Dream (AO3), which promised equal opportunity for all Americans, whatever their social background. The novel (AO5) unveils Fitzgerald's presentation of social inequality within the American Dream (AO3). As literary critic Terry Eagleton (AO5) identifies in his 1976 study, 'Marxism as a school of thought can be used to 'analyse the precise relations between different classes and those classes stand in relation to the mode of production'. As a result, reading literary texts through Marxism (AO5) can 'explain the literary work more fully', through an evaluation of the social context. Upon evaluation, the inequality present within society manifests itself in the form of social class. Throughout Fitzgerald's novel, specifically the juxtaposition of East Egg and West Egg, the social divide to understand – is home to the upper classes, who have long occupied powerful positions of extensive hereditary wealth and capital. 'The white palaces' of fashionable East Egg are the home of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, East Egg's most esteemed residents, and (AO2) of the 'old money' which prevails there. Across the bay lies East Egg's 'less fashionable' West Egg – home of the novel's eponymous character, Jay Gatsby, and narrator, Nick Carraway, with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan. Gatsby's home's location 'at the very tip of' West Egg, places him into class divisions, torn between the movement between East Egg's old money, and the newly rich of West Egg, such as Gatsby (AO2). Carraway's position among the two classes is complicated by his status as a descendant of a family of 'well-to-do people' who have lived in the Middle Western city for three generations' (AO2), and his friendship with the newly rich Gatsby. As Fitzgerald reminds us, Carraway remains 'within and without' the complex of the East Ashes, the industrial working-ground of the American working class – the Marxian perspective takes the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smokes', whose dirt and darkness contrast with 'the white palaces' of East Egg's glittering wealth (AO2). (L) Fitzgerald's juxtaposition of the 'placid ash-grey men' with the hedonistic lifestyle of society's upper class – depicted in the novel, serves a stern social critique which aligns itself with Marx's condemnation of the capitalist society (AO5).

### 2. Research Task: Literary Criticism

Student's own research and reading required here. Any piece of recent literary criticism from an academic source is valid, so long as the student shows an understanding of the critic's different interpretation from the reading provided.

### 3. Comparing Texts

Student's own choice of text required here. Again, any choice is valid so long as the student makes a presentation of social class within the novel and makes specific, analytical comparisons between America's working, and upper classes.

## Sample Essay Extract 2: A New Historicist Reading of *Hamlet*

### 1. Essay annotation

(P) Shakespeare's presentation of the supernatural in 'Hamlet' chiefly takes the form of the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father in Act 1, Scene 5 of the play and reveals to Hamlet the circumstances of his own brother's death. (E) From describing the effect of the ghost's appearance, Shakespeare moves to comparing his treacherous brother to a 'serpent' in a biblical allusion to the Fall of Man. The wife's guilty conscience to 'thorn' the 'bosom lodge to prick and sting her', Hamlet's natural imagery throughout the scene (AO2). (E) This form of dramatic irony (AO2) emerges from the circumstances surrounding the 'most unnatural murder', and his brother's 'foul, strange, and untimely' death. Shakespeare's presentation of the supernatural appears a manifestation of (AO2) punishment, with the ghost of Hamlet's father pleading with his son to 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder'. Shakespearean audiences (AO3) were familiar with the concept of the restless dead, business unfinished, or the desire for revenge on behalf of the deceased. However, the particular supernatural figure which Renaissance audiences would have found (AO3) at the start of the scene, Hamlet's father's ghost explains to his son that he is 'Doomed for a time to this fastidious, for the day confined to fast in fires / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are purged and clean'd'. Shakespeare's reference to Hamlet's father trapped 'fast in fires' until the sin of his murder conjures a traditional image of purgatory – a state of eternal, unearthly punishment for the concept of purgatory may have been familiar to Shakespeare's contemporary Renaissance audience. Greenblatt argues in his study (AO5), 'Hamlet in Purgatory', it would have been an unlikely reference at best, given the religious culture of the period. Greenblatt's observation...

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## 2. Integrating Greenblatt's argument

Student's use of quotes here will depend on their own reading and research. However, the key points of Greenblatt's argument, and should, therefore, make reference to a

1. The religious culture of Renaissance England in which the phenomenon of purgatory was central to the Church of England in 1563.
2. The idea that Shakespeare was writing for a Protestant culture, and the appeal of a contrastingly aligned with the Catholic faith.

## Sample Essay Extract 3: Reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

### 1. Narrative Theory

The response illustrates the danger of simply relaying the narrative plot in a descriptive manner. The student uses direct quotations to a) support the argument, and b) illustrate how Coleridge uses language to structure the narrative. Students should be reminded of the importance of always using quotations to support their argument.

### 2. Semiotics

The response indicates a student's knowledge of Saussure's critical theory, and applies it independently to their own interpretation through the analysis of the lighthouse. However, to solidify their use of critical context, the student needs to closely read and expand on the analysis of their featured quotation.

### 3. Feminist Reading

Student's own choice of critic required. However, students should use their theory to analyse how the presentation of femininity may be received by a feminist reader.

