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THEORIZING THE ELA CLASSROOM: EXAMINING THE THEORETICAL
FOUNDATIONS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM AND ANALYZING
TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND ATTITUDES TOWARD LITERARY THEORY

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THEORIZING THE ELA CLASSROOM: EXAMINING THE THEORETICAL
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Abstract:

This thesis studies the theoretical frameworks that govern the secondary English language Arts classroom, and the reasons why those frameworks often go unseen by both teachers and students in the classroom. By considering the historical development of literary studies as it intersects with secondary English language arts, an argument is made against using a monological theoretical perspective in the classroom by explicating recent movements to include intentional instruction of literary theory in the secondary ELA curriculum. This “multiple perspectives” approach provides a new framework for reading, interpreting, and analyzing literature from a variety of worldviews and ideologies. This thesis then details a study that was conducted regarding the knowledge and attitudes that secondary ELA teachers might have about using literary theory in their own classrooms. The findings are discussed and related to the larger argument for using multiple perspectives before ideas for future research are detailed. Lastly, ideas and resources for implementing such a curriculum are discussed briefly in both general terms and for me specifically.

Chapter 1: The Problem

1. For some reason, there is a reluctance to adopt intentional instruction of literary theory and criticism into the Oklahoma secondary English language arts (ELA) curriculum, even though evidence has shown that it increases student engagement and understanding, as seen in [Appleman (2015), Eckert (2006), Eckert (2008), Moran (1990) Schade (1996), Sullivan (2002), Wilson (2014)].
2. This reluctance is problematic because the current theoretical bases of the secondary ELA classroom are not adequate for providing students with a broad understanding of what literature is and can mean. Instead, students are given the option of going along with “correct” readings provided by the teacher or the option to try to find the text’s meaning within themselves divorced from another context. This issue is especially worrying when considering how multicultural and non-canonical literature are presented for interpretation and analysis.

Students often do not understand why they are required to study literature because literary study is decontextualized in the secondary English language arts (ELA) classroom, and students are not privy to the theoretical perspectives that provide contexts which might make literary study engaging. This leads to disengagement in the ELA classroom, since students have been trained to ingest particular responses from their teachers only to regurgitate them onto a test at a later date. ELA teachers are not to blame for this – the consequences of standardized testing bleed through all disciplines – but the traditional approaches to teaching literature in the ELA classroom do not do the teachers or the students any favors. Fundamentally, a lack of explicitness in literary interpretation and analysis instruction prevents students from truly understanding the possibilities of interpretation and meaning making by either shutting them completely out of the process or by focusing so narrowly on emotional reaction to the point of erasing other opportunities for meaning. Without clear instruction in literary theory, its purposes, and its uses, students are left waiting for handouts of meaning from their teachers, textbooks, or perhaps other students.

In 1990, the National Council of Teachers of English published a book collating a number of essays and conversations surrounding the use of literary theory in the post-secondary

English classroom, spurring other writings about students as literary critics or the ways in which literary theory could be used to interrogate canonical literature (Moran et. al 1990). However, there has long been a disconnect between secondary and post-secondary English pedagogy, as Arthur Applebee (1993) asserted three years later in his landmark book that featured studies covering everything from preservice ELA teacher experience to content analysis of ELA textbooks. One of his surveys asked secondary ELA teachers about literary theory and its influence in their classrooms. At that point, about “72 percent of teachers reported little or no familiarity with contemporary literary theory” (Applebee, p.122), a number which has not been recalculated in almost thirty years. Part of the purpose of this study is to ask Applebee’s question again, specifically of teachers in Oklahoma, my own community context.

Certainly, some scholars argue that literary theory has made its way into the secondary ELA classroom, and this is true on the surface. Deborah Appleman (2017) asserts, in an essay responding to Applebee’s work, that things have changed and that “there are many signs that literary theory occupies a larger pedagogical space in current practice...teaching literary theory is now frequently included in preservice literature methods classes,” along with several other examples (p. 175). Appleman also points to the fact that a new textbook series that includes literary theory in its approaches as a sign that things have changed. However, this change does not seem to have taken place at the same rates and in the same way across the United States. Perhaps one could speculate that the debates around Common Core and the choice of some states to create their own standards might point to this differentiation. Maybe the ingrained culture of a particular ELA department is resistant to new curricula. Another reason for this discrepancy could be the differences in teacher preservice program requirements across the country.

For example, the University of Oklahoma does not require its preservice ELA teachers to take any sort of literary theory courses. Reviewing degree sheets from a selection of Oklahoma higher education institutions with preservice teacher programs reveals that only Oklahoma State University requires preservice English education students to take a class about literary theory and criticism. Most require an initial “critical reading” or “literature interpretation” class, but these courses often focus largely on close reading and perhaps historical information. After establishing why the lack of literary theory instruction in preservice ELA teacher training is problematic, this issue will be further explicated below.

Whether or not preservice teachers are learning to use literary theory in the classroom, such practice is not encouraged or even mentioned by the Oklahoma ELA state standards. Reading through these standards, there is not one explicit mention of literary theory or criticism. When asked whether literary theory was considered for inclusion in the new Oklahoma ELA standards released in 2016, the Director of Secondary English and Language Arts for the Oklahoma Department of Education, Jason Stephenson, said that as far as he knew there had been no discussion of the topic. This is not unexpected, given that the Common Core Standards do not include literary theory either, nor do any other state standards. However, it is fairly easy to assume the literary ideologies that underlie the Oklahoma ELA standards: the focus is almost entirely on formal elements, with the occasional nod toward author context. Perhaps one could say the archetype study recommended for eleventh grade counts as a kind of literary theory application, but it seems doubtful that students are actually reading Northrop Frye or Carl Jung in English class. What the Oklahoma standards are missing is an intentional use of literary theory, and one might wonder if this is truly accidental given the acrimonious culture wars fought over literary study in the 1980s and 1990s. In order to show that using literary theory is not just a way

to “indoctrinate” students with political views, it is useful to consider both the problems of the traditional secondary ELA approach to literary study and the benefits of explicitly teaching literary theory in the secondary classroom.

Despite its lack of widespread adoption as a pedagogical strategy, instruction about literary theory has made its way into the classroom and into some preservice teacher programs (Appleman 2015a, 2017). And while Common Core standards do not specifically account for literary theory instruction, many pedagogists and classroom teachers have found ways to work this instruction into the standards. While scholars may disagree on exactly which theories are worth teaching and how to implement them in the classroom, everyone seems to agree that the lack of explicitness in ELA literature instruction has led to students not really understanding what they are being asked to do in the classroom. Beth Wilson (2014) explains that

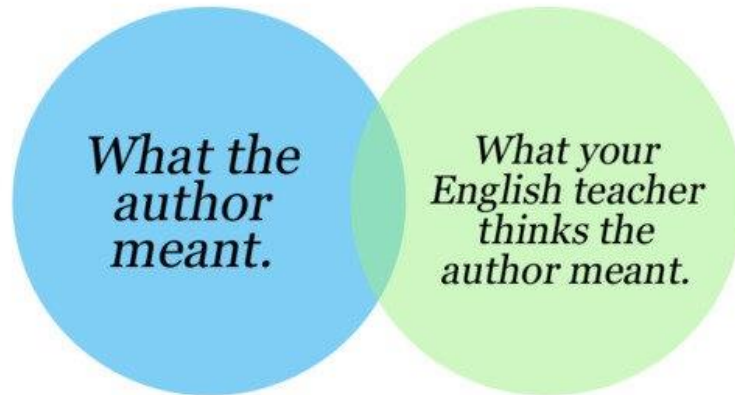
“Students’ understanding of how we English teachers recognize textual significance seems to fall into clusters around two extremes. On one end, students believe that teachers have a mystical ability to identify important elements among the greater textual mass and to divine from them the author’s intended meaning. On the other end, they believe we arbitrarily choose elements and then overanalyze to find a meaning that the author (who just wanted to write a darn story/poem/play) never meant to convey. Some students fall in between— either trusting teachers to have a reliable method, or not particularly caring how we do it” (p. 68).

The lack of agency in meaning-making that students have experienced in the ELA classroom eventually leads them to the assumptions about English teachers that Wilson describes. In my personal experience, students seem much more likely to believe that teachers are just making it up instead of respecting them as divine interpreters of important literature. Without seeing the

reasoning behind a teacher's interpretation, which the teacher themselves may not consciously articulate, the student only sees someone making up answers to test questions. Even bringing theory into the classroom may not help this issue if students are not scaffolded with careful instruction, as Appleman (2015a) warns

“Students already suspect that we English teachers meet together at conferences and make up terms like tone, symbol, and protagonist just so we can trick them on the next test, wreck something that was just starting to seem like fun, or complicate something that was just starting to get more simple. If theory is going to be believed and used by students, if it is somehow going to become an integral part of their repertoire of reading, then it needs a chance to make a case for itself, even if that means beginning slowly...”
(p. 27).

As will be demonstrated shortly, some version of literary theory is in the background of every ELA classroom. What Wilson and Appleman are suggesting is that because these theories are hidden, students are unable to conceptualize the ways in which literary meaning are actually constructed. Students are given second-hand interpretations from textbooks, or a trail of clues from the teacher that lead to only one conclusion. When the teacher's meaning making process is not clear, or not seen at all, students often resort to asking what the author meant, assuming that at least the person who wrote the text can give them a straightforward, “right” answer. Left to their own devices, attitudes like this appear:



For instance: “The curtains were blue.”

What your teacher thinks: “The curtains represent his immense depression and his lack of will to carry on.”

What the author meant: “The curtains were f█████ blue.”

EATLIVER.COM

The image above has made its rounds on the internet for some time now and reveals the curious disconnect between what ELA teachers think they are doing in the classroom, and what students take away from the instruction. Wilson and Appleman were right – students do see the work ELA teachers do to produce meaning as arcane and arbitrary, divorced from context that might explain how the meaning was produced.

As will be explicated further in the next section, this meme is a reaction to the “secret” theoretical basis of the American ELA classroom: New Criticism, a school of literary formalism that was first conceptualized in the early twentieth century before being institutionalized as the foundational mode of literary analysis in secondary literary studies. This is what Appleman is pointing to when she references the notion students might have that English teachers “make up terms like tone, symbol, and protagonist just so we can trick them on the next test...” Formalist analysis without any explicit instruction as to why they are being asked to do formal analysis leaves students feeling as though English teachers are “reading too much into things” or perhaps

just trying to justify making them read a book in the first place. What is most definitely happening is that students relinquish their agency in meaning making because they have been continually taught that the teacher holds the secret of meaning, and if they can just pry it out with the right questions and answers, all will be revealed (and the test will be easy). The lack of student agency in literary discussion limits the possibilities of interpretation and simply reproduces the teacher's own interpretation, which itself is often derived from a textbook.

Rogers (1991) attempted to trace how an intervention in the teacher-student transmission of interpretation might change students' attitudes toward literary interpretation and discovered that students were most likely to stay in the lane of New Critical, formalist interpretation as encouraged by their teachers. They were likely to reject extratextual material as unimportant to textual meaning because they had been taught that they should not consider it. Rogers found that students' interpretive possibilities were narrowed by a formalist approach, particularly when it was taught in a transmission-style method from teacher to student. Here, "transmission-style" indicates literature instruction in which the teacher tells the students what the texts mean and how they should be interpreted, "transmitting" information to students without asking them to engage critically with the material. She asserts "if it is our goal to help students become sophisticated and critical readers of literature, our larger and smaller instructional communities will need to reflect that goal...we need to give students a more equal role in the interpretive process as it is played out in classrooms" (p. 416). When the teacher leads literary discussion, students are more likely to clam up and wait to hear what they are supposed to get out of a text so as to avoid giving the "wrong" answer. Unless the teacher is explicit in asking for multiple perspectives of and interpretations about a text, this discussion often ends up being a lecture, and

one in which the students are certain that the English teacher is just reading too much and making things up.

In an attempt to wrest authority away from the English teacher, the meme above wants to give it all to the author. Many scholars and students alike would prefer straight, definitive answers regarding meaning and interpretation, but authors such as J.K. Rowling have aptly demonstrated that even authorial intention cannot be depended upon as a stable source of meaning (Jackson 2018). This image also contains the misapprehension that readers have no stake or agency in the construction of literary meaning. All interpretive activity is stymied by the author's authority, thus rendering literary study trivial and unnecessary. These attitudes are dangerous because they suggest that authors are always honest about their meanings, that people should trust what they have heard, and that asking questions and attempting interpretation is frivolous in some way. The world in which American students operate is constantly bombarding them with messages that they read and take at face value because of the notion that the author/speaker is a source of truth. Part of the job of the English teacher is to show students that meaning and interpretation are more complicated than memes can suggest, and that students' own interpretive abilities matter when they are reading the world around them.

Unfortunately, English teachers do not always help this cause. The image above may be a reductive stereotype, but it contains a grain of truth that speaks to the long history of English teachers prescribing meaning to texts without explaining the processes behind their interpretations, or indeed that there might be other interpretations at all. Part of the issue is that English teachers themselves were taught literature this way, and thus may not see the interpretive approaches that support their own assumptions about literary meaning [Zancanella and Wolman-Bonilla (1991), Grossman and Shulman (1993)]. This idea is also supported by Xerri's (2013)

study in which he interviewed a number of teachers at a post-16 school in Malta and found that many of them were reluctant to engage with literary theory both because it was unfamiliar and because it was not how they had been taught to engage with literature (p. 211). He asserts that the teacher's anxiety about and avoidance of theory is transferred to their students, which will hinder those students when they are asked to engage with theory in college. Even the teachers who were interested in using literary theory were afraid that doing so badly might be worse than not doing so at all. One such teacher compared theoretical analysis to "dissecting a butterfly," explaining that unless a teacher has a deft hand when "dissecting" a text for analysis, they will just end up chopping the text to pieces and killing it for students (p. 211). This fear of doing theory wrong, or badly, gave the teachers whom Xerri interviewed pause about fully embracing its use in their classrooms. Without confidence in their ability to adequately and engagingly teach complex theoretical material, teachers seem likely to fall back on more traditional modes of ELA instruction with which they are already familiar.

It also cannot be understated how much influence standardized testing has on the curriculum, and literary studies is no different. ELA teachers may resist the standardization of literary response, but some capitulation to the test is expected at this point. The slap-dash attempts to cover all material on a standardized test lead to lessons in formalist vocabulary divorced from context, which prevents students from seeing how this formal language might help them understand literary analysis. Instead of explicit instruction and theoretical application, students are left with vocabulary worksheets and identifying examples removed from their larger context. For some standardized tests, literary analysis has been removed entirely to make room for more grammar and technical reading. Crocco and Costigan (2007), Jerald (2006), and Rabinowitz and Bancroft (2017) demonstrate that the phenomenon of teaching to the test

narrows the curriculum that is taught to students, removing opportunities for students to engage with complex questions that cannot be formatted onto a standardized test. The ELA classroom feels these effects less perhaps than science or social studies, but the intense focus on basic literacy as a means of testable achievement means that students are not being taught to engage with literature. Instead, they are being asked to demonstrate basic reading comprehension of isolated texts without being given the opportunity to use their own contextual knowledges or multiple perspectives to understand those texts in more meaningful ways.

The history of ELA instruction is a history of prescribed meaning and cultural assimilation, leading to the student alienation that some ELA teachers see in the classroom, particularly when it comes to studying literature. As will be seen, at its inception in the 19th century, literary study was conceptualized as a way to reify Western cultural values through study of the Western literary canon. The term “Western” is extremely loaded because it glosses over the cultural diversity of Western societies but is still often used to refer to those societies in which Euro-American culture is centered. As the hegemonic cultural force at work in the United States and the world today, it can be referred to as the “dominant culture,” after Gramsci’s conceptualization. The dominant culture of a society is determined by the ruling classes and works to legitimize and reproduce those class values throughout the culture (Gramsci 1992). The values upon which the idea of literary merit rests are specifically Western and have been used as a way to shut non-dominant culture literature out of the classroom. The cultural reproduction of the English classroom was elided by the adoption of New Criticism, which allowed teachers to pretend that works had no historical and socio-political dimensions while coincidentally teaching that works by white Euro-American men were the highest literary achievement. This phenomenon is not necessarily malicious or even a conscious choice. It seems

that Western cultural supremacy has become so ingrained that it feels neutral, fading into the background as people passively accept the assumption that Euro-American authors are the best literary artists. Divorcing literature from its contexts also paved the way for standardization that would eventually reduce the discipline to literacy instruction with no larger focus on critical thinking or critical interpretation. Although the intervention of reader response theory shifted the focus away from the canon text to the student, this shift did not coincide with intentional literary instruction that helped students understand why they were being taught literature a certain way, and certainly reader response is not something that is considered in standardized testing.

The lack of explicitness in ELA literary instruction keeps students from understanding what is really being asked of them in the English classroom. Are they supposed to regurgitate the teacher's interpretation? The textbooks'? Where can they look besides their own feelings to understand why a work might be important? Intentional application of literary theory can give students the tools to answer questions about meaning and interpretation while also allowing them to understand the various socio-cultural and political dimensions in which literature, and indeed all texts, operate. One of the most obvious and immediate benefits of incorporating a literary theory as multiple perspectives approach in the secondary ELA classroom is the increase of student engagement through new and different ways of talking about and questioning literature [Appleman (2015), Eckert (2006), Eckert (2008), Moran (1990) Schade (1996), Sullivan (2002), Wilson (2014)]. Part of the basis of this approach is acknowledging that there is no one "right" answer for what a text means, and that the teacher cannot give the meaning of the text to the students. By using multiple branches of literary theory to interpret a text, or by explicitly explaining interpretative strategies, the teacher gives students agency to construct meaning, which in turn can lead to more vigorous critical discussion. If students think the teacher already

has the answer waiting for them at the end of the small group discussion period, there is no reason to discuss the text. Similarly, if the students are using only personal responses to discuss a text, they may run into a wall when they all agree or disagree but cannot argue about each other's feelings. As Eckert (2005) discovered when she implemented a literary-theory based curriculum, literary theory removes the personal element while broadening the possibilities beyond those provided by formalism. Her students were more effectively able to discuss the literature they read, making connections to other texts and experiences that they might not have otherwise. Eckert's students were able to collaboratively construct meaning as a class while also bringing their individual perspectives and ideas to bear on the text being read. Literary theory as multiple perspectives provides a basis for dialogic classroom discussions because doing so moves the impetus of meaning making and interpretation away from the teacher or student and into the realm of theory. This matters because as Reznitskaya (2012) asserts, dialogic literary discussion is much more engaging for students and effective at encouraging critical thinking not just about a particular literary text, but about the world. A multiple perspectives approach removes the possibility of the teacher or any one individual being the sole arbiter of literary meaning and gives students room to practice various interpretive strategies.

