Critical Lenses

Using Multiple Perspectives to Examine Texts
Definitions to understand:

- **Critical:**
  - 1) Inclined to judge severely and find fault
  - 2) Characterized by careful, exact evaluation and judgment: *a critical reading*

- **Lens:**
  - 1) A piece of transparent substance, usually glass...for magnification, or in correcting defects of vision
  - 2) A channel through which something can be seen or understood; “She was studying the writing through the lens of a FBI agent.” **Think perspective!** *(Metaphor)*
Let’s put these definitions together...

- Critical + Lens =
  Careful, exact evaluation and judgement

  +

A channel through which something can be seen or understood

= CRITICAL LENS
Marxist Critical Lens

(Marxist Criticism)
Karl Marx

- May 5, 1818–March 14, 1883
- German-Jewish philosopher, political economist, sociologist, humanist, political theorist, revolutionary, and icon
Friedrich Engels

- 28 November 1820 – 5 August 1895
- German social scientist and philosopher, who developed communist theory alongside his better-known collaborator, Karl Marx, co-authoring *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).
Marxist Critical Lens Claim 1:

- The evolving history of humanity, its institutions and its ways of thinking are determined by the changing mode of its “material production” - that is, it’s basic economic organization.

- **Said simply:** Our history, our traditions, things we have set up in our world, and the way we think are shaped by materialism and economics (money).

Direct quotes from: Classroom Activities-Literary Theories: A Sampling of Critical Lenses
Marxist Critical Lens Claim 2:

- Historical changes in the fundamental mode of production affect essential changes both in the constitution and power relations of social classes, which carry on a conflict for economic, political, and social advantage.

- **Said simply**: Changes in society’s economic production affect our constitution and power-relations.
Marxist Critical Lens Claim 3:

- A Marxist critic typically undertakes to “explain” the literature in any era by revealing the economic, class, and ideological determinants of the way an author writes, and to examine the relation of the text to the social reality of that time and place.

- **Said simply:** When analyzing writing and the persona or viewpoint of the author, a Marxist critic would look at parts of society and economics to determine what perspective a writer is coming from.
Marxist Lens in a nutshell…

- Focuses on power and money in works of literature
- Who has the power/money?
- Who does not have power/money?
- Who is in the “upper class” and who is not?
- What happens as a result?
In the early United States of America, young policeman Ichabod Crane is sent from New York to the fledgling settlement of Sleepy Hollow to investigate a series of ghoulish murders. On his arrival, the town council informs him that the three victims were killed in open ground, and the heads had disappeared - taken by a headless ghost that is supposedly responsible. Ichabod is unconvinced of this, but learns more about the ghostly horseman - it is the ghost of a Hessian sent by the British during the revolutionary war, and he was caught by Redcoats and decapitated with his own sword. When Ichabod sees the ghost kill one of the town council members, his skepticism evaporates - and he soon discovers that the horseman's ghost has an unholy connection to Balthus Van Tassel, a wealthy farmer - and whose daughter Ichabod is falling in love with. -imdb.com
The Legend of Sleepy Hollow through a Marxist Lens:

- If you were looking at *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* through a Marxist lens, it could be said that the story is about the upper class attempting to maintain their power and influence over the lower class by chasing Ichabod, a lower class citizen with aspirations toward the upper class, out of town. This would explain some of the numerous descriptions of land, wealth, and hearty living through Ichabod’s eyes.
(Feminist Criticism)

A Feminist: Anyone who thinks women and men should have equal rights.
Feminist Critical Lens Claim 1:

- Our civilization is pervasively patriarchal.

- **Said simply:** Our society is basically run by men.
Feminist Critical Lens Claim 2:

- The concepts of “gender” are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs, affected by omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization.

  **Said simply:** What we think of to be “boyish” or “girly” is determined by ways of thinking in our culture and men's views toward certain things.
Feminist Critical Lens Claim 3:

- The patriarchal ideology also pervades those writings that have been considered great literature. Such works lack autonomous female role models, are implicitly addressed to male readers, and leave the woman reader an alien outsider or else solicit her to identify herself by assuming male values...

- **Said simply:** The way men think is what we find in our books and texts. What we read often lacks good female role models and asks females to take on male values.

Direct quotes from: Classroom Activities-Literary Theories: A Sampling of Critical Lenses
Feminist Lens in a nutshell...

- Cultural and economic “disabilities” of women have hindered or prevented women from realizing their creative possibilities...

- Somewhat like the Marxist lens - but instead of focusing on relationships between the classes, it focuses on the relationships between the genders.

- Examines relationship between the power that men hold and the power that women hold.

- Questions if this power is equal and if it gives advantage to one sex (males).

Direct quotes from: Classroom Activities-Literary Theories: A Sampling of Critical Lenses
“Everybody Loves Raymond” Through a Feminist Lens

- Have you seen it on T.V.?

- If this text (show) was being analyzed through a feminist lens, it could be said the show is very patriarchal. Raymond, while somewhat of an idiot, almost always ends up on top and he is the “head of the family.” All attention is focused on him and he is even in the center of this picture.
Archetypal Critical Lens

(Archetypal Criticism)

Archetypal: the original pattern or model from which all things of the same kind are copied or on which they are based; a model or first form; a prototype.
Archetypal Critical Lens in a nutshell...

- The definition of “archetype” is an: original pattern or model from which all things of the same kind are copied or on which they are based; a model or first form; a prototype.

- In literature, an archetype is a certain character type or image that we see in a wide variety of works of literature/texts. For example: the death/rebirth theme, the search for the father theme, the fatal woman theme (femme fatale). Any others?
“Little Red Riding Hood” through an archetypal lens:

- Normally, “Little Red Riding Hood” is just a fairy tale that we have all heard countless times...
- Looking at “Little Red Riding Hood” through an archetypal lens, however, one could say that Little Red Riding Hood’s attempts to “accidentally” meet the wolf really signify her “search for her father.”
  (Theme: The search for the father)
Reader-Response Critical Lens

(Reader-Response Criticism)
Reader-Response Critical Lens in a nutshell...

- Does not use one particular critical theory
- Focuses on the activity of reading a work of literature
- Tracks the actual responses of readers as they read the text
- Plot, structure, characters, style, etc. are LESS important than the reader’s experience and connection with the text.
- People bring their own thoughts, moods and experiences to whatever text they are reading.
“Deck the Halls” through a Reader-Response Lens:

- People may connect to this song (text) in different ways.
- This song may remind someone of decorating the Christmas tree with their family or it could even remind someone of something negative they went through.
- Readers bring their own experiences and react to the song in different ways.