## Applying Critical Theory to an Unseen Extract

Student's own choice of focus and critical theory. However, for support, here are several

- **Psychoanalysis:** A consideration of Frankenstein's mental state throughout the extract, and an analysis of his dream.
- **Feminism:** Presentation of the powerful male scientist, compared to the females used in Frankenstein's dream.
- **Marxism:** The least plausible and most difficult of all the critical theories to use in an unseen extract. There could be an argument for a discussion of Frankenstein's social class / standing, and his freedom to perform science, which could eventually lend itself to a consideration of its inferiority / the impossibility of its social mobility.
- **New Historicism:** A consideration of the scientific context of the time, specifically in relation to the study of anatomical study and Galvanic practices.
- **Humanism:** A consideration of the danger of power and knowledge displayed in the character of Frankenstein as the archetypal 'over-reacher'.
- **Narrative Theory:** Consideration of this chapter in relation to the structure of the narrative, as Todorov's 'Disruption', or an analytical reading of Barthesian codes.
- **Postcolonialism:** Plausible consideration of Frankenstein's creature as the colonial 'other', the effect of European knowledge / scientific practice.
- **Semiotics:** A close-reading Saussurean analysis of the various Gothic tropes used by the creature, such as science, monstrosity or death in the extract, through a consideration of The Signifier and the Signified.

## Applying Critical Theory to Your Own Text

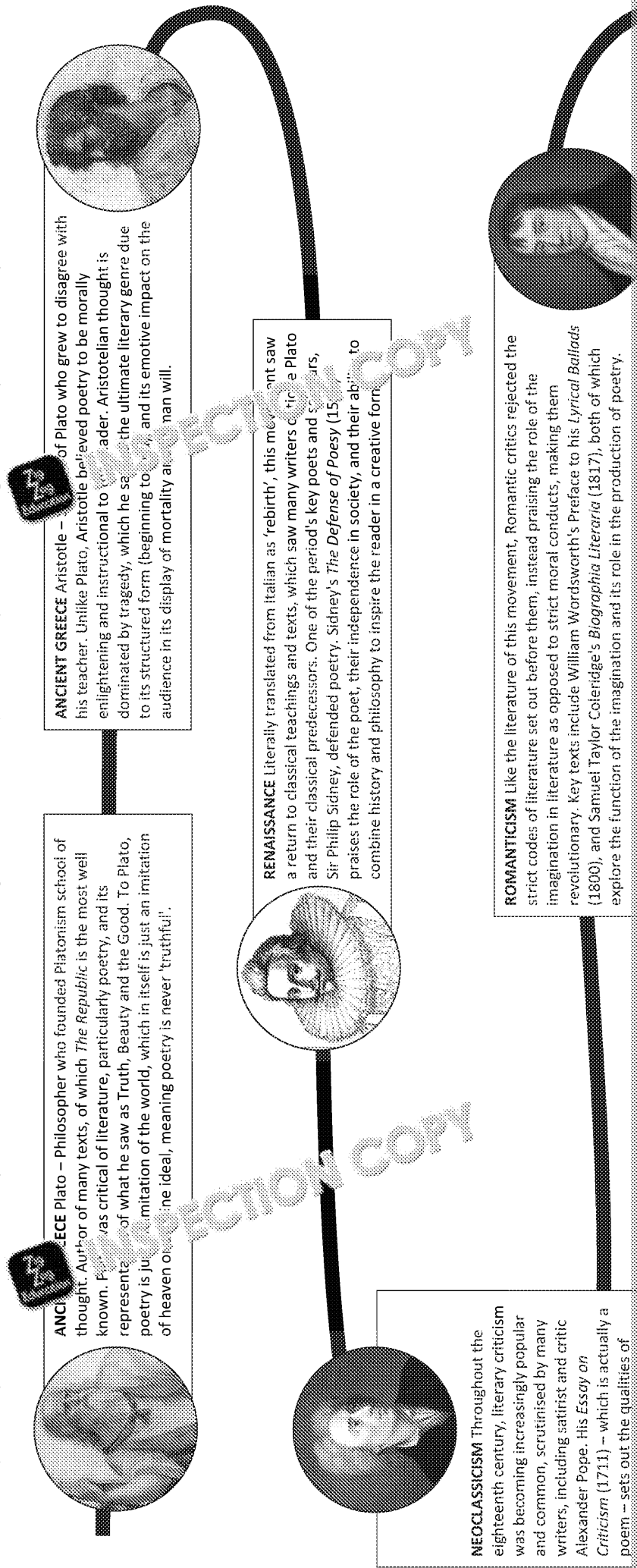
This section is specifically tailored to the student's own text of study, and, therefore, no

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## Timeline of Key Literary Movements

Humans have been practising literary criticism and theory for over two and a half *thousand* years, dating all the way back to philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Here's a brief guide, mapping the journey from the origins of literary criticism to the present day. This includes some of the key movements and thinkers that have emerged, and a brief summary of their theory or school of thought, followed by a timeline of key texts.