A literary theory as multiple perspectives approach is not only beneficial for student engagement, but also improves ELA teacher practice in other ways. A grounding in multiple schools of literary theory, particularly in the cultural studies branches of the field, can provide ELA teachers with broader perspectives during the process of selecting texts for use in the classroom. The deeper understanding of social, cultural, and political issues provided by literary theory can help teachers understand what critical issues, stereotypes, ideologies, and assumptions are present in any and all texts (using this term in the broadest sense to include any cultural

product that can be “read” in some way). This deeper understanding is useful when selecting texts for whole class use, classroom library inventory, or recommending texts to students.

Knowledge of literary theory can also expand the possibilities for lesson planning beyond formal analysis. As will be seen in Chapter 4, teachers have adapted multiple perspectives into a variety of activities, converting theoretical perspectives into “critical lenses” that can be applied to a text. Teachers have used these critical lenses to help students analyze both canonical and noncanonical works in fruitful ways that encourage student engagement. Other teachers have developed lessons around pop culture that allow students to critically analyze the cultural products with which they interact daily. Whatever the text, a multiple perspectives approach can provide a framework for new kinds of analyses that are likely to be of some interest to students.

However, the greatest value from using literary theory as multiple perspectives is that it provides a way out of the continual assimilation of students into Euro-American cultural values present in the ELA classroom. For non-dominant culture students, traditional literary study using traditional canonical texts is a continual parade of texts in which they are either not present or presented as stereotypes. Although inroads have been made to allow young adult literature and multicultural literature into the secondary ELA classroom, these texts are often treated beneath canonical texts, read more for reader response engagement than serious study (Brauer and Clark 2008, p. 301). For Euro-American, dominant culture students, traditional literary study is a reinforcement of their values, lacking any challenge to their larger worldviews and allowing them to make assumptions like a student of mine, who once asserted that obviously men were better than women – men had done everything in history. This attitude and others like it are not challenged by traditional literary study, and formalism allows ELA teachers to avoid engaging on any level with the social, political, and cultural dimensions of a text. Formal analysis

perpetuates the idea that only certain kinds of texts, produced by certain kinds of people, can be studied as “literature” while simultaneously denying that any such privileging is happening. Without broader perspectives about literary meaning, English teachers can easily reject a text for not counting as literature under a formalist schema that is undergirded by Euro-American cultural supremacism (Wollman-Bonilla 1998, p. 4). The traditional methods used for secondary ELA literary study do nothing to prevent the reproduction of harmful white supremacist and patriarchal ideologies. Teachers are missing the opportunity to engage students on an ideological and political level through literature by revealing those dimensions present in the text being studied. Neither New Criticism nor reader response has a way to deal with the fact that most American students are socialized in a culture that privileges white experience and white culture over all others (Banks 2017). The school system is part of this culture, and works to reproduce it as an institution. As Bourdieu (1986) and others have argued, the school system functions primarily as a vector for ideological reproduction. The ELA classroom is a particularly crucial space for this process, since the ELA teacher’s text choices have dire implications for the kinds of viewpoints, ideas, and ideologies that students are absorbing from their school experience (Wollman-Bonilla 1998, p. 2).

Unfortunately, the ELA classroom is literally conservative. It is consistently resistant to changes in its curriculum, and the progress that is made is constantly challenged. Any attempt to disrupt the Euro-American literary canon as the center of the ELA classroom has been resisted. After the liberatory gestures of the 1970s, the 1980s saw a renewed assertion that the ELA classroom was a specifically cultural space that should perpetuate specific “Western” cultural values. Standardized testing has not helped the issue, since standards have narrowed the curriculum to the point that basic reading skills are given most of a teacher’s instructional time.

At the upper levels, Advanced Placement literature classes continue to reify the Western canon and provide little space for students to critically question the works they are supposed to be “analyzing.” The overabundance of focus on theme and other literary devices renders upper level literary study little more than a word search puzzle. Students unquestioningly consume the literature of Euro-American dominance, and because their teachers most likely grew up in the same system, they will not even realize what is happening. Without ever having to say the words “Euro-American culture is the only legitimate culture,” ELA teachers effectively devalue the diverse experience of their students just through biased text selection (Sinclair 2018).

However, one cannot fully understand the colonizing and assimilating force of the secondary ELA classroom without first analyzing its history.

Chapter 2: The What and Why of Literary Theory

1. Students do not understand the point of literary study and thus do not take it seriously as an academic endeavor.
2. Students feel alienated by literary study that does not allow them to participate in the meaning making process.
3. The ELA classroom is a primary space of cultural reproduction and reification, and an intervention is needed in mainstream pedagogy to correct this situation.
4. The above three points are the result of the historical trends in ELA education. For a full accounting of the history and development of the secondary English classroom before 1970, see Applebee (1974). For more information on the history of literary studies, see Leitch et. al (2010).

Origins and Evolutions

The history of “literary study” as an academic, institutionalized discipline began in earnest in the nineteenth century. Literary criticism certainly existed before then, but was not widely read or studied by most people. Before the advent of modern compulsory public schooling, literary production and study was the domain of the upper classes. Literary study in the Western tradition has long been tied to class hierarchy, since the education of a “gentleman” necessarily involved learning the Latin and Greek classics, works that were not accessible to most people. The attainment of literary knowledge was intimately tied with class and gender hierarchies, and this continued to be the case until the rise of compulsory education for all in the early twentieth century. The institutionalization of academic disciplines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led some cultural critics to be alarmed that the humanities would be neglected because they were not “scientific.” This led to a trend of scientizing the humanities in such a way so that they could justify their existence within academic institutions.

The foremost champion of literary criticism in the nineteenth century was Matthew Arnold, a Victorian poet and cultural critic who dedicated much of his writing to arguing for the practice of literary criticism as necessary for both literary production and cultural/historical

study. Arnold's assertion that criticism is "the disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" is still a guiding principle for many literary critics and teachers of literature. With the single word "disinterested," Arnold was able to argue that literary study could be objective and removed from its subject of study in a scientific manner that would allow literary study to be institutionalized in such a way that it could be reproduced at a massive scale in the classroom. Arnold began a process that allowed literary criticism to move away from the old historicism of author biography, and to assess the literary work as an aesthetic object for its own sake. However, Arnold was not a predecessor of the "art for art's sake" movement that defined aesthetic philosophy in the late Victorian Era. He saw art, and specifically literature, as cultural expression and was explicit about the fact that literature reproduces cultural values, and that this is a good thing.

It is also worth noting that Arnold, like many cultural critics and writers who came after him, saw the power of literature to reproduce values in the classroom. He worked for many years as a school inspector, and once argued that the school is a place for "civilising the next generation of the lower classes, who, as things are going, will have most of the political power of the country in their hands." While this might sound revolutionary on the surface, Arnold was in fact one of the last in a long line of liberal aristocrats who advocated reform without large-scale systemic change. His call for "civilising" the masses through literary and historical study came at a time when England was experiencing significant social upheaval as the lower classes advocated for voting rights. Arnold believed that without literary education, and without the work of critics, society would lose its humanizing aspects in favor of science and profit (Leitch et. al. 2010, p. 692). He was working for a good cause but could not see beyond his own attitudes about English cultural supremacy to truly understand how paternalistic his own ideas about

criticism and culture were. Unfortunately for Arnold, his work would spur on the further institutionalization of literary study, as it left behind the nuance of his original arguments and reified ideas of objectivity and cultural reproduction.

In this brief overview of literary criticism as it dovetails with ELA pedagogy, perhaps the other greatest influence on Euro-American literary criticism after Arnold is T.S. Eliot. Eliot was *the* poetic and critical voice of English literary study in the twentieth century, and his work still looms large over the ELA landscape. Like Arnold, Eliot believed that criticism was “the disinterested exercise of intelligence...the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste...the common pursuit of true judgement” (Leitch et. al. 2010, 954). Again, the idea of “disinterestedness,” of removed objectivity, is central to the critic’s role. Eliot’s notions about the importance of literary tradition as a subject of study itself also echoes Arnold’s ideas. It was Eliot who provided the bricks with which the New Critics would build their school of literary thought.

Within literary academia, the New Critics are often thought of as the grumpy old men of literary study, those traditionalists whose aesthetic preoccupations were long ago swept away by the counterculture revolutions in higher education during the 1960s (although it is worth noting that close reading is still foundational in most branches of literary theory practiced in the academy). However, in many secondary ELA classrooms it might as well be 1960, given the extent to which New Criticism wields power in the classroom. The New Critics were a group of poets, writers, and thinkers who mostly came from a Southern Agrarian populist tradition, and who wanted to formulate a kind of literary criticism that was precise and objective enough to stand on its own as an academic discipline (Leitch et. al. 2010, 969). The New Critics pushed back against the old historicism that defined English literary study pre-1950, rejecting the notion

that the author's biography was more important than the text itself and highlighting the importance of the "technical effects" of literary works (to use Ransom's term). The most influential founders of this literary movement were John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, William Wimsatt Jr., and Monroe Beardsley, all of them white men who were mostly raised in the South, and many of whom worked in the Yale English department (Leitch et. al. 2010, p. 1213). The arguments these men were making about literature were not just about professional criticism but were also intimately concerned with the ways in which literature were taught in the classroom. Brooks and Warren wrote several best-selling textbooks about literary study, and the arguments in these texts still influence the theoretical assumptions that undergird ELA literary pedagogy (Applebee 1974, p. 163). Ransom is particularly explicit about the need for literary criticism to become "scientific" and professional in his essay "Criticism, Inc." He asserts that "criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons...but I do not think we need be afraid that criticism, trying to be a sort of science, will inevitably fail and give up in despair, or else fail without realizing it and enjoy some hollow and pretentious career" (Leitch et. al. 2010, p. 972). Ransom was deeply worried about the lack of systematic study when it came to literature, believing that without such study literature would be deemed unworthy of its own academic discipline and relegated to a subset of history. This worry drove the New Critics' assertions of the importance of formalism and objectivism, leading them to develop an interpretive approach in which neither the author nor reader had priority in the meaning of a text.

Before considering the ways in which the institutionalization of literary study and the aesthetic priorities of New Criticism opened literary study in ELA classroom to exploitation by

standardized testing, it is important to recognize the main intervention against New Criticism that emerged in the ELA classroom in the 1970s (Applebee 1993, p. 117). Reader response theory, first articulated by Louise Rosenblatt in her book *Literature as Exploration* (1938), was interpreted and expanded upon as a pedagogical approach by Robert Probst in the 1980s, and became a new way to approach secondary literature, radically changing the direction of the classrooms in which it was implemented. Although Rosenblatt and the New Critics were contemporaries, their influence was felt separately, as Rejan (2017) asserts: “Not until the 1960s did a version of the New Critics’ techniques become commonplace in high school curricula. And the impact of Rosenblatt’s approaches was not widely felt until the 1970s...Chronologically and conceptually, however, Rosenblatt’s transactional theory might be better understood as emerging in parallel with (and not as an antidote to) New Critical methods” (p. 13). While this may be the case, Rosenblatt’s work centered the reader in a way that previous theoretical approaches. Instead of seeing the literary work as a purely aesthetic object that the reader could only appreciate and try to interpret objectively, Rosenblatt imagined that reading and interpretation were a kind of transaction between the literary work, the reader, and the author, with the priority being placed on the reader’s work to interact with the poem. Rosenblatt explains the title of *Literature as Exploration* as such:

“The word *exploration* is designed to suggest primarily that the experience of literature, far from being for the reader a passive process of absorption, is a form of intense personal activity. The reader counts for at least as much as the book or poem itself; he responds to some of its aspects and not others; he finds it refreshing and stimulating, or barren and unrewarding. Literature is thus for him a medium of exploration” (p. vi).

The adoption of this perspective on reading and meaning making was part of the larger educational project to bring social constructivist philosophies to bear on schooling, along with an urge to upend the traditional hierarchies in the classroom. Here, in a discussion circle, everyone's reading was just as valid as the teacher's. Unfortunately, reader response was not the solution to the problems of teaching literature that many hoped it would be and brought about its own set of problems. Ultimately, reader response approaches have been usurped by standardized testing curriculums that have no time for anyone's personal feelings about literature (Rabinowitz and Bancroft 2014, p. 7).

Theorizing the ELA Classroom

Neither New Criticism nor reader response theory entered the secondary ELA classroom with nuance and explicitness. Both branches of literary theory were adapted for pedagogical use, and, as many scholars have pointed out, much of the deeper critical, aesthetic, and philosophical perspectives of these approaches was lost in translating them to lesson plans. Rejan (2017) has argued that the summarizing, cliff-notes way in which many preservice English teachers learn about New Criticism and literary theory at large has resulted in a complete misunderstanding of its basic principles: namely, that learning literature is a democratizing activity, and that formal analysis allows even those without a classical education to appreciate literature on some level (p. 16). Rabinowitz and Bancroft (2014) are more forceful in their assertion that this phenomenon is standardized testing's fault, demonstrating that Common Core standards are predicated on the idea that literature has right answers that can be filled in on a test. They point to "New Critical dogmas - in particular 'close attentive reading (Common 3), the independence of the text, and the centrality of language and theme'" (p. 6-7) in the standards as evidence that Common Core is using New Criticism as a way to quantify literature in a testable way. They also assert that what

is practiced in ELA classrooms today is a kind of “Zombie New Criticism... diluted and dehumanized, stripped of [its] theoretical and metaphysical base. Our objection, therefore, is less that the Common Core Standards are theoretically in error than that they have no significant theoretical grounding at all, and thus provide no purchase for real conversation or debate” (p. 7). It seems likely that this reductionist application of New Criticism was going on before Common Core, since it was, as far as one can tell, never taught as an explicit school of literary theory in the classroom, but was instead used as “a technology for producing readings” (p. 7) that the English teacher could then assert the correctness of. In the classroom, the New Critical approach to literary study looks like worksheets for diagramming plots, identifying literary devices, and decoding themes – basically anything that could be called formal analysis. Texts are often treated like puzzles with right interpretations that are privileged over other readings. Students often find this approach to literature alienating and confusing, and the lack of deliberate theoretical application often makes it seem as though teachers are pulling meaning out of thin air. Conversely, students may buy into this approach wholeheartedly, which in turn causes them to privilege the Western canon over other literatures, since formalist/objectivist aesthetic values are derived from Western cultural norms (Hart 1991). Thus, the student sees that only Euro-American artists are able to produce texts worth studying, since only Euro-American texts exhibit Western formal values “correctly.”

Like New Criticism, reader response theory was also watered down for the secondary classroom, as Rosenblatt and other scholars’ nuances have often been replaced by the idea that this approach is just about how individual readers react to or feel about a text. Appleman (2014) reflects on her own experience using reader response approaches in the secondary classroom:

“Five-paragraph themes gave way to reading logs; recitations of genre or structural aspects of the text gave way to recitations of personal connections to the text; and the traditional teacher-in-the-front formation gave way to the intimate and misshapen circles with which many of our students and many of us are familiar. Of course, knowledge of the text was still important, but personal knowledge seemed in many cases to be privileged over textual knowledge. Rather than seeking out biographical information about the author or historical information about the times in which the text was written or took place, teachers began to spend time finding personal hooks into the texts they chose and frequently began literature discussions with questions that began “Have you ever?” (p. 31).

While reader response freed students and teachers from the strict formality of New Criticism, it did not supply other strategies for meaning making and interpretation, at least as it was adapted to the classroom. Without more direction, students are left to form impressions about literature using only their own socio-cultural context, which sounds nice until one considers the implications that this approach might have when confronted with multicultural literature outside the reader’s realm of experience. In many cases, the application of reader response theory in the ELA classroom is individualist and decontextualized, leaving students to build their own meanings without necessary scaffolding.

Rice (2005) discovered how harmful this lack of context could be during research on peer-led literature discussion groups. After supplying students with short stories that she thought contained “universal” themes, she discovered that the students’ lack of contextual knowledge not only prevented them from understanding the stories, but actually led to them rejecting and denigrating the stories. The stories, by Gary Soto, were set in an Hispanic (Rice’s term) cultural

context, but since they were about kids growing up and various life experiences, Rice assumed that the children in her study would appreciate them. However, the students derided the elements from the stories that they perceived to be outside the “norm” of their own experiences (p. 10). Thus, these white, upper-middle-class students were stymied into rejecting these stories when presented through a reader response approach. Rice’s work reveals that multiple perspectives about life and culture are necessary for students to understand why a text might be worth reading, and what it might be trying to say about the world.

