



Critical Lenses for British Literature

What are critical lenses?

Critical lenses are a way to focus reading to examine a text in regards to to the criteria of that lens. For example, the feminist critical lense examines how a text addresses women.

Our lenses this year

We will be examining literature through five critical lenses:

- Feminism (sexism)
- Marxism (economics)
- Warrior code
- Religion
- Racism

Feminism (sexism)

This lens examines a text's look at women.

Key questions to ask when looking at a text through a feminist lens:

- Are women submissive or dominant? How? Where?
- Are there stereotypes of women?

Stereotype of women 1

These are your good girls:

- generally married, if not a she will be a virgin
- dutiful to husband
- subordinate
- gives advice to husband out of sight of others
- pretty
- dignified

Stereotype of women 2A

2A: The monster:

- Hypermasculinized
- Fierce/scary/ugly
- Sexual(?)
- Unmerciful and fights “dirty”

Stereotype of women 2B

2B: The Bitch

- Hypersexualized- uses sex as a weapon to bring good men down from moral high ground.
- Independent
- Speaks her mind
- Usually seen as a slut or a hag
- No morals as compared to a man
- foul mouth-curses

Marxism

Money makes the world go round.... this lens examines the economics in a text.

Key questions to ask when looking at a text through this critical lens:

- Who has the money/power?
- Is there an economic structure?
- How do greaters/lessers get money?
- What earns money?
- Is the system fair?
- Who benefits most?

The Warrior Code

This examines the unwritten code that warriors (men) hold as virtuous and manly. This code has several significant criteria:

- Self-Control
- Brave
- Honest
- Moral
- Acts

Beowulf 263-334

The Warrior Code: Self- Control

In the Warrior Code the warrior always is in control, not only of his actions and words, but in his emotions.

The Warrior Code: Bravery

In the Warrior Code the warrior does not run from a fight, he runs to it, especially if there is a noble cause.

The Warrior Code: Honesty

The warrior dictates the warrior must be honest and true. He cannot embellish a story, nor can he diminish it. He cannot “false crack” someone, even if they deserve it, but must challenge them to a fight.

The Warrior Code: Morality

A warrior has a moral code that encompasses many to all aspects of their life, from the way they treat women, to economics, to behaviors with those above and below their social standing. It can even include religious practices.

The Warrior Code: Action

The Warrior is a man of action. He does not just talk the talk, he walks the walk. In fact he would rather act than talk.

Religion

This lens examines the text and the relationship between the supernatural and natural, as well as formalized religions, and their role in society.

Some key questions to consider when looking at a text through this lens:

- Is there a supernatural world? How and why does it exist?
- Is there a formal religion(s)? What is the relationship between the gods and humans?
- What actions get one into heaven?

Racism (Not us -ism)

This looks at a text's examination of outsiders, maybe of different races, but basically anyone who is “not us”.

Some key questions to consider when looking at a text through this lens:

- What makes the person/character and outsider? Race? Religion? Language? Family? Looks?
- What is the reaction of the “us”(insider) to the outsider?
- Does the outsider become an insider? why or why not?