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**Zig Zag**  
Education

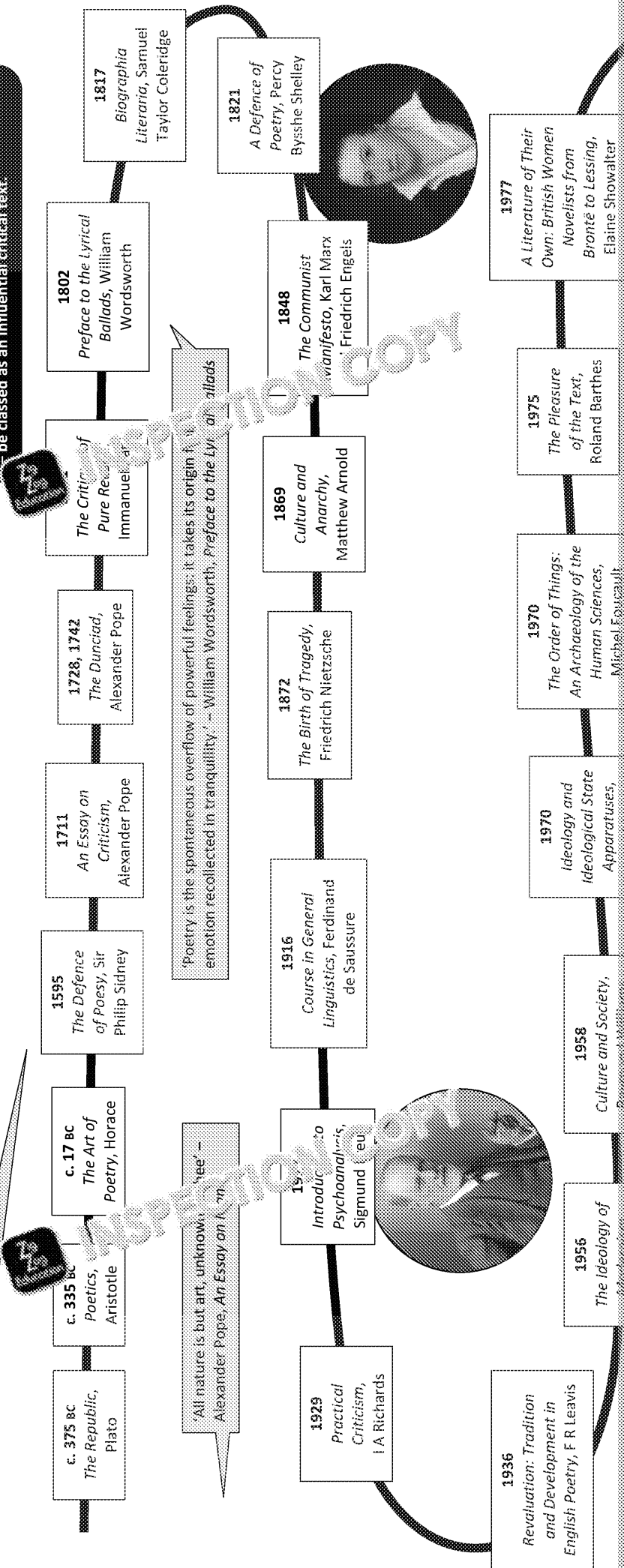
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'... truly neither philosopher nor historiographer could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgments, if they had not taken a great passport of poetry' – Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*

## Timeline of Influential Critical Texts

### Activity

Are there any key texts from the literary canon that you have read or studied that could be added to the timeline? If so, which? Discuss your ideas with a partner, considering why the text(s) can – and should – be classed as an influential critical text.



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## Sigmund Freud

The founder of psychoanalysis and its most famous practitioner, Sigmund Freud, developed psychoanalysis as a means of understanding and treating his patients by analysing their minds and thoughts. As well as treating patients, Freud wrote books and essays on the topic of psychoanalysis, influencing the way the human mind has been understood ever since.

## The image of the psychotherapist

Think about the psychotherapy we see in films or on TV – a patient lying back on a couch explaining their deepest thoughts, childhood memories and dreams to a serious, thoughtful therapist, who nods and jots ideas into a notebook. This cliché image is probably the easiest way to grasp psychoanalysis and is where this type of therapy came from.

## Function and theory of psychoanalysis

Here are a few key points:

- Psychoanalysis focuses mostly on the 'unconscious mind' (thoughts and feelings we are not aware of and cannot control), including instincts, desires, thoughts and memories that we have repressed (pushed 'out' of our mind, forcing ourselves to forget about them)
- Repressed thoughts – and the other things that make up the unconscious mind – do not disappear, but lurk beneath the surface of the 'conscious mind' and still have an impact on it
- The true meaning of someone's words should not be taken at face value, but 'discovered' and then examined by the therapist
- Much of psychoanalysis revolves around sexual desire – how sexual thoughts and emotions are developed and what happens when they are repressed

## Psychoanalysis as literary criticism

Psychoanalysis is usually a far-fetched and 'offensive' way of often a little disturbing. However, it offers an interesting perspective through which we can look into the minds and motivations of writers and their characters and investigate their thoughts and the consequence of the decisions and instincts they reveal.

## Psychoanalysis vs psychoanalytic literary criticism

When talking about psychoanalytic literary criticism, it's important to bear in mind that it is the same as psychoanalysis – the theory and the kind of psychotherapy. Psychoanalysis, in the medical sense, remains a valuable way of investigating the issues troubling a patient and still helps many people work through their problems. However, a lot of Freud's theories specifically have been discredited in the time since his writing, and many critics now find fault with using psychoanalysis to think about literature. So, the question is this: is psychoanalytic literary criticism still relevant?