Other critiques of reader response theory also speak to the problem of solely focusing on individual response. Rabinowitz and Smith (1998) argue that reader response approaches may cause students to reject the readings of others and to ignore differences because they have been taught that only their personal reading of a text matters. A lack of explicitness in defining and practicing reader response theory may lead to overly personalized and decontextualized readings that turn inward to the reader without acknowledging wider contexts. This is not to discount the revolutionary capacity that reader response theory had when it was first introduced. It is difficult to overstate just how much of a shift in pedagogical approaches to literature the adoption of reader response theory inspired. Allowing the reader to participate in the construction of textual meaning on the same level as the text and the author provided teachers with new ways of engaging their students and providing justifications for studying literature (Appleman 2015, p. 30). Before the intervention of reader response theory, no agency was given to students to construct textual meaning. Fundamentally, reader response theory demonstrated that all people can appreciate and interpret texts in some way, and that students’ reactions to literature can open up new dimensions for engagement and understanding. However, over the years the intentionality behind reader response theory has been buried under curriculum developments, so

that, as Eckert (2005) states “In recent years, response theory has become nearly transparent as an underlying assumption for many student-centered teaching practices. But many teachers aren’t aware of the ways in which this informs their practice, and don’t openly discuss theory with students as a reading or interpretive method” (p. 62). Eckert found that when she explained the theoretical assumptions of reader response theory, her students were able to see how their own readings and reactions to a text might connect to other people’s readings and larger contextual issues.

When considering the history of literary theory’s influence on the secondary ELA classroom, it might seem that New Criticism and reader response are the only two schools of theory that exist, albeit in a strangely insubstantial way. It is not clear that many English teachers have and use explicit knowledge about a variety of literary theories in the classroom, and, as Applebee’s (1993) survey found, many teachers did/do not see the value of all that hifalutin academic business in the classroom (p. 122). This is evidenced by the fact that although there was a revolution in higher education English departments during the late 1960s, the “theory revolution” never made it to the secondary classroom (p. 116). During the latter half of the twentieth century, writings by various French post-structuralists, deconstructionists, and other postmodern perspectives, were being translated into English and upended traditional academic literary study. Post-structuralism became the theoretical basis for postmodernism, and these concepts dominated post-secondary English departments until the 1990s, when cultural studies coalesced as a new way of reading not just texts, but all cultural products (Leitch et. al. p. 32). Cultural studies is interested not just in literary texts and their meaning, but with situating them in a larger cultural context while also questioning the ideological underpinnings of a given text. In the last thirty years, cultural studies has splintered into a variety of sub “studies,” such as

disability studies or trauma studies. As Leitch et. al (2010) notes, “the studies model is replacing the long-standing schools and movements model in maps of the structure and history of the domain of criticism and theory today” (p. 32). Literary theory has become passé in the academy without ever even making its way explicitly into the secondary classroom. Maynard (2009), in his book about the problematics of literary interpretation, states that “To write now about major issues in theory may seem an inconsiderate bucking of the trend of the day. Literary theory, so hotly pursued in the late 1970s and early 1980s that it was given the pet name ‘theory,’ has been followed by fewer and fewer people as it has seemed increasingly to occupy itself with its own vocabulary, its own set of approved gestures, its elegant pursuit of fine points sometimes shading into aridity and irrelevance” (p. 2). But if theory is “over,” why bring it into the secondary classroom? Is it possible that literary theory still has a place somewhere outside the academy?

Definitions

Before answering these questions, I must pin down a more explicit definition of what is meant by “literary theory.” First, it might be more useful to think of “literary theory” as an umbrella for a variety of schools of thought and critical approaches, since there is no one literary theory that explains all of literature, its meanings and interpretations, its influences and its contexts. Literary theory’s evolution over the course of the twentieth century means that what is practiced as literary theory today looks very different from what the New Critics and others in their time were doing. Over time, literary theory expanded and borrowed from various disciplines, and often in the academy is referred to as just “theory” as a way to mark the fact that these theoretical approaches can be applied to any and all cultural products. Leitch et. al. (2010) explain “Today the term [theory] encompasses significant works not only of poetics, theory of criticism, and aesthetics as of old, but also of rhetoric, media, and discourse theory, semiotics,

race and ethnicity theory, gender theory, and theories of popular culture as well as globalization.” Literary theory can seem like a grab-bag of conflicting perspectives, or as Iser (2003) described the field, “a kind of cannibalization going on among Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, poststructuralism, and so on.... The offshoot is a magma of interpretive discourses” (p. 3). Each of these different discourses provides different ways of conceptualizing and analyzing questions about how and why texts are read, and how those texts interact with larger social, political, and cultural contexts. Very few academic literary critics work solely in formalism, and most specialize in specific schools of theory as a basis for their critical work.

Each “interpretive discourse” that falls under the umbrella of theory can be used as a critical perspective from which literature, and all cultural products, can be analyzed. Many of these perspectives are explicitly political, such as Marxism, feminism, and postcolonialism. These branches of theory are not so much concerned with literature as an art object as they are with situating texts in larger contexts about class, gender, and colonization. To use any of these approaches necessarily requires moving beyond just the text to considering how a given text might manifest an ideological viewpoint about any given issue. However, there is resistance to the “isms” as some refer to them, and to the turn toward cultural studies generally. Leitch et. al. (2010) assert that “To an earlier generation, such theory looks like advocacy rather than disinterested objective inquiry into poetics and the history of literature.” This “advocacy” is perhaps one of the reasons why secondary ELA teachers might be reluctant to bring these critical approaches into the classroom. Explicit instruction of literary theory would require inclusion of these perspectives, since to not do so would deprive students of viewpoints that might help them understand their world more fully. The motive behind this aversion to advocacy is not necessarily maliciousness, or arising from a desire to prevent students from seeing new

perspectives, but is perhaps the result of a social system that encourages schooling to present itself as apolitical.

What is at stake?

Obviously, it would be impossible to adequately cover all the schools and branches of literary theory in a school year. It must be acknowledged that literary study is only a part of the larger ELA curriculum, and that the limitations placed on curriculums by various institutional and societal pressures mean that ELA teachers must be intentional and specific when using literary theory in the classroom. What is being advocated here is not that students become expert theorists who read theory for its own sake, but for the allowance of theory in the classroom to provide multiple perspectives and inquiry guidelines for students. How such an application of theory in the secondary classroom might take shape is still being debated. Rabinowitz and Bancroft (2014) assert that too much theory in the classroom, particularly in the use of theoretical vocabulary, will stifle students' willingness to engage with it. They argue that "technical literary language should be taught, but it should be taught on a need-to-know basis. Or, perhaps, even better, technical literary language should be taught on a desire-to-know basis" (p. 5). Interestingly, their argument is mostly confined to discussion about New Criticism and reader response theory, which might be why they are pushing back against literary vocabulary of the formalist school. They are interested in considering the act of reading as a socially positioned activity occurring between the reader and author, with a focus on intentionality. While their argument is insightful, it neglects to consider the usefulness of theory as a way of teaching multiple perspectives.

Appleman (2015a, 2015b), Eckert (2006, 2008), and Wilson (2014) assert that the greatest value that literary theory has in the secondary ELA classroom is its ability to provide a multitude of different ways through which students can inquire into the meanings and interpretations of a text. Eckert (2008) asserts that learning how to apply theories to a text is in fact reading instruction, and that “The role of theory should not remain merely an intellectual point of reference for the experienced reader to use—in itself a separate subject of study— but rather should become a method for developing that experience by encouraging reading, inquiry, and engagement with text for all students, extending the literacy pedagogies that began with a student’s first reading lesson” (p. 116). Here, literary theory provides a continuation of literacy instruction that helps students go beyond basic comprehension to developing a critical understanding of the ways that meaning and interpretation can happen. Wilson (2014) also argues that it is not enough to conceptualize literacy as just basic comprehension, but that people should have a literacy that “allows us to orient ourselves meaningfully in society, to navigate conflicting messages, to receive and create art, to become conscious of the influences upon us, and otherwise to maneuver in a world that is literate and created for the literate” (p. 75). Explicit instruction in literary theory provides students with tools to understand how meaning is made and how those meanings might influence their own lives. Appleman (2015b) explains the purpose of using literary theory in the classroom is that “the theories are used to both illustrate and cultivate the concept of multiple perspectives: that is, the habit of mind of considering concepts, events, cultural phenomenon, and especially texts, from multiple points of view” (p. 178). This “cultivation” is essential because the U.S. schooling system has a habit of reducing knowledge and student experience to a singular, dominant culture point of view that has detrimental effects for all students. Without the ability to consider multiple perspectives and to

critically consider their importance, teachers and students alike lose out in the struggle to construct meaning. As Appleman (2015a) asserts, “Both teachers and their students have less power over their environment if...they do not understand the theoretical context in which they function. We may not be able to name our theories, nor are we always aware of how our ideologies...become internalized and may in fact prevent us from understanding worlds and perspectives different from our own” (p. 149). Teachers often reproduce their own educational experiences in the classroom without realizing it, having internalized ideologies that prevent them from seeing the world through perspectives other than their own, perspectives governed by the dominant Euro-American culture. This is especially problematic because, as Stingley (2019) has argued, ELA classes are most often taught by white women, and those white women most often uphold, whether consciously or not, Euro-American cultural superiority through their teaching.

Incorporating an appreciation for and use of theory improves the ELA teacher’s practice even if they are not explicitly teaching every bit of theory they know. Without a broad base of theoretical perspectives, ELA teachers are likely fall into a problem that hooks (2014) describes as a cyclical adoption of norms and values: “most of us [teachers] were taught in classrooms where styles of teachings reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal” (p. 35). When perspectives stagnate in this way, ELA teachers may continue teaching the same Western canonical texts without realizing both the problematics and possibilities of interpretation that might lie within. Rehabilitating the Western canon is challenging to say the least, but until teachers and students have equitable access to other texts, taking a theoried approach is the least ELA teachers can do. It is not fair for non-white students to suffer through the awkwardness of racist history that is likely to raise its head

in many Euro-American texts, and to gloss over the problems of history as they bleed into literature is to deny the truth of systemic injustice. Refusing to engage in the political dimensions present in all texts is not a valid way to keep controversy out of the classroom. Whatever fears dominant culture administrators, teachers, and parents have about their children being exposed to “politics” pale in the face of the experiences that non-dominant culture children are subjected to when they are prevented from reading and engaging with texts in a way that would help them understand the structures of power and oppression at work in their lives.

It may seem as though this argument is coming on too strong, and many teachers are resistant to the idea that they might be obligated to talk about larger socio-political issues in their classrooms. For many dominant culture teachers, literature is a neutral field whose instruction allows the teacher to avoid the discomfort of engaging with difficult structural or systemic questions. However, scholars from various fields have made the case that the United States schooling system erases the truth of American history and culture, eliding the various kinds of violence that have been visited on non-dominant culture populations by assimilating students into the dominant culture ways of thinking. hooks’ point that most teachers teach the same way they were taught is not just a pedagogical issue, but an ideological one. Without critical examination of the ideologies that underlie schooling, teachers will not be able to name them to students, which is essential in the process of developing multiple perspectives and critical literacy. The lack of critical perspectives in the ELA classroom is particularly troubling because the ELA classroom is a primary location of either assimilation or the transmission of cultural capital. As was previously discussed, the ELA classroom was founded on Euro-American assumptions about what constitutes literature and how that literature should be read as a way of passing on Euro-American values.

In order to clarify this discussion, a brief explanation of culture's intersection with schooling is necessary. Banks (2010) explains that in the United States, there is a macroculture (what has been referred to in this thesis as "dominant culture"), or "shared core culture," along with a number of microcultures whose values often conflict with the macroculture's (p. 7). The U.S. macroculture is Euro-American, based on hegemonic values that have carried through U.S. history, and which Banks identifies as equality, from the Founding Fathers; individualism and individual opportunity from the Protestant work ethic; individualism and anti-groupism, from hyper-capitalist reinforcement of the nuclear family; and expansionism and Manifest Destiny from anti-indigenous politics. All of these values and beliefs come together to form what hooks (2015) succinctly calls the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy," and these three ideologies are at the heart of Euro-American culture as it exists in the United States. Because of this fact, schooling is also implicated in the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, and as an institution reproduces the inequalities that support such a social system. hooks argues that these concepts cannot be separated from each other, and that any critical analysis of American society must look at the ways race, gender, and class intersect with each other. She explains that students who are steeped in these systems of oppression through schooling, "Having been taught to believe in the superiority of empire, of the United States, of whiteness, and of maleness, by the time most grade school students reached college their indoctrination had deep roots" (p. 30). The lack of critical analysis in the secondary classroom, particularly the ELA classroom, allows students to maintain their beliefs about white American superiority, capitalism as a neutral system, and men as the movers of history. For non-dominant culture students, the stakes are much worse, since they are actively neglected by the American schooling system. Gonzalez et. al. (2005) argue that

It is impossible to ignore, then, that schooling practices are related to issues of power and racism in U.S. society, especially as related to the working-class status of these families...As usually constituted, working-class children receive a reduced and intellectually inferior curriculum compared with their wealthier peers, as part and parcel of the stratification of schooling (Spring, 2001). Although with considerable variability across the country, this social stratification is systemic, not occasional, so it is a constant in the education of working-class children, especially as their numbers and cultural diversity increases (p. 276).

This issue goes deeper than casual racism, sexism, or classism, since most teachers would likely deny that they have any prejudices against their students. Unfortunately, unconscious bias is present in all humans, and if teachers are recapitulating the biases from their own education, the systemic inequalities of schooling are reproduced. Gay (2000) asserts that

While most teachers are not blatant racists, many are probably cultural hegemonists. They expect all students to behave according to their school's culture of normality. When students of color fail to comply, the teachers find them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation. Rather than building on what students have to make their learning easier and better, the teachers want to correct and compensate for their "cultural deprivations." This means making ethnically diverse students conform to middle class, Eurocentric cultural norms (p. 46).

Lurking behind both Gonzalez and Gay's assertions is the issue of cultural capital, that is, Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of the ways in which cultural knowledge, intellectual skills, understanding of cultural objects, and academic qualifications act as a type of capital that is often

transmitted through education, but can also be “inculcated” unconsciously just by consuming dominant cultural products. Schooling is one of the primary mechanisms through which the dominant culture can perpetuate itself, and also functions as a way for dominant culture parents to pass social privilege down to their children. Children raised by parents who possess Euro-American cultural capital have an advantage at school because they are able to correctly “behave according to their school’s culture of normality.” Because these children come to school already steeped in the dominant culture, they are not asked to make adjustments to assimilate themselves into the classroom. In fact, the classroom serves to underscore the “correctness” of their cultural background by presenting them with texts, history, and knowledge through a monological dominant culture perspective that is neither felt nor seen by its participants.

Nowhere is this phenomenon more strongly at work than in the ELA classroom. As the primary space of cultural transmission in schools (arts programs of all kinds often perpetuate Euro-American cultural norms, but those classes are not usually mandatory in the same way ELA is), the ELA classroom serves as a space of assimilation and erasure for non-dominant culture students. Sinclair (2018) asserts, “English has a colonization problem” and this is not a new story. Sinclair lists the various interventions made with multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching philosophies, then asks why so little has changed so far. She points to the long tradition of white saviorism in education, and asserts that this attitude is extremely damaging because it accepts deficit perspectives about student cultures as fact, and allows the white teacher to feel as though they are doing students a favor by teaching them about “literature.” And this “literature,” which, as was seen earlier, is based on Euro-American canonical superiority, further alienates non-dominant culture students who cannot see themselves in any of the texts present in the classroom. Sinclair asks, “If only certain stories ‘count,’ what

does that say about the lives not represented in the stories we value? (p. 91), and this question is answered by Baker-Bell et. al (2017) who assert that

We... invoke racial violence on Black and Brown youth when we don't include literature that portrays Black and Brown people as heroes and victors. We invoke racial violence when we fail to portray Black and Brown women as heroines and activists. We invoke racial violence when we don't affirm or sustain Black and Brown youths' multiple languages and literacies in our classrooms. We invoke racial violence when we don't cultivate critical media literacies that Black and Brown youth can use to critique, rewrite, and dismantle the damaging narratives that mainstream media has written about them. We invoke racial violence when we don't provide opportunities for young people to speak back, to, and against racial oppression (p. 124).

Both Sinclair and Baker-Bell et. al propose theoretical perspectives as ways of intervening in this issue. For Sinclair, analyses of power dynamics in literature should function as a way to "actively use our curriculum and pedagogy to name and confront systems of oppression" (p. 91). Baker-Bell et. al call for even stronger curricular intervention by offering Critical Race English Education as a framework for "centering race and racism in English education" (p.123). This framework asks English teachers to use their power in the classroom to name and dismantle white supremacy and racism by teaching critical media literacy. This can only happen when the ELA classroom has been decolonized of its Euro-American bias, and the impetus for such a decolonization can only be justified through the multiple perspectives approach provided by theory. That it has to be "justified" at all is a failing of schooling and society at large, but in a world where the people who write curriculum standards do not believe in critical literacy (Tampio 2014), teachers and scholars have to provide concrete arguments for

changing the ELA curriculum. To attempt to decolonize the ELA classroom without acknowledging its hidden ideological bases would result in a reification of Euro-American “literariness” because the formal standards used to “count” texts as teachable literature would still be based upon Euro-American cultural values.

Implementing multiple perspectives with literary theory provides epistemological freedom for students. Without acknowledging the ideological bases of the ELA classroom, students are left in the dark as to both the why and the how of literary study. The true power of teaching theory in the ELA classroom is the opportunity to give students the tools to understand the ideological perspectives that govern their own lives, with an eye toward critiquing those ideologies and the material conditions they create. Several of the teacher scholars who have written about using literary theory in the classroom see it as a way to implement critical pedagogy. They directly connect using literary theory in the classroom to Freire’s (1987) assertion that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (p. 23). Appleman also brings in hooks (1996) idea about being an “enlightened witness,” which means “we are able to be critically vigilant about both what is being told to us and how we respond to what is being told” (p. 8), to describe the purpose of teaching multiple perspectives to students. The power of multiple perspectives is that this approach gives students the opportunity to turn their analytical gaze away from literature to any text, and any cultural product, so that they in turn can understand the world more deeply to be able to articulate their own place in it. This is especially important for marginalized students who do not have their identities and cultural contexts affirmed by mainstream American schooling. Literary theory as multiple perspectives provides engaging ways to teach analyses of any cultural products or texts, which equips students with the capacity to resist being interpellated into Euro-

American cultural hegemony. This is necessary for all students no matter their background because dominant culture students need to understand their privilege and the ways it can be critiqued, and non-dominant culture students need ways to affirm that their own cultures matter and should be sustained by schooling. All students deserve the opportunity to see their stories in the classroom. When teachers refuse to acknowledge the non-dominant cultural capital that students already have and view their lack of Euro-American cultural knowledge as a deficit, teachers continually reproduce the notion that Euro-American culture is the ultimate expression of all human culture, this leads our students to believe that what they, and their families, and their home cultures, say and feel is irrelevant. Gonzalez et. al (2005)'s concept of the "funds of knowledge" that all students and their families can bring to schooling is just as applicable in the ELA classroom as any other classroom. Students and their communities have texts and perspectives about texts that are equally as important and eye-opening as any piece of Euro-American literature.

