Teaching

Classic Literature

from

Multiple Critical Perspectives

A SAMPLER

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All of our Multiple Critical Perspectives Lesson Guides contain:
- *brief overview of the work;*
- *brief explanations of the three critical perspectives used in the Guide;*
- *two or three activities to approach the work from each perspective;*
- *discussion questions pertaining to each perspective;*
- *essays and writing assignments pertaining to each perspective.*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO *FRANKENSTEIN*

GENRE: Gothic

Introductions include features like plot summaries, character descriptions, social and historical background for the work, etc.

Frankenstein is an example of a very early Romantic novel. It is told as a retrospective in letters, complete with stories within stories.

The narrator of the story is a young adventurer, Robert Walton, who meets an older scientist, Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein narrates his story, which Walton writes in letters home.

There are certain style points in the story that indicate it was written at a time when the art of the novel was still beginning to take shape. Unlike modern stories, *Frankenstein* has very little dialogue. When characters speak (and there are really only three characters that contribute the bulk of the text) it is in chapter form, not the back—and—forth banter we are familiar with today. Most of the information the

reader receives is through exposition by the narrator of that particular section, not through exchanges between the characters.

Another style point is that the language of the characters is not conversational. Even in the brief moments of dialog, the characters …

Marxist Criticism applied to *The Awakening*

NOTES ON THE MARXIST APPROACH

The Marxist approach to literature is based on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist. His major argument was that the means of production in society controlled the society—whoever owned the factories "owned" the culture. This idea was called "dialectical materialism," and Marx felt that the history of the world was leading toward a communist society.

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Every Critical Perspective addressed in the Guide is explained in clear and simple terms for both the teacher's and students' convenience.

Marxism is linked to Freudian theories by its concentration on the subconscious—Freud dealt with the individual subconscious, while Marx dealt with the political subconscious. Marx believed that oppression exists in the political subconscious of a society—social pecking orders are inherent to any group of people.

Four main areas of study:

- economic power
- materialism versus spirituality
- class conflict
- art, literature, ideologies

. . . . . .

Activity Three: Examining Edna's awakening as a rejection of bourgeoisie values

A. Have students skim the book, paying special attention to Robert's reason for smoking cigarettes and not cigars (Chapter 2), Leonce Pontellier's offhand and casual way of handling money (Chapter 3), Leonce Pontellier's attitude toward his house and

possessions, the description of the Pontelliers' lifestyle, and Edna's initial rebellion against it (Chapter 17), …

Activities combine small group work, individual work, class discussion, rereading of key passages, small-group and full-class discussion as well as occasional writing assignments.

B. Divide the class into groups to compare what they have found and to develop a thesis about Edna's ….

C. Reconvene the class. Have individual groups share their theses, and then, as a class, discuss the end of the novel in terms of ….

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does Chopin's portrayal of the middle-class Creole society illustrate the Marxist principal that society is not based on ideals or abstractions, but on things?

. . . . . .

Discussion questions and writing assignments provide a wrap-up to the study of the work from each perspective.

Do other types of criticism—feminist, psychoanalytic, or others—overlap the Marxism?

After reading this text, do you notice any system of oppression that you have accepted? If so, what system, and how do you think you came to accept it?

ESSAYS OR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Each of the above three activities results in the development of a thesis for discussion. Have your students choose one or more of these theses and write an essay supporting the chosen thesis, using support from the novel and class discussion. NOTE: a few of the above topics invite some degree of research as well, so any of the above writing topics can be expanded into a research project.

Each Guide approaches the work from three different perspectives. By using an assortment of Prestwick House Multiple Critical Perspectives Lesson Guides *for the titles you teach, you will expose your students to the vast array of thought that makes the study of literature so rich and exciting.*