### No

- One of the main issues, as Eliot points out, is that 'the work of art is treated as a window to the artist's sex-conscious soul' (Introduction, p.1), but even Freud, in his own writing, was

### Yes

- Psychoanalytic literary criticism remains a valuable way of discussing the thoughts, emotions and history that exist within and around texts, as literature and psychoanalysis are two areas that naturally incorporate each other (e.g. Freud connected his famous Oedipus complex from the myth to his patients' relationship

## The unconscious mind

The main focus of psychoanalysis is suppressed desires, instincts and thoughts within the unconscious mind – usually repressed sexual emotions and desires which typically appear in childhood. An important part of psychoanalysis therapy is remembering these memories, confronting them and conquering their damaging nature and effect on the individual.

## A couple of Freud's key ideas (A01)

## How can we use psychoanalysis to think about literature? (A02)

## Key things to remember (A01)

## Leading critics (A01)

## Ernest Jones (1879–1958)

In his essay 'The Oedipus Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery', published in *The American Journal of Psychology* in 1910, Ernest Jones puts forward one of the first – and most influential – examples of psychoanalytic literary criticism. This is one of the most famous essays within this movement, particularly as a Freudian study of a text. He later turned the main issue within it into a book called *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949). In this essay, Jones argues that Hamlet's apparent horror of his mother (seen in the above) and his reluctance to kill her is caused by

## Freud (1856–1939)

Julia Kristeva is an influential psychoanalyst, literary critic and feminist. She has written many books covering a range of topics. Her works include: *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980), and *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991). See interview, A

## Psychosexual development

Freud believed that as children grow and develop, they go through different stages that later influence their mind, character and personality. The most famous of these is the 'Oedipus complex', which Freud believed children develop in the 'phallic stage' of their development between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. Freud's theory states that boys of this age have unconscious sexual desires towards their mother and, because of this, feel guilty and hated towards their father. Freud argues that if they become fixated at this stage in their development, they will experience anxiety surrounding sex and their sexuality throughout their life.

A literary text is a collection of words written by an author. For this reason – just like the therapist analysing every unconscious word behind their patients' words – the psychoanalytic critic investigates the author's written words as a way of uncovering the depths of their unconscious mind. Psychoanalytic literary criticism applies the theory of psychoanalysis to a literary text, with an emphasis on the unconscious mind and the desires behind the author, but their characters and readers. Psychoanalysis is regarded as a critical theory in the early twentieth century, not long after Freud developed his theory. Some of which even seem to have emerged because of literature. For example, Freud's theory was heavily influenced by the tragedian playwright Sophocles, especially the play *Oedipus Rex*.

Analysis is the analysis of the psyche (mind/soul) – focusing on the thoughts, feelings, desires, and emotions of the individual. It is used to learn about an author in the same way a dream could, and we can use what the thoughts, desires, behaviour etc. of a character really mean. Most psychoanalytic theories have been discredited since they were first created – to which we can be an interesting lens through which to analyse literature, you must be able to interpret our interpretations.

## 'The Abject'

An example of Kristeva's theories about psychoanalysis can be seen in her development of the term 'abjection'. Kristeva's theory of 'The Abject' refers to the space between what can be considered the self and the other – our understanding of what is a part of us, and what is not. Abjection is the reaction of horror and confusion that we feel when we are faced with the abject – when our understanding of ourselves 'collapses' because of death, blood, wounds, etc. It represents the things that, as Kristeva puts it, 'show me what I permanently trace aside in order to live – and we therefore feel horror and disgust when we are eventually faced with them' (Kristeva, 1992). The Abject appears in literature for the reader with topics that make us feel abjection through, for example, graphic descriptions of violence. Abjection is also something that psychoanalysts believe that we must face – and

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## Wollstonecraft and Woolf

One of the most important texts in the history of feminist writing is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft – philosopher, writer, and mother of Romantic writer Mary Shelley. Wollstonecraft's text argues for the equality of men and women, particularly in education. Wollstonecraft called for the establishment of mixed-sex schools and emphasised the importance of education for women, their employment, and their ability to financially support themselves. Wollstonecraft was revolutionary in her advocacy of women's rights, and her life and works have inspired many writers and texts, including Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's text addresses the relationship between women and fiction as an 'unsolved' problem that has been complicated by the fact that literature has been dominated by men, with women being denied education and silenced.

## How can we use feminism to think about literature?

Feminist critical theory takes various forms. Writers and critics have chosen to analyse the representation of women in literature and the works of female writers, and to evaluate the impact of the feminist movement on literature. Critically, it challenges the long-standing dominance of the literary canon by male writers, as well as the presentation and critique of women in their literature.

2. Consider and compare the following quotations. What might these tell us about the evolution of feminist thought and attitudes among female writers? (AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4)

'I do not wish [women] to have power over men, but over themselves.' – Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792)

'Literature is for everyone [...]. I lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.' – Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*, 1929)

## The Feminist Movement: A Timeline (AO3)

1913  
Activist Emily Davison is killed after walking in front of King George V's horse at the Epsom Derby in an act of protest against gender inequality, and in campaigning for a woman's right to vote

1918  
Women over the age of 30 are given the right to vote in the UK general election under the Representation of the People Act – provided a woman or her husband owns property. Crystal Eastman, an American lawyer and journalist, defends a woman's right to birth control in an article published in the *Birth Control Review*.