Using literary theory as multiple perspectives in the ELA classroom expands what is possible in literary study in order to open the door for all non-dominant culture students to see themselves as prioritized in the classroom. By calling into question the ideologies that govern ELA literary study, the ELA teacher gives space for students to understand their own relationship to power and oppression, which in turn gives students the power to liberate themselves from those structures of power. Literary study has always been about more than literature. It has long been the grounds of ideological and cultural battles, and students deserve to know the truth about their schooling, its purposes, and its structures of power. Explicitly teaching literary theory in the ELA classroom is one way in which to bring these structures to light, but as has already been demonstrated, implementing such a curriculum faces many obstacles. Focusing

on the ELA teacher's perspective may clarify some of the resistance to such a necessary curricular intervention.

Chapter 3: Studying ELA Teacher Knowledge and Attitudes

This study used three instruments to gather data: an online survey, interviews with ELA classroom teachers, document analysis of teacher preservice program requirements, and document analysis of ELA curricular materials. The survey was developed as a way to gauge basic ELA teacher knowledge about and attitudes toward using literary theory in the classroom. The survey included fifteen questions, whose content was informed by and developed from several sources. First, casual conversations with other ELA teachers and education faculty were indispensable in helping me brainstorm relevant topics and questions that seemed worth asking. Second, contemporary research about using literary theory in the secondary ELA classroom provided inspiration for several of the questions. Most directly, Applebee's (1993) wide-ranging study of national trends in American ELA education provided a starting point for developing the questions used in this survey. At the time of his research, most ELA teachers he queried rejected literary theory as useful for the classroom, and most were invested in either New Critical or reader response approaches in their own classrooms (p. 122). Survey questions 1, 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11 were written with Applebee's surveys in mind. I wanted to see if those trends were still reflected in ELA teachers' attitudes toward literary theory today, and particularly in the context of Oklahoma ELA teachers. Appleman's (2015, 2017) work is foundational both to the survey and to the entirety of this project. Although she has not formally surveyed secondary ELA teachers in large numbers, she has worked with a number of classroom teachers to implement literary theory in their curricula, along with teaching preservice English teacher classes about literary theory-based pedagogy. Appleman (2015) describes some of the main objections secondary teachers have expressed to her against implementing a multiple perspectives, theoried approach in the classroom: "Teachers, too, may not be convinced of the relevance of

contemporary literary theory...Literature teachers...are already overwhelmed as they juggle curricular concerns as well as the varied literacy skills and needs of their increasingly diverse student body” (p. 4), and “There are those [teachers] who may say that they signed on to teach English, not social studies, and that this approach is too political” (p. 8). Survey questions 5, 7, 8, and 12 were included to gauge whether these objections were considered impactful by participants. Question 12’s wording “average student” was done intentionally to get past the idea that only Advanced Placement students might be capable of using literary theory to conduct analysis. Appleman (2017) has also asserted that more preservice teacher programs now include instruction about using multiple literary theories and their application in the secondary ELA classroom, and that preservice teachers are getting more experience with these multiple perspectives and critical lens-based approaches. Survey questions 1, 2, and 3 were included in order to test that hypothesis among participants. Issues about text accessibility and teacher purchasing freedom, along with various arguments about using literary theory to critically analyze texts in the secondary ELA canon, such as those from Hill and Malo-Juvera (2019), Appleman (2015), and, Wilson (2014), informed questions 9, 10, 13, and 14. Lastly, question 15 was inspired by conversations with ELA classroom teachers, and by Rabinowitz and Bancroft’s (2014) arguments about the ELA curriculum’s reduction under Common Core standards. It is important to note that the survey was workshopped with peers but was not distributed to a test group for vetting before being used in this study. Instead, the survey went through four iterations in which questions were added, removed, and refined in discussion with some of my colleagues before it was given to participants.

Survey respondents were given four levels of response to each question: definitely yes, probably yes, probably no, definitely no. This set of answers was chosen in order to gauge the

respondent's feelings about their answers, giving indication of which questions might be more relevant to the respondent. Responses were numbered as such: definitely yes (1), probably yes (2), probably no (3), and definitely no (4) in order to analyze the data numerically.

Survey Instrument

1. I understand the term “literary theory,” and I am familiar with several of the different ways in which scholars interpret literature.
2. I have conducted literary criticism as a student at the collegiate level.
3. My preservice English education program included instruction about literary theory and how to use it in the classroom.
4. I have used critical lenses or multiple perspectives to teach literature in my classroom.
5. I feel knowledgeable about discussing political, historical, and cultural issues as they relate to the works of literature I teach.
6. When I teach literature, I usually focus on formal analysis [plot structure, literary devices, diction/syntax, rhyme/meter, etc.]
7. I am comfortable discussing topics like race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability in my classroom.
8. If/when I discuss topics like race, gender, sexuality, and disability in my classroom, I am afraid that parents will complain to my school’s administration.
9. How I teach texts is more important than which texts I am teaching.
10. Literary works can have a variety of interpretations and it is important to let students explore that variety.
11. I value students’ personal, emotional reactions to literature more than their abilities to formally analyze a text.
12. My average student is capable of using different literary theories to analyze the texts we read in the classroom.
13. I am free to buy new books for my classroom when necessary.
14. I am limited to teaching the books already owned by my school.
15. Standardized testing prevents me from teaching in ways I wish to do so.

The survey was distributed through three different means: posted on social media, posted on a forum, and shared with five high schools selected through convenience sampling. The survey was distributed electronically, and all responses were anonymous. The first survey distribution was to a Facebook group for English and Language Arts teachers in a southern U.S.

state that has approximately 3000 members. This group was selected because it is the largest social media group for ELA teachers in that state, and its members are regularly active. The solicitation information is available in the appendix.

The second survey distribution was to the subreddit r/ELAteachers, a forum with a little over 9000 members. This group is open to the public but mainly consists of ELA teachers in the United States. The group features content that ranges from job searches to lesson planning to teacher troubleshooting.

The third survey distribution was to high school English departments that were convenience sampled by their proximity to me. The following schools were solicited: Suburban High School 1, Suburban High School 2, Suburban High School 3, Urban Private Upper School, and Rural High School. Responses were received from SHS 1, SHS 2, and UPUS, and all survey responses remained anonymous.

Interviews were conducted with Oklahoma secondary ELA teachers to more deeply understand the particular pedagogical choices an ELA teacher might make regarding approaches to literary interpretation and analysis. These interviews also inquired as to what level of knowledge the sampled teachers had of literary theory, if they had ever used it explicitly in the classroom, and how that process worked for them. Instead of using specific interview questions, I developed an outline of topics based on the research that informed the survey questions and expanded upon those questions. Below is the outline I used in the interview to guide the conversation:

1. Questions related to preservice teacher classes and academic work
 - a. Explicit discussion, application of theory and criticism
 - b. Pedagogical tools for analyzing literature
 - c. What was prioritized in terms of teaching literature?

- d. How did you feel like the profs you had approached literary study?
 - e. How familiar are you with the history of English education and the theoretical schools behind it?
2. Questions related to knowledge about literary theory and its application in the classroom
 - a. Have you explicitly used literary theory in your classroom instruction?
 - b. How would you identify the approaches you take to interpreting and analyzing literature?
 - c. Would you feel comfortable using a multiple perspectives/critical lenses approach?
 - d. Do you think your students would respond positively to such an approach?
 3. Questions related to the atmosphere of the school and the ease or difficulty of teaching literary theory in the classroom.
 - a. If you were to discuss political or controversial cultural topics in the classroom, would you expect backlash from parents or admin?
 - b. Does your school encourage or discourage critical pedagogies?
 - c. Do you think that there are certain schools of theory that might be easier to bring into the secondary classroom than others?
 4. Questions related to pedagogical practice and teaching philosophy
 - a. How would you summarize your teaching philosophy?
 - b. Why did you decide to become an English teacher?
 5. Questions related to attitudes about literature and literary study beyond the classroom.
 - a. What kind of texts do you tend to read outside the classroom/teaching?
 - b. Do you feel like your own relationship to literature influences how you teach?

Document analysis was conducted on curricular material not generated by students to ascertain what, if any, explicit theoretical approaches were being used by the teacher. Each piece of curricular material was analyzed using Table 1 to track keywords or phrases that could be associated with New Criticism, reader response, or multiple perspectives. This was done to ascertain the degree to which literary theory was being utilized, either implicitly or explicitly, while teaching students literary interpretation. Keywords and phrases were derived from the background information discussed in Chapter Two. Data was collected from a single high school's English department [this collection was interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic], specifically from eleventh and twelfth grade English teachers

T.1 *Literary theory schools keywords and phrases for document analysis*

New Criticism	Reader Response Theory	Multiple Perspectives
Objective, objectivity	Subjective	Critical, criticism
Literary devices	Personal	Theory
Literary elements	Response	Lenses
Close reading	Reaction	Race
Form	Feeling	Feminism, gender
Formalism	Transaction	Marxism, social class
Theme	Choice	Historicism
Genre		Psychoanalysis
		Postcolonialism

Document analysis was also conducted on degree sheets and course catalogues from a number of Oklahoma higher education institutions. Institutions were selected from the Oklahoma Office of Educational Quality and Accountability Education Preparation Inventory for 2020 and narrowed to a sample of seven universities for manageability. Degree sheets from these institutions were analyzed for any inclusion of a course requirement that implied the study of literary theory beyond New Critical approaches. To find these courses, I looked for the keywords and phrases: “critical,” “theory,” “criticism,” “literary analysis,” “cultural analysis,” and “approaches.” Courses were identified with a variety of titles, such as “Literary and Cultural Analysis,” “Critical Approaches,” or “Literary Criticism.” Then, these courses were cross-referenced in the course catalogue in order to determine what their content might be. Table 2 lists the universities analyzed, whether or not a course on literary theory is offered at that institution, whether or not a literary theory course is required for the institution’s ELA teacher preservice program, and the descriptions of those literary theory courses found in the institution’s course catalogue. Finally, course descriptions from a single university were analyzed for indications of the theoretical bases of those courses in order to demonstrate how teacher preservice programs and English subject area courses might perpetuate certain perspectives regarding literary interpretation and analysis.

T.2 Comparing preservice ELA teacher programs and literary theory courses

University Name	Literary theory course offered?	Literary theory course required?	Course Content Descriptions:
University of Oklahoma	Yes	Only 1/3 offered	Split across three courses; EngEd major requires 1
Oklahoma State University	Yes	Yes	"Study of the major works of critical theory and literary criticism."
University of Central Oklahoma	Yes	Indeterminate	"Examines the standards used in the evaluations of literature."
University of Tulsa	No	No	UT does not appear to offer a course about literary theory specifically.
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma	Yes	No	"Critical Approaches to Literature (Not required for teacher certification)."
East Central University	Yes	Yes	"Explores various methodologies in literary criticism."
Northeastern State University	Yes	No	"A study of the major documents of literary criticism from Plato and Aristotle to the present."

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Implications

Survey data was divided into three different sets: total responses, state responses, and Reddit responses. Because the sample size was relatively small, it was important to consider the total responses in order to find useful patterns. However, since this study is also specifically concerned with literary instruction in Oklahoma, responses from Oklahoma teachers were isolated and analyzed separately. The survey had 92 responses in total, 41 to the Oklahoma survey and 51 to the Reddit survey. Four responses were removed due to lack of completion of more than half of the questions.

Total Survey Responses:

The majority of respondents were high school teachers, which was expected given the methods of survey distribution. Most respondents were from suburban schools, with only a few urban and rural participants. Teaching experience ranged from 1-28 years, with the majority of participants falling in the range of 5-10 years.