1928  
UK voting age for women is lowered from 30 to 21

1944  
Enactment of the Civil Rights Act in the USA – outlawing discrimination

1946  
The National Organization for Women

## Waves

The feminist movement has been categorised into four movements, known as 'waves'.

Feminism is the ideology that men and women are equal – not just socially, but personally, politically and economically. Throughout history, women have been viewed in society – and consequently in literature – as being inferior to men. Although the turn of the twentieth century has marked a great change, particularly due to the work of gender activists and feminists throughout the world, there is still lots of work to be done to secure gender equality.



## What is Feminism? (AO1)

## Fourth Wave

Sparked by the 2010s – including #MeToo – and the United Nations 'He for She' gender equality campaign – this fourth wave is still flourishing, driven by online influences and social media.

## Feminist Food for Thought

In feminist critical theory...  
2. What is 'the feminine mystique'? (AO1 and AO3)  
3. Who is Germaine Greer? What is her most notable work? Why is she seen as a controversial figure in the feminist movement? (AO3)

## Leading Critics (AO1)

## Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986)

French philosopher, social theorist, and feminist activist Beauvoir made her mark on the feminist movement with the publication of her text *The Second Sex* (1949). Emphasising the oppression of women and the power of feminism to liberate not only women, but men also, Beauvoir's text remains a landmark in feminist critical theory.

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## Wider Reading: More Gears in the Marxist Machine (NO1)

While Marxism may be the namesake of just one person, countless philosophers, critics and political thinkers have contributed to the ideologies and language that keep the machinery of Marxism turning. Here are a few of the key concepts, terms and thinkers associated with the Marxist movement since its inception. Do some research and then copy and complete the information below.

\* German philosopher, journalist, historian and sociologist Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) was \_\_\_\_\_.

\* \_\_\_\_\_, developed by \_\_\_\_\_ philosopher Georg Lukács (1885–1971), this critical theory states that literature should be an objective form through which the writer can explore the struggles of society without transferring their political bias or affiliations. As a result, literature can present a true reality that can be \_\_\_\_\_ by the reader, and enlighten them.

\* 'The class struggle, which is always present to a historical age', influenced by Marx, is a fight for \_\_\_\_\_.

— On the Concept of History (1940), \_\_\_\_\_

\* Louis Althusser (1918–90): *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970). Althusser's text: \_\_\_\_\_.

## Raymond Williams (1921–1988)

Raymond Williams has contributed greatly to Marxist literary theory, developing it as a critical movement through the publication of many popular and influential essays and books.

In his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977), he states that Marxism is something that is constantly changing, having 'openness and flexibility' (p. 1). He explains that he has 'freed' himself from the 'model of fixed and known Marxist positions', seeing them as fluid and ever-changing. Williams examines the development of Marxism and the concepts that have been studied and introduced as a result of Marxist studies, including 'culture' and 'ideology' (p. 5). In his book, Williams explores Marxism's relation to theories about culture and literature in a concise way. Meanwhile, he analyses the development of ideas within Marxist theory, studying the ideas of Marx and other Marxists separately and critically.



**Marxism** – as its name plainly tells us – is the philosophy that emerged from the writing of famous nineteenth-century thinker Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx's theories were laid out in works such as *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and his large 'bible of the working class', *Capital* (1867). They centre on the often-ignored experience of the working class (the 'proletariat') – the lowest rung of the social order, made up of unskilled workers who work on the land and in factories. Working-class people who do not benefit financially from their labour have little power in a society driven by the creation of wealth (or 'capital'). These are the foundations of a 'capitalist' system – where power is held by the wealthy, and the 'means of production' are held by private owners rather than the government. Capitalism is the main form of European society, even to this day.

In his writing, Marx argues for a society instead – a society which allows for greater social equality by removing the class system and the means of production are owned by the community, where each person has a role to play. Marx believed a communist revolution would eventually be brought by a struggle between the social classes, resulting in a working-class revolution. As it is rooted in a social movement and ideology, Marxism can be seen as a way of understanding the world, and a way of changing it.

## What is Marxism? (NO1)

While Marx's theory is political and economic in orientation, literary critics have now adopted Marxism as a means of considering the presentation of society in literary texts, and the relationship between power and class in literature. In this way, Marxist readings use the historical context of a text to understand the 'ideologies' that underpin and 'influence' a literary text. Some Marxist critics, such as Georg Lukács, take this one step further by comparing the presentation of social reality in literature to the social reality of the world in which the text was written, i.e. assessing a text's 'social realism'.

## Reading literature: The Marxist Method (NO2)

## Marxism: A Timeline (NO3)

## Application

So, what does all this look like in practice? Well, when you conduct a Marxist reading of a text, you'll want to answer the following questions:

- \* What is the class system of the text?
- \* What institutions provide structure in the text (e.g. government, education, economy, etc.) and how do they use this as a means of controlling, ruling or running society?
- \* What power do the characters have (if any), and how do they hold onto and use this power? Particularly, how do they use this to hold power over individuals/groups in society?

1. Are there any texts you have read that you feel lend themselves to a Marxist reading? If so, which? With a partner, write down both your chosen texts, followed by a few lines stating why you chose each particular text, including the key analytical points that underpin your Marxist reading of the text. (AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5)

2. a) Read an excerpt from, or summary of, Warren Montag's 1991 essay 'The Workshop of Filthy Creation: A Marxist Reading of Frankenstein'.

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## Stephen Greenblatt (1943–present)

Stephen Greenblatt has been credited with establishing and popularising the New Historicism movement, along with critics such as Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson and Marilyn Butler. Greenblatt's historicist interests circulate around the Renaissance period, particularly the works of William Shakespeare – as seen in his publications: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1987), and *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001).

In 2000, Greenblatt and his colleague Catherine Gallagher published *Practicing New Historicism*, in which they lay out the theoretical foundations of New Historicism. One of the chapters in the study is titled 'The Touch of the Real' – a phrase that dives right to the heart of Greenblatt's historicist approach. As Greenblatt reminds us, New Historicism is interested in only the truth:

**'We wanted to find in the past real bodies and living voices, and if we knew that we could not find the truth, we would at least seize upon those traces that seemed to be close to actual experience.'** – *Practicing New Historicism*, p. 30

Greenblatt uses the phrase 'The Touch of the Real' repeatedly throughout his career to embody the principles of New Historicism. These principles see the new historicist using specific details (or 'anecdotes'), and acknowledging contradictions at work in both literature and history. That way, the new historicist avoids making large, sweeping statements that generalise a whole time period, or the attitudes of its society.

**2. Research Greenblatt's text *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001). Write a short summary of Greenblatt's argument, emphasising the role New Historicism plays in his analysis of Shakespeare's play and the culture in which it was written. (AO1 and AO2)**

New historicists have had to face the same criticism from scholars that psychoanalysts have, with many claiming that the practice of New Historicism takes too narrow an approach to literature. There is some danger in analysing aspects of a text in relation to whole historic periods, especially considering the distance between the text and the time from which it originates, and the critic themselves. Critiques of New Historicism to bear in mind when using this critical lens include:

- All history is subjective to the author who tries to portray it in their text, the contemporary reader who tries to interpret such a presentation, and the

Like history, New Historicism itself has a past. While New Historicism originated in the 1980s, literary critics have been practising historicism for over 400 years. In a similar way to Marxist literary critics, historicists consider to what extent a text reflects the time in which it was written. However, while new historicists also believe literature is a product of a particular moment, unlike their predecessors, they not only consider the time in which it was produced, but the time in which it is being critiqued. New historicists believe history is but subjective, i.e. defined by our own interpretation, which, in itself, is a product of culture and time in which we ourselves live.

### Renaissance (c. 1550–1660)

Key New Historicist: Stephen Orgel (1933–present)

Their Key Publications

- *The Illusion of Power* (1975)
- *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (1996)
- *Imagining Shakespeare* (2003)

### Romanticism (c. 1790–1850)

Key New Historicist: Marilyn Butler

Their Key Publications:

- *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975)
- *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760–1830* (1981)

Research Task: Michel Foucault and New Historicism

Critiquing New Historicism: How can we use it to think about literature? (AO2)

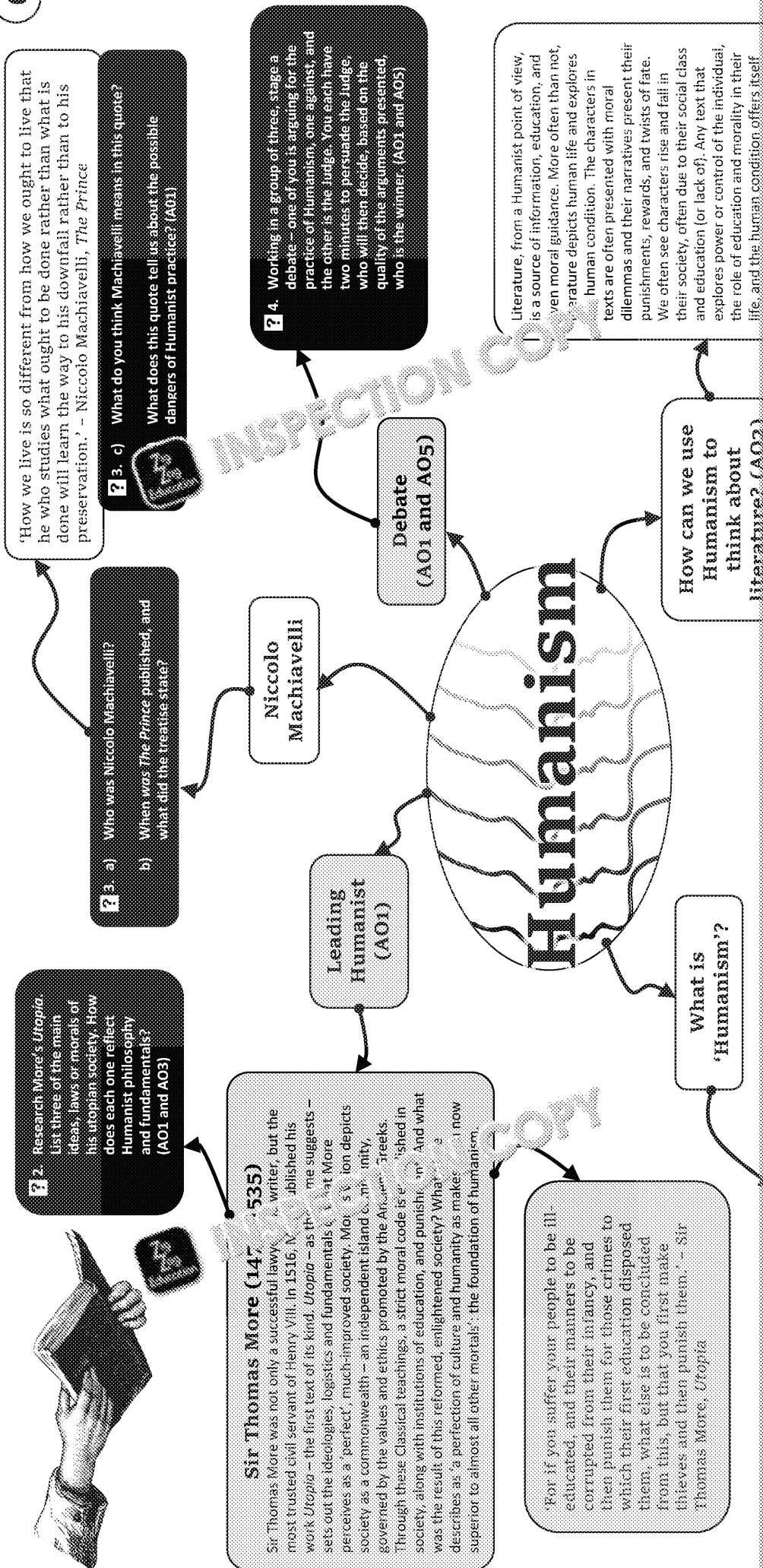
Leading Critic (AO1)