Figure 1 is a table of all responses, given both as raw numbers of responses and percentages of respondents. Data is broken into all responses, Oklahoma responses, and Reddit responses, with sample sizes included for each. It is important to note that not all questions had the same number of respondents, since survey participants were given the option not to answer questions if they so desired. Percentages are calculated with total responses to a given question, not total responses overall.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8										
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%										
All responses n = 92	DY	60	69.8	DY	68	79.07	DY	51	61.4	DY	30	36.1	DY	58	70.7	DY	12	14.6
	PY	15	17.4	PY	13	15.12	PY	24	28.6	PY	26	31.3	PY	17	20.7	PY	19	23.2
	PN	7	8.1	PN	4	4.7	PN	20	23.8	PN	5	6	PN	10	12.0	PN	6	7.3
	DN	4	4.7	DN	1	1.2	DN	14	16.7	DN	1	1.2	DN	6	7.2	DN	1	1.2
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	21	58.3	DY	25	69.44	DY	14	38.9	DY	20	55.6	DY	19	52.8	DY	16	44.4
	PY	6	16.7	PY	7	19.44	PY	8	22.2	PY	7	19.4	PY	12	33.3	PY	13	36.1
	PN	6	16.7	PN	3	8.3	PN	9	25	PN	5	13.9	PN	4	11.1	PN	4	11.1
	DN	3	8.3	DN	1	2.8	DN	5	13.9	DN	4	11.1	DN	1	2.8	DN	3	8.3
Reddit n = 51	DY	39	78	DY	43	86	DY	12	25	DY	33	70.2	DY	32	68.1	DY	14	29.8
	PY	9	18	PY	6	12	PY	16	33.3	PY	6	12.8	PY	14	29.8	PY	24	51.1
	PN	1	2	PN	1	2	PN	11	22.9	PN	5	10.6	PN	1	2.1	PN	6	12.8
	DN	1	2	DN	0	0	DN	9	18.8	DN	3	6.4	DN	0	0	DN	3	6.4
All responses n = 92	DY	20	24.4	DY	65	80.2	DY	18	22.0	DY	7	8.8	DY	13	16.0	DY	14	17.5
	PY	38	46.3	PY	15	18.5	PY	33	40.2	PY	29	36.3	PY	20	24.7	PY	30	37.5
	PN	17	20.7	PN	0	0	PN	27	32.9	PN	28	35	PN	24	29.6	PN	19	23.8
	DN	7	8.5	DN	1	1.23	DN	4	4.9	DN	16	20	DN	24	29.6	DN	17	21.3
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	6	17.1	DY	28	80	DY	9	25.7	DY	3	9.1	DY	6	17.6	DY	4	11.8
	PY	15	42.9	PY	6	17.1	PY	19	54.3	PY	15	45.5	PY	10	29.4	PY	11	32.4
	PN	11	31.4	PN	0	0	PN	6	17.1	PN	9	27.3	PN	10	29.4	PN	11	32.4
	DN	3	8.6	DN	1	2.9	DN	1	2.9	DN	6	18.2	DN	8	23.5	DN	8	23.5
Reddit n = 51	DY	14	29.8	DY	37	80.4	DY	9	19.1	DY	4	8.5	DY	7	14.9	DY	10	21.7
	PY	23	48.9	PY	9	19.6	PY	14	29.8	PY	14	29.8	PY	10	21.3	PY	19	41.3
	PN	6	12.8	PN	0	0	PN	21	44.7	PN	19	40.4	PN	14	29.8	PN	8	17.4
	DN	4	8.5	DN	0	0	DN	3	6.4	DN	10	21.3	DN	16	34	DN	9	19.6
All responses n = 92	DY	20	24.4	DY	65	80.2	DY	18	22.0	DY	7	8.8	DY	13	16.0	DY	14	17.5
	PY	38	46.3	PY	15	18.5	PY	33	40.2	PY	29	36.3	PY	20	24.7	PY	30	37.5
	PN	17	20.7	PN	0	0	PN	27	32.9	PN	28	35	PN	24	29.6	PN	19	23.8
	DN	7	8.5	DN	1	1.23	DN	4	4.9	DN	16	20	DN	24	29.6	DN	17	21.3
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	6	17.1	DY	28	80	DY	9	25.7	DY	3	9.1	DY	6	17.6	DY	4	11.8
	PY	15	42.9	PY	6	17.1	PY	19	54.3	PY	15	45.5	PY	10	29.4	PY	11	32.4
	PN	11	31.4	PN	0	0	PN	6	17.1	PN	9	27.3	PN	10	29.4	PN	11	32.4
	DN	3	8.6	DN	1	2.9	DN	1	2.9	DN	6	18.2	DN	8	23.5	DN	8	23.5
Reddit n = 51	DY	14	29.8	DY	37	80.4	DY	9	19.1	DY	4	8.5	DY	7	14.9	DY	10	21.7
	PY	23	48.9	PY	9	19.6	PY	14	29.8	PY	14	29.8	PY	10	21.3	PY	19	41.3
	PN	6	12.8	PN	0	0	PN	21	44.7	PN	19	40.4	PN	14	29.8	PN	8	17.4
	DN	4	8.5	DN	0	0	DN	3	6.4	DN	10	21.3	DN	16	34	DN	9	19.6
All responses n = 92	DY	20	24.4	DY	65	80.2	DY	18	22.0	DY	7	8.8	DY	13	16.0	DY	14	17.5
	PY	38	46.3	PY	15	18.5	PY	33	40.2	PY	29	36.3	PY	20	24.7	PY	30	37.5
	PN	17	20.7	PN	0	0	PN	27	32.9	PN	28	35	PN	24	29.6	PN	19	23.8
	DN	7	8.5	DN	1	1.23	DN	4	4.9	DN	16	20	DN	24	29.6	DN	17	21.3
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	6	17.1	DY	28	80	DY	9	25.7	DY	3	9.1	DY	6	17.6	DY	4	11.8
	PY	15	42.9	PY	6	17.1	PY	19	54.3	PY	15	45.5	PY	10	29.4	PY	11	32.4
	PN	11	31.4	PN	0	0	PN	6	17.1	PN	9	27.3	PN	10	29.4	PN	11	32.4
	DN	3	8.6	DN	1	2.9	DN	1	2.9	DN	6	18.2	DN	8	23.5	DN	8	23.5
Reddit n = 51	DY	14	29.8	DY	37	80.4	DY	9	19.1	DY	4	8.5	DY	7	14.9	DY	10	21.7
	PY	23	48.9	PY	9	19.6	PY	14	29.8	PY	14	29.8	PY	10	21.3	PY	19	41.3
	PN	6	12.8	PN	0	0	PN	21	44.7	PN	19	40.4	PN	14	29.8	PN	8	17.4
	DN	4	8.5	DN	0	0	DN	3	6.4	DN	10	21.3	DN	16	34	DN	9	19.6
All responses n = 92	DY	20	24.4	DY	65	80.2	DY	18	22.0	DY	7	8.8	DY	13	16.0	DY	14	17.5
	PY	38	46.3	PY	15	18.5	PY	33	40.2	PY	29	36.3	PY	20	24.7	PY	30	37.5
	PN	17	20.7	PN	0	0	PN	27	32.9	PN	28	35	PN	24	29.6	PN	19	23.8
	DN	7	8.5	DN	1	1.23	DN	4	4.9	DN	16	20	DN	24	29.6	DN	17	21.3
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	6	17.1	DY	28	80	DY	9	25.7	DY	3	9.1	DY	6	17.6	DY	4	11.8
	PY	15	42.9	PY	6	17.1	PY	19	54.3	PY	15	45.5	PY	10	29.4	PY	11	32.4
	PN	11	31.4	PN	0	0	PN	6	17.1	PN	9	27.3	PN	10	29.4	PN	11	32.4
	DN	3	8.6	DN	1	2.9	DN	1	2.9	DN	6	18.2	DN	8	23.5	DN	8	23.5
Reddit n = 51	DY	14	29.8	DY	37	80.4	DY	9	19.1	DY	4	8.5	DY	7	14.9	DY	10	21.7
	PY	23	48.9	PY	9	19.6	PY	14	29.8	PY	14	29.8	PY	10	21.3	PY	19	41.3
	PN	6	12.8	PN	0	0	PN	21	44.7	PN	19	40.4	PN	14	29.8	PN	8	17.4
	DN	4	8.5	DN	0	0	DN	3	6.4	DN	10	21.3	DN	16	34	DN	9	19.6
All responses n = 92	DY	20	24.4	DY	65	80.2	DY	18	22.0	DY	7	8.8	DY	13	16.0	DY	14	17.5
	PY	38	46.3	PY	15	18.5	PY	33	40.2	PY	29	36.3	PY	20	24.7	PY	30	37.5
	PN	17	20.7	PN	0	0	PN	27	32.9	PN	28	35	PN	24	29.6	PN	19	23.8
	DN	7	8.5	DN	1	1.23	DN	4	4.9	DN	16	20	DN	24	29.6	DN	17	21.3
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	6	17.1	DY	28	80	DY	9	25.7	DY	3	9.1	DY	6	17.6	DY	4	11.8
	PY	15	42.9	PY	6	17.1	PY	19	54.3	PY	15	45.5	PY	10	29.4	PY	11	32.4
	PN	11	31.4	PN	0	0	PN	6	17.1	PN	9	27.3	PN	10	29.4	PN	11	32.4
	DN	3	8.6	DN	1	2.9	DN	1	2.9	DN	6	18.2	DN	8	23.5	DN	8	23.5
Reddit n = 51	DY	14	29.8	DY	37	80.4	DY	9	19.1	DY	4	8.5	DY	7	14.9	DY	10	21.7
	PY	23	48.9	PY	9	19.6	PY	14	29.8	PY	14	29.8	PY	10	21.3	PY	19	41.3
	PN	6	12.8	PN	0	0	PN	21	44.7	PN	19	40.4	PN	14	29.8	PN	8	17.4
	DN	4	8.5	DN	0	0	DN	3	6.4	DN	10	21.3	DN	16	34	DN	9	19.6
All responses n = 92	DY	20	24.4	DY	65	80.2	DY	18	22.0	DY	7	8.8	DY	13	16.0	DY	14	17.5
	PY	38	46.3	PY	15	18.5	PY	33	40.2	PY	29	36.3	PY	20	24.7	PY	30	37.5
	PN	17	20.7	PN	0	0	PN	27	32.9	PN	28	35	PN	24	29.6	PN	19	23.8
	DN	7	8.5	DN	1	1.23	DN	4	4.9	DN	16	20	DN	24	29.6	DN	17	21.3
Oklahoma n = 41	DY	6	17.1	DY	28	80	DY	9	25.7	DY	3	9.1	DY	6	17.6	DY	4	11.8
	PY	15	42.9	PY	6	17.1	PY	19	54.3	PY	15	45.5	PY	10	29.4	PY	11	32.4

Responses to the survey reflect the wide range of teaching experience and contexts of the survey participants, but there are several notable data points. First, a majority of participants answered “definitely yes” or “probably yes” to Q1 and Q2, which indicates that a majority of respondents think that they have both learned about and practiced literary theory at the collegiate level. Since the survey did not specify any particular theoretical approaches, it is not possible to say how exactly these participants conceive of “literary theory;” however, these responses do suggest a majority of participants have been exposed to some variation of literary theory in their secondary education.

One of the questions with which this study is concerned is how preservice ELA teacher education might influence the approaches to literature used in the classroom. Interestingly, total responses to Q3 were spread across all four answer options, with a small majority answering “definitely yes” or “probably yes.” However, the majority of participants answered “definitely yes” to Q4, which might indicate that preservice exposure is not the only force driving adoption of multiple perspectives or critical lenses by ELA teachers.

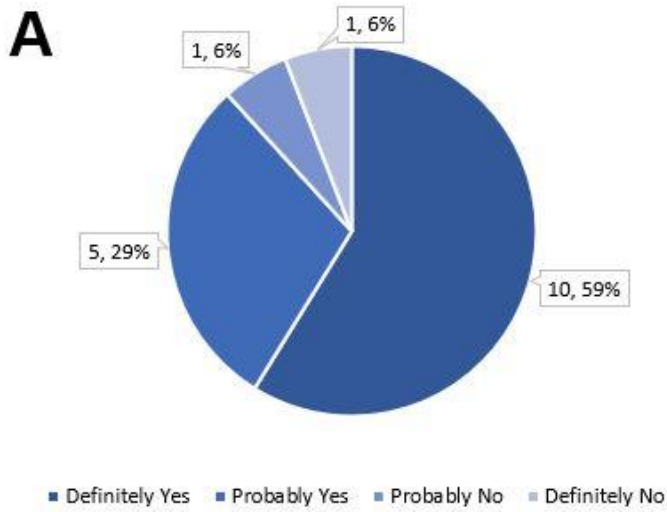
Another topic this study explored is the use of formalism in the ELA classroom. The majority of participants answered “definitely yes” or “probably yes” to Q6, but it is worth noting that between those sets of responses, more than half only said “probably yes.” The question gives specific examples of formalism, and the lack of definiteness in these responses complicates earlier hypotheses about how entrenched in the ELA classroom formalism is. Q11, which asked about student emotional responses with an eye toward reader response theory, had a mix of responses, with a slim majority of yes responses. It seems that ELA teachers are using a mix of approaches to literary analysis.

Responses to Q7 were notable when placed in the context of the earlier literature reviewed in this study. 70% of participants answered “definitely yes,” and 20% answered “probably yes” to the statement “I am comfortable discussing topics like race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability in my classroom.” This indicates that perhaps participants are bringing these topics to bear on the texts they teach. However, what these “discussions” might look like is unknown, so the question of whether participants are simply acknowledging these topics or actually providing liberatory pedagogies to their students by critically examining these issues.

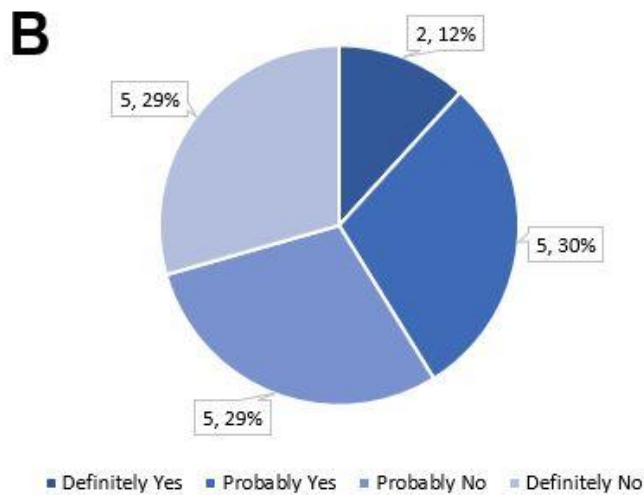
One other observation about the survey data that seems worth discussing is the responses Q12: “My average student is capable of using different literary theories to analyze the texts we read in the classroom.” Responses broke down into only 9% answering “definitely yes,” 36% answering “probably yes,” 35% answering “probably no,” and 20% answering “definitely no.” Over half of participants who answered this question seem to think that their average student most likely would not be capable of using multiple literary theories to conduct literary analysis. Interestingly, the Oklahoma responses were more positive than the Reddit responses, with more than half (54%) of OK participants agreeing that their average student was capable. The reverse was seen in the Reddit data, where almost 60% answered “no” to Q12. The reasons for these differences are not immediately apparent in the data, but middle school and junior high teachers were more likely to say “no” to this response. Since the survey did not ask for grade level taught, it is not possible whether or not to say that the high school teachers who answered “no” teach early high school or on-level courses.

Figures 2A-2E represent an analysis of responses by participants who answered “definitely no” or “probably no” to Q4 (“have you used multiple perspectives or critical lenses in your classroom”). After filtering total responses for no’s, responses to the other questions were

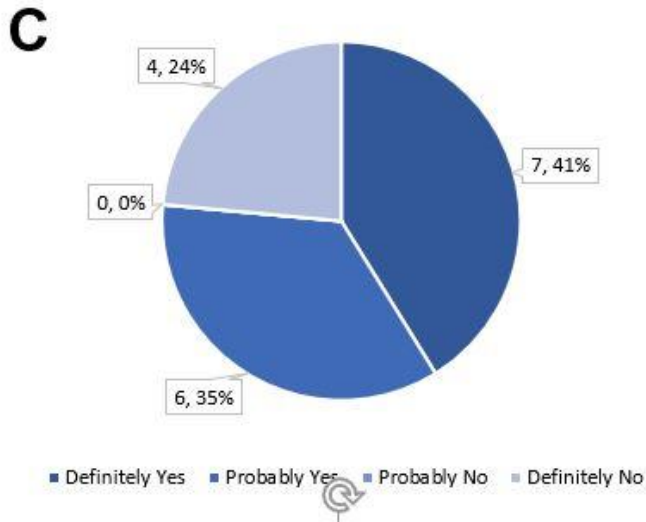
considered. Each pie chart represents answer breakdowns for the given questions by those participants who answered “definitely no” or “probably no” to Q4. 2.A shows these participants’ responses to Q2, indicating that a majority of participants who do not use multiple perspective or critical lenses had themselves conducted literary criticism in their collegiate education.



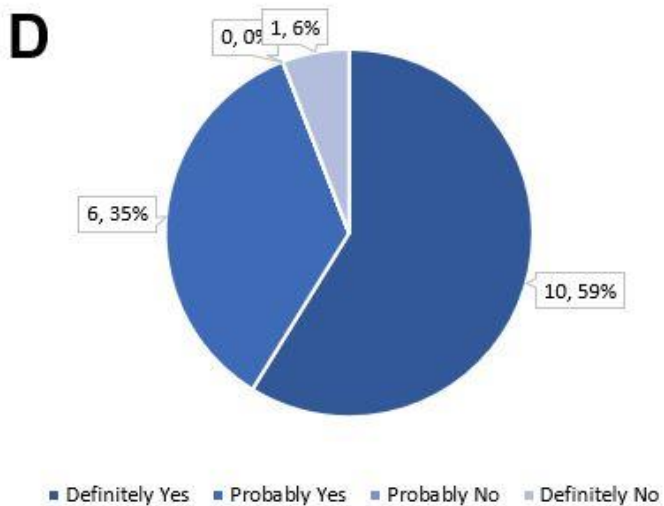
2.B shows responses to Q3, indicating that this group of participants had mixed experiences in their preservice programs in terms of literary theory instruction.



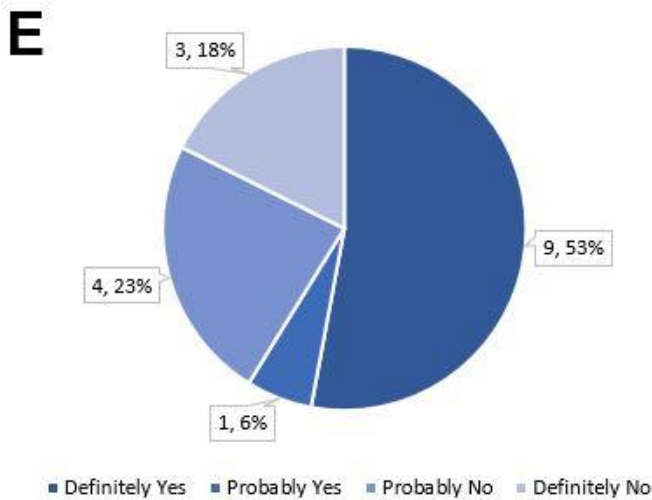
2.C shows that a majority of participants who do not use multiple perspectives or critical lenses rely on formalism as their main approach to literary analysis in the classroom.



2.D shows that a majority of this group of participants answered “definitely yes” to Q10, which asked about the importance of allowing students to explore interpretive variety.



2.E shows that a majority also answered “definitely yes” to Q15, which asked about standardized testing keeping ELA teachers from teaching literature how they would prefer to do so.



Oklahoma Survey Responses:

A large number, but not a majority, of the OK survey respondents were suburban high school teachers. It is important to note that while the average teaching length of a respondent was 12 years, this average represents a wide range of career-lengths (standard deviation is 7 years). Several respondents had been teaching for less than 10 years, which was also seen in the Reddit survey data.

One relationship worth noting is that between preservice instruction in literary theory, use of critical lenses, and use of formalism. Of those teachers who said they received preservice instruction in literary theory, almost two-thirds said they had used critical lenses or multiple perspectives approaches in their own classrooms. Interestingly, teachers who denied receiving preservice literary theory instruction were still fairly likely to say that they had used multiple

perspectives or critical lenses in the classroom. Teachers who said no to having preservice literary theory instruction were less likely to say they had used critical lenses or multiple perspectives approaches in their classroom, but many were also likely to say they probably had done so.

Teachers who said they had no preservice training in literary theory also showed a tendency toward using formalism in the classroom. Of those who answered “no” to the preservice question, two-thirds said definitely yes to using formalism, and another sixth said probably yes. However, teachers who said “yes” to preservice instruction in literary theory also showed a majority of “probably yes” responses to the question of using formalism in the classroom. This suggests that the relationship between preservice teacher education and the approaches teachers implement in their own classrooms are connected, but also suggests that there are other factors that might influence whether a teacher has heard of or implemented these approaches in their own classroom.

Document Analysis

English/Language Arts Preservice Program Requirements and Courses

Unfortunately, the course catalogue descriptions were extremely vague and short, so it is difficult to know exactly what is being taught. A further study could request syllabi or other materials from course instructors in order to determine the content of these literary theory courses. Another complicating factor is the dual nature of teaching degrees. In the set of universities considered, all of them split preservice teacher programs between the education department and the subject department. Several of them treat education classes as a minor to be combined with a subject area major. However, the requirements between English majors and

English education majors are often different for the obvious reason that education majors need time to take education classes, and thus do not have the time to take upper level English courses. Often, literary theory and criticism is offered as an elective, and it is uncertain what number of preservice English education students might elect to take such a class while trying to balance education classes and internships.

The arrangement in the University of Oklahoma's English department for preservice ELA teachers is particularly interesting and provides a window into the assumptions that programs make about what knowledge is necessary for teachers in the secondary classroom. First, consider the course descriptions of the three courses that cover literary analysis and criticism:

ENGL 2413: Introduction to Literature: "Concentrates on close readings of masterpieces in fiction, drama and poetry. The readings are drawn from periods ancient to modern and may be American, British or Continental".

ENGL 2273: Literary and Cultural Analysis (required for education majors): "Prerequisite: ENGL 1213. This course offers an introduction to literary and cultural analysis focusing on textual explication, interpretation, and critique. Subjects may include poetic forms including prosody and scansion, narrative techniques, introduction to genre, and a grounding in basic literary terms. The course emphasizes writing analytically about literature and culture."

ENGL 2283: Critical Methods: Texts/Contexts/Theories/Critics: "Prerequisite: ENGL 1213 and ENGL 2273. This course examines literary and cultural texts in conjunction with texts of theory, criticism or history. The course explores how to read literary texts within relevant

frameworks, whether they be historical or other contexts such as gender, race, or colonialism.”

<http://www.ou.edu/cas/english/academics/courses/catalogue>

Although ENGL 2413 is not required, it is recommended in the “Suggested Plan of Study” on OU’s English education degree sheet, which indicates that preservice ELA teachers are encouraged to take this class. A few words in the course description reveal that both New Critical and Great Books perspectives are present in this course’s design. “Close reading,” though practiced in a variety of literary contexts, was developed by the New Critics and indicates their influence. “Masterpieces” could be culturally neutral, but the next sentence clarifies that these texts come from “American, British, or Continental” sources, falling back onto a reliance on the Western/Euro-American literary canon. Nothing in this course description indicates that multiple perspectives about the possibilities of literary meaning might be discussed in the course, but without a syllabus it is impossible to say for certain.

ENGL 2273, which is required for English education majors, seems to provide a little more nuance. The inclusion of “cultural analysis” points to the opportunity for students to read beyond formalism, and the word “critique” perhaps indicates the use of some set of critical lenses. However, the subjects included muddy these indications. “Poetic forms,” “genre,” and “basic literary terms” fall under the purview of New Criticism, so it is likely that formalism is the main theoretical basis of this course.

Lastly, ENGL 2283 teaches a variety of literary theories while also teaching students how to read theory, which is a skill in and of itself. This course does not seem to provide any guidance for using theory in the classroom but does provide a broader range of perspectives of the possibilities of literary meaning, interpretation, and criticism than the previous two courses.

The schools of theory taught in this course form the basis of the multiple perspectives and critical lens-based approaches for which Appleman and others are arguing; unfortunately, the lack of requirement for education majors, prerequisite courses, and upper division status mean that students might be less likely to make time for such a course.

Secondary ELA Curricular Materials

The first document considered was a summer reading assignment for an Advanced Placement twelfth-grade English class. The “purpose” of the assignment is given here:

PURPOSE

To this end, your summer reading is to focus on a variety of “lenses” in which you will experiment with during the year-long AP Literature course. Each lens is a theory that can be applied to any text. However, each lens is based on its own agenda and/or assumptions about society/humanity and will emphasize some details of a text while ignoring or minimizing others. These lenses fit within a broad area of study, called **Literary Theory** or **Critical Theory**. Your assignment will be to research a small list of these lenses, in preparation for the course.

In the first sentence it is apparent that this teacher will be using the metaphor of “lenses” to help students understand how literary theories can be used to interpret a text. As was discussed previously, this is a common tactic, and one encouraged by teacher-pedagogists who have written about the issue. The teacher here gives a simple explanation that will allow students to start working through these ideas on their own, while also making students aware of the multiplicity of perspectives they will encounter in their reading. Interestingly, the teacher seems to assume that students have never heard of literary theory even by twelfth grade, which is suggestive about the priorities in the secondary ELA classroom.

The goal of this assignment, aside from establishing familiarity with critical lenses, is for students to begin a kind of theory guidebook that they can use to discuss and interpret literature in the classroom. Students are being asked to research a list of critical lenses and answer some basic questions about them to start their notes. Here is the list of lenses being examined:

- Biographical
- Historical
- Psychological – Freud
- Archetypal – Jung
- Feminist
- Marxist
- Postcolonial Theory
- Wild card – student gets to pick another lens to discuss

This list is obviously not exhaustive, but the teacher has selected a broad overview of some of the more impactful ways literature can be read. For students who might be easily overwhelmed by so many new ways of considering literature, this list provides enough variety that students will most likely “get” at least a few of the theoretical perspectives. Already, this document can be easily identified as supporting a multiple perspectives, theoried approach to literary study. The teacher then provides a series of questions for students to answer about each lens to help students parse out what the purposes and agendas of a given lens might be. Lastly, the teacher provides a set of introductory resources for students to consult. The teacher recommends the Purdue OWL’s “Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism” as a starting point for students. Several critical perspectives are listed under this heading, with summaries and important theorists from each. It is important to note that this teacher is not asking students to actually read theory texts for this assignment, which might be for any number of reasons, not the least of which being the difficulty of many such texts. However, by providing explicit information about the theoretical perspectives that will be covered in this class, the teacher provides students with a variety of ways to approach whatever texts are read. Worth noting is the lack of inclusion of New

Criticism or reader response theory on the list, and this lack of inclusion could suggest either that the teacher takes these perspectives for granted as outside “literary theory” or that the teacher assumes students are already familiar with those approaches to interpretation to some degree.

The other teacher who provided curricular materials shared pieces of a unit that uses critical lenses to analyze Suzanne Collins's novel *The Hunger Games*. This teacher implements critical lenses in a variety of ways to help students examine different aspects of the text. In order to keep from overwhelming the students, the teacher elected to focus on four critical lenses that were especially fruitful when applied to *The Hunger Games*. The teacher explained to me that other lenses were discussed, and students were given the opportunity to explore beyond the four taught in class. This teacher also elected not to ask their students to read theory texts, and instead distilled the critical lenses into question sets that allowed students to interrogate their reading from different perspectives without needing an overwhelming amount of background information. Then, the teacher provided an excerpt from *The Hunger Games* and asked students to highlight portions in different colors corresponding to each critical lens. This was done to show students the variety of critical perspectives that are present in a text at any given time. The teacher talked students through each critical lens and then asked them to highlight, modeling the analysis for students as they went along. Using the visual of different glasses for each critical lens provides a more concrete metaphor for students and allows them to imagine how reading a passage might change depending on the perspective they take. Here are excerpts from the PowerPoint the teacher used to explain critical lenses:

Reader Response*

Reading a text to identify personal meaning

1. In what ways is the text relatable to your own life?
2. In what ways is the text different from your own life?
3. How did the text affect you emotionally?
4. How does the text interest you or relate to your world?

Read the "Hunger Games" excerpt using your Reader Response lenses



Gender*

Hunger Games with Gender lenses



Reading a text to identify how it comments on gender issues or identify attitudes toward gender

1. Consider the gender of the author and main characters. Whose perspective is present and how does their gender impact the way they view the world?
2. What gender roles or stereotypes are present in the text? How are these perceived by other characters and how does this impact the way you read it?
3. Flip the gender of the characters. How does this change the impact of what you read?
4. Relationships- intersection of gender

Socioeconomic Status*

Hunger Games
with SES Lens



Reading a text to identify how it comments on social status issues

1. How are higher, middle, and lower classes represented?
2. What does the text say about class structure?
3. What does the text show about how class influences the world?
4. What stereotypes are there about the different classes in the society you are reading about?
5. How is class determined in this society? How is attainment of wealth perceived by the characters?

Psychological*

Hunger Games
with Psych lenses



Reading a text for what it shows about patterns regarding human behavior and nature

1. Is the way characters behave believable?
2. What drives characters to act the way they do? What motivates them?
3. What range of emotions does the character have? What influenced their prevalence?
4. Does the character act morally/ethically? How do you perceive their behavior? What could cause differences in morality?

Here is the notes sheet and passage that students highlighted and annotated while learning about the lenses. The passage is very short but contains all the various perspectives the teacher was wanting to explain.

Critical Lenses

Psychological Lens	Social Class Lens	Gender Lens	Reader Response Lens
Reading a text for what it shows about patterns regarding human behavior and nature	Reading a text to identify how it comments on social status issues	Reading a text to identify how it comments on gender issues or identify attitudes toward gender	Reading a text to identify personal meaning

“Katniss,” he says. I go over to him and brush back the hair from his eyes. “Thanks for finding me.”
 “You would have found me if you could,” I say. His forehead’s burning up. Like the medicine’s having no effect at all. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I’m scared he’s going to die.

“Just in case I don’t-” he tries to say.

“No, Peeta”, I don’t even want to discuss it.” I say, and as he insists on continuing, impulsively, I lean forward to kiss him, stopping his words. This is probably overdue anyway since he’s right, we are supposed to be madly in love. It’s the first time I’ve ever kissed a boy, which should make some sort of impression I guess, but all I can register is his feverish heat. I break away and pull the edge of the sleeping bag up around him. “You’re not going to die. All right?”

I step out in the cool evening air just as the parachute floats down from the sky. My fingers quickly undo the tie, hoping for some real medicine to treat Peeta’s leg. Instead I find a pot of hot broth.

Haymitch couldn’t be sending a clearer message. He is fighting just as hard to get us sponsors, while other districts have the resources to easily send what their tributes need. I can almost hear his snarl. “You’re supposed to be in love, sweetheart. The boy’s dying. Give me something I can work with!”

And he is right. I’ve got to give the audience something more to care about. Romance. Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home. Never having been in love, this is going to be a real trick, but the performance must happen to get what we need to survive. I think of my parents and the way they were before my father died before reentering the cave on a mission.

After this introduction, the teacher asks the students to take what they have learned about critical lenses and apply them to a piece of media of the student’s choosing. This teacher uses a writing schematic called Answer, Cite, Explain, Done (ACED) paragraphs for analysis, and asked students to use this format to provide an analysis of their chosen text. This step is

important because it shows students how widely applicable critical lenses are and provides an opportunity for students to engage with material they find legitimately interesting.

This introductory activity explicitly teaches students about critical lenses, but interestingly the teacher never calls this exercise “literary theory.” The lenses are presented as analysis tools, not as theoretical perspectives, which is perhaps too fine a distinction for the secondary classroom in which teachers have to find ways to keep from intimidating students and getting those students to buy into any particular pedagogical approach. By simplifying critical lenses into question sets, the teacher is able to mitigate much of the confusion that might arise from simply handing critical perspectives to students and asking students to apply those perspectives to a text.

To further enhance student understanding of critical lens perspectives, the teacher incorporated critical lenses into a creative writing activity in which students were asked to write a dystopian short story and analyze it using critical lenses. This was done so that students could demonstrate both their understanding of the dystopian genre as discussed while reading *The Hunger Games*, and to apply their knowledge of critical lenses as authors instead of readers. The teacher explained that this activity was very useful because it helped students organize their own creative writing around issues they found interesting while also serving as an assessment of the knowledge they had gained over the course of the unit.

Interview Data

Since so much of teaching and the implementation of curriculum is both personal and district-specific, interviewing classroom teachers seemed necessary in order to provide some nuance to the survey data. Unfortunately, due to the 2020 coronavirus outbreak, interview data

collection was interrupted and only one interview was conducted. However, this singular interview provides useful and impactful insight into the ways in which literature instruction is informed by preservice experience, standardized testing, district and school policies, and personal teacher preference.

The interview participant was selected through convenience sampling and is a classmate mine. Denise [pseudonym] teaches on-level eleventh-grade English at a large, suburban, Title I high school. She has been teaching for five years and is the head of the English department at her high school. Her English department participated in the study survey, and she agreed to be interviewed before distributing the survey to her department. Denise has previously used critical lenses in her own classroom, and now as department chair is trying to encourage the other English teachers at her high school to do so. Denise is also working on a Master's in English education at a state university.

The interview was conducted at a local coffee shop. My goal was to have a conversation with Denise about her teaching experience, both preservice and in the classroom, reflected through the lens of literary theory. To begin, I asked about Denise's preservice teacher experience, and specifically whether or not she received any instruction both about literary theory itself and about how to use it in the classroom. Denise attended a public university in Oklahoma and majored in English Education. Interestingly, Denise's preservice teacher experience was in some ways bifurcated because she took classes in both the education department and the English department. This same bifurcation was seen in the degree programs discussed at the beginning of this study. Because Denise had different professors for content classes versus education classes, she observed different priorities about reading, interpretation, and textual engagement. Denise explained that "you're in English classes learning as a student

from literature professors... but then you're also in the education program learning from teachers of English, which was entirely different." She asserted that there was kind of disconnect between what she experienced in her English content classes versus English education classes: "It felt like the English teachers were the ones who focus more on content and teaching the text or making [connections to the world], but it wasn't ever literally using [critical] lenses and that was never something we talked about in the education college. Whereas, in the English college, it was never explicitly called "critical lenses," but we were doing literary theory in our discussions, so it was like guided discussion using literary theory." Denise indicated that she felt there was a gap between what was being taught in the English department and the education department.

When I mentioned that it is common practice not to require literary theory courses for an English teaching degree, Denise was not surprised. She remarked that "you notice it, and as a department chair now it's something that I do see when I talk to teachers that it's a novel idea whenever they do talk about it, instead of being integrated [into the curriculum]...I've incorporated it [critical lenses] into my units in the past two years, just because talking about a text with the literary lenses helps them [students] delve into more of the meaning and make connections." Denise explained that the twelfth-grade Advanced Placement English teacher had also added explicit literary theory instruction to her curriculum in the form of summer reading, so that students could learn about different types of literary theory and the different critical lenses available before they began their literary study in the fall.

This led to a conversation about the benefits and deficits of Advanced Placement English classes. Denise had previously taught pre-AP tenth-grade English, but then transitioned to teaching on-level tenth and eleventh grade classes. However, as the department head, she also keeps track of what is being taught in the AP classes. She explained that she was offered the

choice to move to AP eleventh grade instruction but declined. Denise was quick to assert that this was not because of the students, whom she described as “great kids who are usually more academically minded,” but because of the ways in which these high-achieving students had been taught to interact with literature and the English teacher themselves. She explained that “the difference is that AP kids seem to, when you ask them a question, they answer the way that they think you want them to answer. Whereas an on-level kid is going to say what they think is their opinion regardless of what you want them to say. And sometimes that goes terribly wrong and other times, most of the time, it’s kind of awesome.” Denise reiterated that this is not the students’ fault, but the fact that they are taking a class that ends in a test makes them desperate to have the right answers. She explains: “The real literature comes out in on-level [classes] when you get to delve into the text...and I think that, like the literary lenses come back to stuff like connecting it in real ways to the world, and my on level kids connected to that so much more.” Denise asserted that students found literary study more engaging when it went beyond just looking at the text and used critical lenses to connect what students were reading to larger issues. She explained that in the fall she had taught Suzanne Collin’s young adult hit *The Hunger Games* through a variety of critical lenses, using reader response theory, gender studies, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and Critical Race Theory, which gave students the opportunity to read the text in multiple ways. Denise started with reader response theory because it was what her students were most familiar with, and it gave students agency to say what they thought was happening in the text. Then, she complicated their readings by providing them with different literary theories to apply to the text, telling her students that the other theories were “different ways to look at the same piece of information.” She provided a passage from *The Hunger Games* to her students and had them read it four times, focusing on a different critical lens each time while they highlighted

and annotated the text. She found that students were engaged during this process of hunting for new meanings, and that these various lenses provided more opportunities for discussion than when she had taught *The Hunger Games* previously without using the lenses. Denise was able to pull intersectionality into this discussion by asking her students to consider how these different lenses might interact, and how those readings complicate the text. She was able to have productive conversations about the complexities of social privilege that was previously not possible when she taught the text without using critical lenses.

I queried Denise about the differences in her undergraduate and graduate English education program experience to see if there were any major differences in the ways in which literary instruction was being taught. She declaratively answered “no,” and asserted that the instruction was basically the same for both programs in her experience. She explained that in the graduate level class she took on teaching literature, it was “essentially only strategies to teach theme and vocabulary, very basic content within the text only...very much based on literary elements and theme.” This focus reflects both what is seen in the Oklahoma ELA standards and the survey responses about using formalism in the classroom.

When asked if she had given literary theory texts to her students in order to teach them about different critical perspectives, Denise explained that she found it effective to give them levels of questions to ask of the text that would draw them in to deeper analysis using various critical lenses. As the students read a passage, they were asked to annotate textual evidence that could support different critical readings. Students were asked to find five pieces of text for each critical lens they used and were given the choice of which passage or page from *The Hunger Games* they wanted to analyze. This gave students the opportunity to analyze passages that they found particularly interesting, which increased their engagement with the text. Denise then asked

them to relate the critical reading students conducted to the larger questions about dystopian elements in the novel. She explained that last year when she taught *The Hunger Games*, she only focused on dystopian genre elements as a way to analyze the text, but that students were not able to make the same connections or have the same depth of conversation. Denise explicates that “they couldn’t bridge that gap of “what is she [Collins] trying to say. They could say ‘she uses third person point of view’ or ‘she uses first person point of view’ or ‘she uses bureaucratic control’ but they couldn’t figure out what she was really trying to say. The lenses were literally the missing piece. So I added it [critical lenses] in this year, and it was immediate, they got it.” Denise reiterated that giving students the language to talk about the various issues they were seeing in the novel made a remarkable difference in their ability to both discuss and analyze the text. By going beyond a simple genre study, Denise was able to have discussions about the purpose of dystopia as a genre and how engaging with dystopia in a critical way can allow readers to reflect on their own society. To further extend this critical inquiry, Denise asked her students to write their own dystopian short stories while considering which critical lenses might be applicable to their work.

Another point of interest was Denise’s assertion that using critical lenses made discussion more accessible for students. I asked if Denise found that students were reluctant to talk about certain topics that might be viewed as controversial, such as gender/sexuality, race, and class. Using theory allowed students to discuss complicated issues without making it personal. For example, using gender studies as a critical lens allowed students to talk about depictions of gender in *The Hunger Games* without feeling as though they were talking about women they knew personally. She explained that she eased students into learning about critical lenses by using pop songs to practice critical analysis and discussion before moving on to the novel.

Denise, as department chair, said she encouraged other teachers to use the critical lenses, and at this point a few other teachers are trying to use them. However, she acknowledged that those teachers hadn't been as successful in implementing critical lenses, but she wasn't sure exactly what issues they were having. Denise got the impression that these teachers might just be doing critical lenses because they were asked to and not because they wanted to do so.