## New Historicism

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Narrative theory, or 'narratology', is the study and critique of narrative. This critical study can be applied to many forms, such as literature, art and film. Narrative theory evaluates the structure, role and importance of narrative in a text. Narratology is also closely associated with the school of structuralism – the study of human connection, from language and symbols, to signs, clothes, and beyond. In this way, narrative theorists use a structuralist approach to consider how the language and structure of narratives communicate meaning and understanding to audiences. French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2006) was the first to unite structuralism and narratology. To Lévi-Strauss, every aspect of life – from our minds, to society, to the way we operate and communicate – is a structure, part of a greater system.



**What is Narrative Theory? (AO1)**

# Narrative Theory

**Reader Reading (AO1)**

**1. a) What is Frye's definition of an archetype?**

**b) According to Frye's definition, what is the purpose of an archetype?**

**c) How does Frye's archetype relate to Barthes' theory of narrative codes?**

Read the second essay of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), titled 'Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols' (accessible online). Find the section in which Frye discusses what he calls an 'archetype'.

While narrative theory of course informs our understanding of a text's narrative, there are many elements within and around the narrative that influence our understanding of it. Through narratology, we identify, analyse and critique the following:

- The narrative's structure and order, as seen through the sequence of events
- The progression of the narrative, and the effect this has on us as readers
- How meaning is shaped within the narrative, i.e. the codes, conventions and archetypes used within it to inform our understanding of current and future events
- The qualities that are shared or differ among narratives from either the same genre, form, time period, literary movement or author

**How can we use narrative theory to think about literature? (AO2)**

**Izvetan Todorov (1939–2017)**

Tzvetan Todorov was an influential Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic and historian. Todorov's narratology derived from his study of fairy tales, in which he identified a clear narrative structure that ... is follow.

**Todorov's Narrative Structure**

Like Barthes' codes, Todorov's narrative structure consists of five parts. The order of the narrative is as follows:

1. **Equilibrium** – All narratives start in a state of 'equilibrium' – a peaceful state in which all is well
2. **Disruption** – The text's equilibrium is disrupted by a character or event
3. **Quest** – The main character, usually with help from others, ventures on a quest or journey to help restore the equilibrium
4. **Climax** – The events and actions of the quest reach maximum intensity, usually drawn to a close by the successful completion of the quest or task at hand
5. **Resolution** – Equilibrium is restored, usually providing the 'happy-ever-after' ending

**Leading Critics (AO1 and AO3)**

**Roland Barthes (1915–1980)**

French essayist and critic Roland Barthes has left his mark on schools of thought throughout literary and social criticism. In terms of narratology, Barthes

**Barthes' Literary Codes**

1. **Hermeneutic Code:** The mystery of the text. These are clues, questions or enigmas that arise in a text which keep the reader guessing and searching for an answer. Not all hermeneutic codes are resolved, which can be frustrating for readers.
2. **Proairetic Code:** These codes refer to the actions or events that drive the narrative forward, creating tension and suspense as the reader is left anticipating the sequence.
3. **Semic Code (Resonance):** 'Semic' derives from semantic, which refers to 'meaning'. This is the code that refers to the small details from which we gather meaning as an audience. It can be as small as an object, or it can be a character, or a place, which helps establish greater meaning within the narrative.
4. **Symbolic Code (Symbolic):** As the name suggests, the symbolic codes are narrative features that symbolise

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In this exploration, we may ask the following questions:

- What cultures are presented in the text, and how are they presented?
- Does the author make use of any colonial stereotypes – e.g. the Other?
- How is identity determined in the text – do gender, religion, cultural beliefs, etc. play a significant role?
- How is the relationship between cultures presented?
- Are any characters/groups oppressed? If so, who is silenced, and who holds the power in the text?
- How is power, control or authority exercised or determined in the text? Is it through language, economy, property, class, status, education, etc.?
- Does historical context play a role in the text? Is it informed by historical acts of colonisation?