This interview also provided an enlightening conversation about standardized testing in Denise's particular school context and in the larger state school system. When asked about how standardized testing preparation affected her literature instruction, Denise explained that in recent years the state board of education had switched from using End of Instruction exams as a way to gauge high school graduation preparedness, and now allows districts to choose between using the ACT or the SAT as the standardized test for high school students. In Denise's estimation, this was done to allow for all students to have a free chance to take the ACT or SAT in order to equalize the college application process, but the change has had consequences. Unfortunately, this shift has created a number of issues for all teachers, not just in the ELA classroom. Neither the ACT or the SAT map with the state standards, which are about to undergo further revision, most likely to align with these tests. Denise explained that her school has elected to use the ACT, and that doing so has already influenced classroom instruction by making ACT preparation part of the curriculum. For the ELA classroom, the ACT provides a very narrow view of what ELA content should include. Denise said that all literary content was purged from the test several years ago, and what is left is an English test that focuses solely on grammar, a reading test that focuses on basic comprehension and authorial intent, and a writing test that asks students to conjure arguments only using the test text. When asked how all of this had affected her classroom instruction, Denise explained that she had not rearranged her class

just to teach to the test, but instead told students that they would only “sell our souls for five minutes a day” to standardized testing by doing bellwork at the beginning of class. This strategy was effective, and Denise’s students had some of the highest scores in the district. However, she acknowledged that many other teachers were probably devoting a larger amount of instructional time to ACT preparation.

When asked if she had ever received any pushback against any of her teaching, Denise only remembered one instance in which a parent had objected to a text. In her pre-AP tenth grade course, she assigned Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, which the students enjoyed. A parent objected to the “religious” content of the text without reading it, and their child was given an alternate assignment. Denise said nothing more came of it beyond the complaint. Denise laughed as she explained that now that she teaches on level, she probably teaches more controversial content than she did when she taught pre-AP but has had no complaints about her current curriculum. In her current unit, they are discussing the American Dream and criticizing it, which she said was difficult for students to grapple with because “equality of opportunity” is so deeply ingrained into their thinking about social relations. She said that students were most reluctant when asked to argue for or against the existence or truth of the American Dream because they did not feel comfortable arguing against it. Denise was able to work with their concerns to show her students that they could pick different perspectives in the argument as long as they could provide evidence to support their position. This assignment gently forced students to confront their own internal biases and presuppositions about the American Dream, and Denise put this exercise in conversation with the students’ previous readings of *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman*. By connecting fiction and non-fiction through critical lenses, Denise’s students were able to develop a more nuanced and analytical understanding of both the literature they were reading,

and the social contexts about which they were writing. Fortunately, at the time of the interview, no one had complained about this content and her students seemed to be engaged by it. Denise has used the new mandate for nonfiction in the ELA classroom to provide contextual material that relates to the literary text she is teaching, which also allows her to provide a variety of perspectives to students.

I asked Denise, referring back to the previous discussion of *The Hunger Games*, if she had seen shifts toward newer or young-adult genre texts in her school's curriculum. Denise explained that, at least from what she could tell between teaching tenth and eleventh grade classes, the same canonical books were still being taught, but in some different ways. She pointed to another teacher's development of a critical lens-based unit for reading *Fahrenheit 451*, but acknowledged that it was very difficult to get teachers on board with changing the curriculum. This issue is also tied in with book access, since Denise said that her school makes it fairly difficult to get new class novel sets. The adoption of an online ELA textbook has not helped, Denise explained, because it only includes text excerpts in the main textbook and the optional novels included with the program were largely unfamiliar to Denise and her colleagues. She gave the example of the twelfth-grade teachers no longer being able to get copies of *Frankenstein* because that novel was not included as part of the new textbook package. Instead, the teachers are splitting thirty old copies of the book between classes so that they can keep their *Frankenstein* units. Denise also explained that even if she wanted to use the novels included with the online textbook, she has met resistance trying to change classroom novels because the other ELA teachers don't want to learn a whole new curriculum. She said it makes sense because they have invested so much work and time into these lessons and now feel comfortable teaching them, so it doesn't make sense to these teachers to constantly change what is being taught. Denise has

taken the opposite approach and updates her curriculum constantly. She explained that she is already thinking about changing out *The Hunger Games* for another text, and that this idea has been met with pushback from her team teachers who were just getting comfortable with *The Hunger Games*. Another issue Denise identified for curriculum development and implementation is the substantial amount of turnover and new-hire teacher onboarding that happens each year. She explained that she had run into the issue of other teachers wanting her to give them her lesson plans as a script that they could follow, but Denise declined. Although she has been teaching for less than ten years, Denise is one of the longest-working ELA teachers at her school.

Discussion

Taken together, this collected data paints a complex and sometimes conflicting picture of the ELA teacher's relationship to and willingness to engage with literary theory in the classroom. The question of how much influence previous exposure in a preservice teacher program has on a teacher's likeliness to implement literary theory explicitly in their curriculum was not clearly answered. Document analysis of degree requirements and course materials seemed to indicate that literary theory is not considered essential for preservice ELA teachers. This lack of consideration is reiterated by the interview data, specifically when Denise talked about the disconnect between the two aspects of her preservice teacher education and the differences of priorities between her subject matter professors and her English education professors. Despite the apparent disconnect in preservice instruction, most participants agreed that they had used multiple perspectives or critical lenses in the classroom previously. It seems as though some teachers are learning about critical lenses or multiple perspectives from other sources, either on their own or through professional development. Conversely, the survey data also suggests that the notion that ELA teachers will implement literary theory just because they were taught about

it in their post-secondary education is not entirely accurate and reveals a gap between what ELA teachers learn and what they teach in their own classrooms. The gap is perhaps the result of the differing priorities Denise discussed, by which is meant the tendency of English education professors to focus on strategies for teaching formal analysis versus the English subject area professor's prioritization of discussion-based critical analysis. It seems that English education preservice teachers are either being told or deciding for themselves that the way collegiate literary analysis is conducted does not fit or cannot work in the secondary classroom. This study did not explore the ways in which an ELA teacher's personal ideas about literary meaning might shape lesson planning and doing so might give some idea about how teachers perpetuate their own interpretive priorities to students.

The fact that the question regarding student ability had the most negative responses indicates that teachers' fear of student's not "getting it" might be a more substantial preventative factor than the teacher's own discomfort with the subject material or fear of backlash for being "too political." However, it would be interesting to know how much of the participants' negativity is a projection of teacher's own struggles with learning about literary theory, and how much of it is an accurate reflection of their students' abilities. Xerri (2013) saw this phenomenon in his study of teacher attitudes toward literary theory in the curriculum where one of the teachers he interviewed first indicated that students were "not prepared for it [theory]" and that this teacher didn't think it was worth learning "neither at this level nor in the future," before eventually admitting that they were insecure about teaching theory because "many of them [theories] don't make sense to me personally" (p. 210). More specific data collection from teachers who participated in the survey might reveal that a similar anxiety about teaching what is viewed as esoterically complex material. Teaching analysis of any kind is a complicated process,

so it is not surprising that teachers might be reluctant to engage with literary theory as a further complication. The curricular material that was analyzed shows that this engagement does not have to be complicated or painful, and that it is possible to teach literary theory through the critical lens model in a way that students find engaging (at least according to the teacher who prepared those materials). It is also worth noting that the critical lens curriculum that was discussed is used in an on-level class with “average” students, and that the teacher explained that students were much more engaged with critical lens discussions than they had been the previous year when the teacher focused only on genre study.

Participants’ overwhelming agreement that they were comfortable discussing race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability in the classroom seems on the surface to contradict the notion that the ELA classroom is ideologically grounded in a dominant, Euro-American cultural perspective. However, it is entirely possible that a teacher might feel comfortable addressing these issues while still maintaining some degree of bias. As Sinclair (2018) demonstrated, many ELA teachers thought that they were helping students to understand racial perspectives by teaching *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Unfortunately, this text perpetuates white savior narratives while letting “us get off the hook of truly dismantling systems of oppression by engaging in a superficial act of kindness...we fail to change that narrative in ourselves or our teaching” (p. 90). Without interviewing teachers to dig into their perspectives on race, or gender, or class, it is not possible to know what their level of “comfort” with those issues truly is. It is encouraging that so many participants would answer yes to this question, and hopefully it indicates a true willingness to engage critically with the power structures that govern American schooling. This willingness was seen in Denise’s teaching and in her campaign to get other teachers on board with critical lenses. As the head of her English department, Denise has the opportunity to encourage and

influence a number of teachers to reevaluate how they teach and engage students with literature. However, as Denise explained, some of those teachers were not willing to do the curricular work required to support this approach to literary study. The tendency to use other's lessons plans, along with a need for testable material, might hinder the adoption for a truly critical ELA pedagogy. For critical lenses to work in the classroom, the teacher has to buy in as much as the students. Treating literary theory simply as a machine for producing readings negates its liberatory possibilities.

The curricular materials that were examined indicate that the complexity of literary theory can be mitigated by mapping theoretical schools onto critical lenses. Even though neither teacher asks students to read primary theory source material, each provides students with multiple perspectives that can be used to analyze any textual material covered in class. The simplification of critical lenses into question sets is a particularly useful and engaging move, since it makes the issues relevant to a particular school of theory more explicit, and it encourages students to practice inquiry and text interrogation. These question sets are also easy to map onto other cultural products, providing an opportunity for students to bring in pop culture artifacts or other texts into the classroom for analysis.

For survey participants who said they do not use critical lenses or multiple perspectives in their classrooms, preservice teacher education did not seem to be a major contributing factor, since many of those participants said they had practiced literary criticism in their own education. Interestingly, fewer participants agreed that they had received instruction about literary theory than those who agreed that they had practiced literary criticism at the collegiate level, suggesting that preservice ELA teachers are being asked to practice the application of literary theory to texts without being taught how to incorporate that practice into their own curricula. Also interesting is

the conflict between participant responses to questions about formalism and interpretive variety. In this category of participants who do not use critical lenses, most agreed that they used a formalist approach to literary study in their own classrooms. However, a majority of these same participants also agreed that literature has a variety of interpretations that students should be allowed to explore. This points back to Applebee's idea that ELA teachers are attempting to use both New Criticism and reader response theory separately in the ELA classroom, perhaps switching back and forth or combining the two without ever explicitly telling students what these theoretical perspectives assume about reading and interpretation. Lastly, these participants overwhelmingly answered "definitely yes" or "probably yes" to the question of standardized testing interfering with the teacher's preferred approach to teaching literature. One assumption this could lead to is that these participants would use critical lenses if they felt like it was permitted by their curricula, but without further questioning it is impossible to know for sure.

The problem of bifurcated preservice teacher education seems to encourage ELA teachers not to engage deeply with literary theory and criticism from a multiple perspectives approach, and to passively accept New Criticism and/or reader response as the ideological basis of their classroom without even realizing it. The course requirements and descriptions analyzed here reveal a tendency to let preservice ELA teachers off the hook for taking upper level theory courses that could provide them with the foundation for using a multiple perspectives approach in their own classrooms. The reasons for doing this are probably both practical and ideological. Since preservice teacher education programs require what amounts to a double major in some instances, the required courses covering content are likely to be reduced in favor of education courses and internships. This makes sense and is not likely to change any time soon. Many preservice teacher programs also recognize that students are already paying a premium for their

education and do not want to force students to pay for more classes than they need to take. However, there may also be an ideological component to not requiring courses in advanced literary theory and criticism, in that some people take the attitude that the classroom should be apolitical, and that to protest systemic injustice through curricula is taboo.

Limitations

The survey was likely too long, which may have affected response rates, since there were some participants who did not complete the entire survey. Some of the questions included were vaguely worded, allowing for participants to interpret the questions differently than I originally intended. For example, a “yes” answer to Q2, “I have conducted literary criticism as a student at the collegiate level,” could mean that the participant has used critical lenses to analyze literature. It could also mean that the participant used New Criticism to do a close reading without connecting the text to larger contextual issues. Neither of these responses are wrong answers to Q2, but in order to understand the theoretical perspective of the participant the question would have to ask “how” they conducted literary criticism. Other questions might have been too leading, such as Q7, “I am comfortable discussing topics like race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability in my classroom,” since most teachers would probably want to say yes to this even if it isn’t reflected in their actual classroom practice. More subtle questions might be needed to parse out how teachers might feel about these issues.

If this survey was to be updated and conducted again, it would also need to include the question “do you explicitly teach different schools of literary theory to your students as perspectives for interpreting literature.” Answers to this question might reflect the reality of the situation more accurately than asking if teachers use multiple perspectives or critical lens approaches. I was reluctant to include technical language and theory vocabulary in the survey

because I did not want participants to feel as though they were being condescended to or told that their teaching was wrong in some way.

Another survey method that might have been more effective would have been to distribute some of Applebee's original survey questions from his 1993 study. Doing so would have provided a more direct way of comparatively analyzing the ways in which teacher's attitudes toward literary theory might have changed or stayed the same in the last thirty years. Using Applebee's survey would also have removed the issue of vetting or developing questions because his have already been effectively used.

Obviously, the small number of participants, both in the study and interviews, is limiting when considering how these responses might reflect larger ideas and trends in ELA teaching. Not only was the sample size small, it was skewed toward suburban high school teachers who are active in online communities. Electronic distribution is convenient, but it is limiting here because it is likely that teachers who are more digitally engaged might be more likely to know about newer curricular approaches. This is not always true but taken in concert with the fact that most participants have been teaching for less than ten years indicates that this data presents a biased picture of ELA teacher practice. A larger distribution of the survey after it is revised would provide some interesting insight. Specifically, the Oklahoma responses might be much different if every teacher in Oklahoma was surveyed, and it would be worth analyzing how responses might shift with a larger study because of Oklahoma's sizable rural school population. Conversely, more urban teacher responses might cause other shifts in the data, and it would be interesting to see if similar issues about text accessibility and perceived student ability would arise between rural and urban contexts.

Next Steps:

Further research:

One population that was not included in this study but who needs to be for further research are curriculum developers, coordinators, and coaches. These people are often gatekeepers and promoters of curricula, and to fully understand why ELA teachers make the instructional choices that they do, it would be necessary to understand how curriculum constructors conceptualize the goals and purposes of the ELA classroom. Similarly, English department heads may have more power over implementing new curricula and setting the ideological tone for the ELA classrooms at a particular school than a singular classroom teacher. Fundamentally, the question of implementing a multiple perspectives, theory-based approach to literary study is a question of the, often unspoken and unconscious, ideological biases that inform ELA teachers' beliefs about what they teach and why they teach it. It also seems likely that the pressures of standardization are responsible for a narrowing of the ELA curriculum that precludes critical literacy and literary theory simply because teachers will not have time to let students dig in to texts in enough depth while both the teacher and the students are desperately trying to memorize grammar and vocabulary words for at test.

Another question would be one of accessibility and instructional differentiation. A case study, or set of studies, that examined the implementation of a multiple perspectives-based curriculum in a secondary ELA classroom could provide insight into the possibilities for engaging students at several levels of complexity. The space that multiple perspectives provides for students to bring media in which they are interested into the classroom might also serve as a way to engage students who are normally alienated or disengaged in ELA classes. Comparing

case studies across several school environments might also shine light on the ways that state, community, district, school, and department values influence the ideological foundations of a given ELA classroom.

The obvious (and perhaps monstrous) elephant in the room, upon which this study briefly touched, is standardized testing. While much work has been done on the ways the curriculum has narrowed, particularly in urban contexts and in subject areas that are not mandatorily tested, it seems perhaps the damage done to the ELA curriculum is less obvious. The allocation of resources to basic literacy instruction and the ubiquity of English as a tested subject gives the illusion that ELA classes are more highly prioritized than other subjects. Unfortunately, that prioritization is the result of assimilationist attitudes that insist on the continued dominance of English as the lingua franca. The fact that the main subareas of English as an academic field that show up on standardized testing are grammar, nonfiction writing, and basic reading comprehension reveals that those who create and champion standardized testing only care about ELA as a tool for conforming students to Euro-American capitalist culture.

What can be done?

It must be stated clearly that no one is calling for the abolition of close reading, or plot analysis, or learning about literary devices. Literary criticism from any theoretical perspective is impossible without close reading, since breaking down the interior of the text is essential in order to relate its internal elements to its external contexts for analysis. And it must also be acknowledged that the secondary ELA classroom fundamentally cannot engage with literary theory and criticism in the same way that post-secondary academia does. To attempt to do so would be folly. Instead, this thesis is advocating three things: that ELA teachers recognize no

school of theory or method of literary analysis is ideologically neutral, that students receive intentional instruction about literary theory and multiple perspectives of literary interpretation and analysis, and that ELA teachers demonstrate to students that literary criticism can be used as a way to interrogate socio-cultural issues. How this might look in each classroom will vary from teacher to teacher, but the resources provided below can serve as a starting place for those interested. Some teachers might wonder how implementing this kind of curriculum can work within Common Core or state standards. Both Appleman (2015a) and Li (2015) advocate using the school of theory known as New Historicism as a way to meet CCSS requiring nonfiction study in the ELA classroom. Li convincingly argues that not only is New Historicism a way to bring historical nonfiction material to the ELA classroom in engaging ways, but it also provides a substantial multicultural education intervention by giving students the opportunity to study the events of history from neglected perspectives. Other teachers might wonder how they can use multiple perspectives and critical lenses with the same old texts they have always taught. Eckert (2005) and Hill and Malo-Juvera (2019) provide tools and examples for interrogating the secondary ELA canon through various theoretical perspectives. Eckert's book is a pedagogical text that uses examples from her own classroom teaching, while Hill and Malo-Juvera's is a set of critical essays demonstrating how various perspectives can be brought to bear on the secondary canon. Both texts are extremely useful for teachers who do not have the freedom to order new books or to teach noncanonical texts. Appleman's *Critical Encounters in Secondary English* is an indispensable guidebook for anyone looking to implement a multiple perspectives curriculum. This text provides a wealth of resources, explanations, and example lessons that any teacher, regardless of their knowledge of theory, could use in their own classroom. Lastly, it is essential to remember that a multiple perspective curriculum is not just another set of vocabulary

words for a worksheet, or a one-time activity disconnected from the rest of the lessons. It is a new way of thinking about, reading, and interpreting texts that should be transferable to any reading of any text.