Postcolonial readings provide the opportunity to 'rewrite' literature. As modern-day readers, we now have the knowledge to reconsider literature, and give a voice to those who have been left absent from important narratives. As a postcolonial society, we can use the historical contexts of the time to explore themes such as morality, ethics, racism, colonialism and power.

**How can we use postcolonialism to think about literature? (AO2)**

### Homi Bhabha (1949–present)

Indian English scholar Homi Bhabha is one of the most influential figures in postcolonial theory. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) his most notable text – Bhabha coins several concepts that have come to define the language of postcolonial theory. These concepts refer to the relationship between the coloniser and 'the Other' – a term used throughout postcolonial discourse to refer to the colonised individual.

With 'post' meaning 'after', and 'colonialism' meaning the acquisition and exploitation of a colony (country), postcolonialism is a theoretical study that analyses representations of colonial relations in literature. More often than not, postcolonial critiques focus on the contrasting presentation of 'the coloniser' (usually a white, European or Western empire or force) and 'the colonised' (the indigenous inhabitants of regions such as Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East) in literature. These readings often focus on depictions of the cruel and violent enslavement of such regions by British and European forces during the period of the Atlantic slave trade, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. This movement saw the transportation of over 12 million Africans from their home, to the 'New World' – the western hemisphere, including the Americas, Europe and the British Empire.

Postcolonialists examine the implications of colonialism and its impact on a country's infrastructure and people, including the hierarchy and power principles it establishes. Critics of this branch are particularly interested in how colonialism helped establish the superiority of Western cultures in history, and the consequential writing of history and literature from their perspective alone. As a result, many postcolonialists work towards the 'rewriting' of colonial texts, and seek to correct the stereotypical depictions of other cultures in these works – restoring the voice of cultures that were silenced and oppressed individuals.

**What is Postcolonialism? (AO1)**

**Wider Reading and Research (AO1)**

**Recommended Reading (AO4)**

**Leading Critics (AO1)**

**? 1. a) Who is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak?**

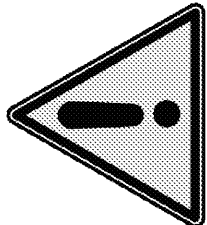
**b) Define Spivak's theory of 'the subaltern'**

- *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Salman Rushdie (1995)
- *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe (1958)
- *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison (1992)
- *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo (2019)
- *Queenie*, Candice Carty-Williams (2019)

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Semiotics, or semiology, derives from the Greek word 'semeion', meaning 'sign'. As you can guess, semiotics, then, is the **study of signs or signals**. While this can apply to practical, fundamental signs in our society – anything from road signs to warning signs – in terms of literary analysis, semiology relates to the author's use of images and symbols to translate a greater meaning. This branch of critical theory is interested in the way signs convey meaning, and the knowledge and conventions we need to understand such meaning. This understanding depends on two factors – concepts that Swiss linguist and lecturer Ferdinand de Saussure names the 'signifier' and the 'signified'.

'A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas' – Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916)

What are Semiotics? (AO1)

How can we use semiotics to think about literature? (AO2 and AO4)

Semiology is fundamental to the way we understand an author's use of symbolism, imagery, and linguistic devices. It's also fundamental to situating a text in relation to others of the same genre, literary movement or form. For example, if you were to analyse the semiology of several Gothic texts, you would most likely find the

**Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)**  
In 1916, three years after Saussure's death, his students gathered together their notes from his lectures and published them as *Course in General Linguistics* – uniting all Saussure's teachings and theories in one publication. At the heart of this text lies the fundamental principles of both semiotics, and the theoretical school of structuralism.

Leading Critics (AO1)

**Jonathan Culler (1944–present)**

In 1981, American literary critic and academic Jonathan Culler published *The Pursuit of Signs* – the groundbreaking text in which Culler investigates to what extent a semiology of literature can be established. Here is an extract from the Preface to the 2001 edition of his text for Routledge Classics:

*'I champion the prospect of a semiology, a systematic science of signs, as the best framework for literary studies. Second, I argue that a major obstacle to the semiological project is the legacy of Anglo-American New*

**The Signified and the Signifier**  
Saussure's theory states that a sign is made up of two parts – and *only* when the two components combine does the sign carry meaning we understand. The first is the 'signifier' – this is the thing itself. It can be an image, a symbol, a drawing, a photo, or even just the word. Signifiers are meaningless without their 'signified' – the meaning or importance behind what is signified. That the signifier has its signified, the two have now joined into a 'sign' – an entity we can now derive meaning from and attach importance to. For example, the word or image of a rose is a 'signifier', but what's 'signified' goes beyond the rose itself – to flowers; nature; beauty, romance, passion, and beyond.

**1. Using what you now know about Saussure's theory, copy and complete the table below using your understanding of the following signs and their symbolic meaning in literature. (AO1 and AO2)**

Signifier	Signified
Gun	Crucifixion; faith, religion, sacrifice, morality
Book	Fruit; health, Garden of Eden / Eve / temptation, knowledge

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