As I conclude, I would like to briefly discuss my own engagement with literary theory as it informs my ELA pedagogy. My interests in formulating this project were sparked by my previous work in academic literary studies, and my experiences as a middle school language arts teacher. In the brief time I spent in the classroom (so far), I was troubled by the general boredom students seemed to display about reading and engaging with literature. At the time it did not occur to me that the approach taken to literature in my classroom might be the problem, since I was following the example of the other language arts teachers with whom I worked. Almost everything we did regarding literature was based in New Criticism, from analyzing literary elements in a short story to only teaching form in a unit about poetry. I did not make the connection between the theoretical foundations of the ELA classroom and student disengagement until I had been out of the classroom for some time. During the course of my graduate work in English education, I came to understand that there is indeed a disconnect between the literary studies academy and the ELA education that secondary students, and ELA preservice teachers, receive. This study is the result of interrogating the consequences of such a gap, while trying to conceptualize what literary studies and the ELA classroom might have to say to each other about the reading and interpretation of literature.

In the future, I hope to use the multiple perspectives approach in my own classroom. I believe that students deserve to see the underlying ideologies that inform their schooling, and that learning about literary theory can provide students with new ways of seeing the world and understanding their own lives within it. I do not believe that literary theory is the answer to all

the various and complicated issues that plague ELA pedagogy, but it seems to me that its implementation could be a vital intervention in the teaching of literature by opening up the possibilities of meaning for all students.

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Appendix A: Participant Solicitation Materials

English department heads: Hello, my name is Rachel Myers and I am a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. I am contacting you because, as part of my thesis research, I am surveying secondary English teachers about their knowledge and attitudes regarding literary theory and its use in the English classroom. Would you be willing to forward my survey to the teachers in your school's English department? The survey is electronic, anonymous, and there is no compensation for participating. Please let me know if you are interested in participating and I will send you the link to share with your department. Thank you for your time.

Forum moderators: Hi! My name is Rachel Myers and I am an English Education graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. I am contacting you because, as part of my thesis research, I am surveying secondary English teachers about their knowledge and feelings about literary theory, particularly its use in the classroom. Would it be possible for me to share my survey with your group? The survey is anonymous and there is no compensation for completing it. With your permission, I would post a link to the survey in your forum so that members could complete it. Thank you for your time!

Facebook and Reddit posts: Hello! I am a graduate student working on a Master's in English Education. As part of my thesis research, I am surveying ELA teachers regarding their knowledge about and attitudes toward using a variety of literary theories to teach literature in the secondary ELA classroom.

If you would like to participate in the survey, please click the link below. It works on mobile and should take about seven minutes. The survey is completely anonymous and there is no compensation for completing it. If you are interested in contacting me to talk about your own pedagogical approaches or other relevant topics, please email me: rcmyers@ou.edu. Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix B: Tables and Figures

Table 1: *Literary theory schools keywords and phrases for document analysis*

New Criticism	Reader Response Theory	Multiple Perspectives
Objective, objectivity	Subjective	Critical, criticism
Literary devices	Personal	Theory
Literary elements	Response	Lenses
Close reading	Reaction	Race
Form	Feeling	Feminism, gender
Formalism	Transaction	Marxism, social class
Theme	Choice	Historicism
		Psychoanalysis
		Genre

Table 2: *Comparing preservice ELA teacher programs and literary theory courses*

University Name	Literary theory course offered?	Literary theory course required?	Course Content Descriptions:
University of Oklahoma	Yes	Only 1/3 offered	Split across three courses; EngEd major requires 1
Oklahoma State University	Yes	Yes	"Study of the major works of critical theory and literary criticism."
University of Central Oklahoma	Yes	Indeterminate	"Examines the standards used in the evaluations of literature."
University of Tulsa	No	No	UT does not appear to offer a course about literary theory specifically.
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma	Yes	No	"Critical Approaches to Literature (Not required for teacher certification)."
East Central University	Yes	Yes	"Explores various methodologies in literary criticism."
Northeastern State University	Yes	No	"A study of the major documents of literary criticism from Plato and Aristotle to the present."

Figure 1: *Total Responses from Survey Participants*. DY, Definitely yes; PY, probably yes; PN, probably no; DN, definitely no.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %
All responses n = 92	DY 60 69.8	DY 68 75.07	DY 26 31.0	DY 53 63.9	DY 51 61.4	DY 30 36.1	DY 58 70.7	DY 12 14.6
	PY 15 17.4	PY 13 15.12	PY 24 28.6	PY 13 15.7	PY 26 31.3	PY 37 44.6	PY 17 20.7	PY 19 23.2
	PN 7 8.1	PN 4 4.7	PN 20 23.8	PN 10 12.0	PN 5 6	PN 10 12.0	PN 6 7.3	PN 37 45.1
	DN 4 4.7	DN 1 1.2	DN 14 16.7	DN 7 8.4	DN 1 1.2	DN 6 7.2	DN 1 1.2	DN 14 17.1
Oklahoma n = 41	DY 21 58.3	DY 25 69.44	DY 14 38.9	DY 20 55.6	DY 19 52.8	DY 16 44.4	DY 25 69.4	DY 7 20
	PY 6 16.7	PY 7 19.44	PY 8 22.2	PY 7 19.4	PY 12 33.3	PY 13 36.1	PY 6 16.7	PY 7 20
	PN 6 16.7	PN 3 8.3	PN 9 25	PN 5 13.9	PN 4 11.1	PN 4 11.1	PN 4 11.1	PN 14 40
	DN 3 8.3	DN 1 2.8	DN 5 13.9	DN 4 11.1	DN 1 2.8	DN 3 8.3	DN 1 2.8	DN 7 20
Reddit n = 51	DY 39 78	DY 43 86	DY 12 25	DY 33 70.2	DY 32 68.1	DY 14 29.8	DY 33 71.7	DY 5 10.6
	PY 9 18	PY 6 12	PY 16 33.3	PY 6 12.8	PY 14 29.8	PY 24 51.1	PY 11 23.9	PY 12 25.5
	PN 1 2	PN 1 2	PN 11 22.9	PN 5 10.6	PN 1 2.1	PN 6 12.8	PN 2 4.3	PN 23 48.9
	DN 1 2	DN 0 0	DN 9 18.8	DN 3 6.4	DN 0 0	DN 3 6.4	DN 0 0	DN 7 14.9
All responses n = 92	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	
	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %	# %	
	DY 20 24.4	DY 65 80.2	DY 18 22.0	DY 7 8.8	DY 13 16.0	DY 14 17.5	DY 23 28.8	
	PY 38 46.3	PY 15 18.5	PY 33 40.2	PY 29 36.3	PY 20 24.7	PY 30 37.5	PY 19 23.8	
PN 17 20.7	PN 0 0	PN 27 32.9	PN 28 35	PN 24 29.6	PN 19 23.8	PN 20 25.0		
DN 7 8.5	DN 1 1.23	DN 4 4.9	DN 16 20	DN 24 29.6	DN 17 21.3	DN 18 22.5		
Oklahoma n = 41	DY 6 17.1	DY 28 80	DY 9 25.7	DY 3 9.1	DY 6 17.6	DY 4 11.8	DY 12 35.3	
	PY 15 42.9	PY 6 17.1	PY 19 54.3	PY 15 45.5	PY 10 29.4	PY 11 32.4	PY 7 20.6	
	PN 11 31.4	PN 0 0	PN 6 17.1	PN 9 27.3	PN 10 29.4	PN 11 32.4	PN 8 23.5	
	DN 3 8.6	DN 1 2.9	DN 1 2.9	DN 6 18.2	DN 8 23.5	DN 8 23.5	DN 7 20.6	
Reddit n = 51	DY 14 29.8	DY 37 80.4	DY 9 19.1	DY 4 8.5	DY 7 14.9	DY 10 21.7	DY 11 23.9	
	PY 23 48.9	PY 9 19.6	PY 14 29.8	PY 14 29.8	PY 10 21.3	PY 19 41.3	PY 12 26.1	
	PN 6 12.8	PN 0 0	PN 21 44.7	PN 19 40.4	PN 14 29.8	PN 8 17.4	PN 12 26.1	
	DN 4 8.5	DN 0 0	DN 3 6.4	DN 10 21.3	DN 16 34	DN 9 19.6	DN 11 23.9	

Figure 2: Comparing participants who said “no” to Q4

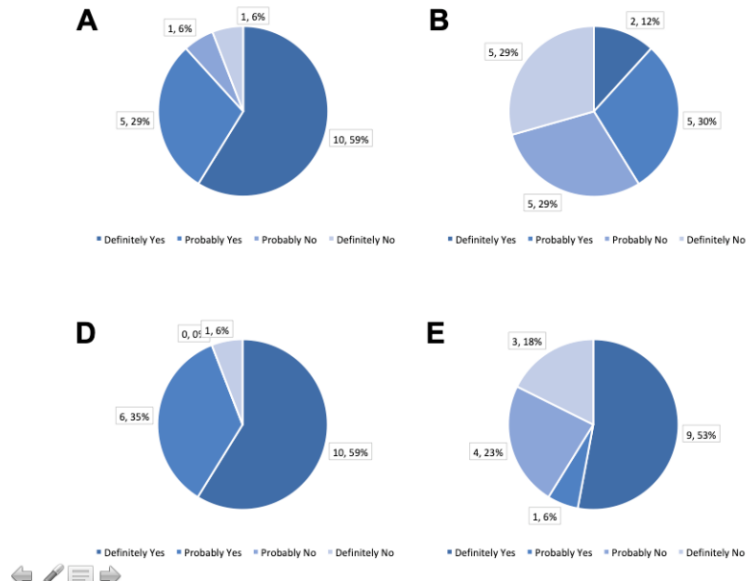


Figure X: Analysis of responses by participants **not** using critical lenses or multiple perspectives in the classroom

- (A) Responses to question 2 “I have conducted literary criticism as a student at the collegiate level”
- (B) Responses to question 3 “My preservice English education program included instruction about literary theory and how to use it in the classroom”
- (C) Responses to question 6 “When I teach literature, I usually focus on formal analysis [plot structure, literary devices, diction/syntax, rhyme/meter, etc.”
- (D) Responses to question 10 “Literary works can have a variety of interpretations and it is important to let students explore that variety”
- (E) Responses to question 15 “Standardized test preparation prevents me from teaching literature in the ways I would prefer to do so”

Appendix C: Curricular Materials

AP English Literature and Composition (Grade 12)

AP ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION 2020 SUMMER READING [REDACTED]

Literary study is at the heart of this course, focusing on the close examination of fictional literary texts throughout many literary periods (from the early modern/Renaissance, Victorian, Modern, Postmodern and many others).

Essentially, we're looking at how literature reflects *and* shapes culture, both intentionally and unintentionally, and reveals truths about *us, humans*, that we sometimes don't mean to express or realize.

PURPOSE

To this end, your summer reading is to focus on a variety of "lenses" in which you will experiment with during the year-long AP Literature course. Each lens is a theory that can be applied to any text. However, each lens is based on its own agenda and/or assumptions about society/humanity and will emphasize some details of a text while ignoring or minimizing others. These lenses fit within a broad area of study, called **Literary Theory** or **Critical Theory**. Your assignment will be to research a small list of these lenses, in preparation for the course.

REQUIREMENTS

NOTES OVER EACH ASSIGNED LENS, HAND-WRITTEN IN COMPOSITION NOTEBOOK
How you organize your notes is your choice, but they must be hand-written. The composition notebook that you write your notes in will be used all year long.

LIST OF QUESTIONS/CONFUSIONS ABOUT EACH LENS, HAND-WRITTEN ON NOTEBOOK PAPER These questions and concerns are turned in with your notes, and they help start and/or guide class discussion as we clarify the lenses.

THE ASSIGNMENT

- Biographical
- Historical
- Psychological -

- Freud
- Archetypal - Jung
- Feminist
- Marxist

- Postcolonial Theory
- One Wild Card (one lens of personal choice)

the purpose of the lens (beyond "to analyze the text"...to

end?) What is its "agenda"? What s/concepts (beyond the obvious) is the lens exploring and t is the end goal of that exploration? What is the lens trying ove? disproof? explain? illustrate? 2. the type of details ens focuses on to achieve its objective

set issue/concept within humanity or society, a ed scope. So what details does the lens need used on? This may be large ideas/concepts, ures, absence of something (fill in the e obtuse just to get some notes down. You're learning these lenses and developing a erstanding...so dig! :) 3. the type of questions use while trying to apply the

len
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LITERARY THEORY

AKA. CRITICAL THEORY; AKA. CRITICAL LENSES

An Introduction (taken from Purdue OWL (Links to an external site.))

A very basic way of thinking about literary theory is that these ideas act as different lenses critics use to view and talk about art, literature, and even culture. These different lenses allow critics to consider works of art based on certain assumptions within that school of theory. The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important.

For example, if a critic is working with certain Marxist theories, s/he might focus on how the characters in a story interact based on their economic situation. If a critic is working with post-colonial theories, s/he might consider the same story but look at how characters from colonial powers (Britain, France, and even America) treat characters from, say, Africa or the Caribbean. Hopefully, after reading through and working with the resources in this area of the OWL, literary theory will become a little easier to understand and use.

Teacher's Note: The assigned lenses are those that will be discussed, explored, and applied in our AP Literature course. However, there are many more lenses available to study and I highly encourage you to explore them.

RESOURCES

I will have a plethora of resources posted on my staff homepage and/or Canvas, active for your convenience in May. It will include documents and videos from reliable resources that present the lenses in a variety of ways, so you can find the explanations that work for you.

You are, of course, welcome to find your own sources, but verify their credibility.

If you are impatient and want to get started on your research before the resources are released on my homepage, here are a few excellent places to start:

- Refer to the Purdue OWL link (above) to view introductory information about these lenses and others that you might be interested in, such as Queer Theory, Ecocriticism, etc.)
 - <https://owl.purdue.edu/> ◦ Google: Introduction to Literary Theory Purdue Writing Lab
- Introduction to Modern Literary Theory (<http://www.kristisiegel.com/theory.htm>)
- Yale University has released recordings of their entire "Introduction to Theory of Literature" course, taught by the well-respected Dr. Paul Fry. He's wordy but goood. This is for the student that finds a lens they are *really* interested in ◦ they *really* need a lot of explanation. I dig it...but it's my jam! (Again, wordy. This means long videos.)
 - YouTube: Introduction to Theory of Literature with Paul H. Fry (full playlist, skip around)
- Documents to look up:
 - Literary Criticism Primer
 - Literary Theories: A Sampling of Critical Lenses
 - Critical Cheat Sheet, by Donald Hall
 - Literary Perspective Toolkit

Note: These are all resources that will be posted on my homepage. This is a short sampling of what I will share, but will get you started, if you are feeling motivated and impatient.

On-level English III (Grade 11)

Slides excerpted from a larger PowerPoint presentation:

Reader Response*

Reading a text to identify personal meaning

1. In what ways is the text relatable to your own life?
2. In what ways is the text different from your own life?
3. How did the text affect you emotionally?
4. How does the text interest you or relate to your world?

Read the "Hunger Games" excerpt using your Reader Response lenses



Gender*

Hunger Games
with Gender lenses



Reading a text to identify how it comments on gender issues or identify attitudes toward gender

1. Consider the gender of the author and main characters. Whose perspective is present and how does their gender impact the way they view the world?
2. What gender roles or stereotypes are present in the text? How are these perceived by other characters and how does this impact the way you read it?
3. Flip the gender of the characters. How does this change the impact of what you read?
4. Relationships- intersection of gender

Socioeconomic Status*

Hunger Games
with SES Lens



Reading a text to identify how it comments on social status issues

1. How are higher, middle, and lower classes represented?
2. What does the text say about class structure?
3. What does the text show about how class influences the world?
4. What stereotypes are there about the different classes in the society you are reading about?
5. How is class determined in this society? How is attainment of wealth perceived by the characters?

Psychological*

Hunger Games
with Psych lenses



Reading a text for what it shows about patterns regarding human behavior and nature

1. Is the way characters behave believable?
2. What drives characters to act the way they do? What motivates them?
3. What range of emotions does the character have? What influenced their prevalence?
4. Does the character act morally/ethically? How do you perceive their behavior? What could cause differences in morality?

Critical Lenses

Psychological Lens	Social Class Lens	Gender Lens	Reader Response Lens
Reading a text for what it shows about patterns regarding human behavior and nature	Reading a text to identify how it comments on social status issues	Reading a text to identify how it comments on gender issues or identify attitudes toward gender	Reading a text to identify personal meaning

“Katniss,” he says. I go over to him and brush back the hair from his eyes. “Thanks for finding me.”

“You would have found me if you could,” I say. His forehead’s burning up. Like the medicine’s having no effect at all. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I’m scared he’s going to die.

“Just in case I don’t-” he tries to say.

“No, Peeta”, I don’t even want to discuss it,” I say, and as he insists on continuing, impulsively, I lean forward to kiss him, stopping his words. This is probably overdue anyway since he’s right, we are supposed to be madly in love. It’s the first time I’ve ever kissed a boy, which should make some sort of impression I guess, but all I can register is his feverish heat. I break away and pull the edge of the sleeping bag up around him. “You’re not going to die. All right?”

I step out in the cool evening air just as the parachute floats down from the sky. My fingers quickly undo the tie, hoping for some real medicine to treat Peeta’s leg. Instead I find a pot of hot broth.

Haymitch couldn’t be sending a clearer message. He is fighting just as hard to get us sponsors, while other districts have the resources to easily send what their tributes need. I can almost hear his snarl. “You’re supposed to be in love, sweetheart. The boy’s dying. Give me something I can work with!”

And he is right. I’ve got to give the audience something more to care about. Romance. Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home. Never having been in love, this is going to be a real trick, but the performance must happen to get what we need to survive. I think of my parents and the way they were before my father died before reentering the cave on a mission.

ACED Paragraphs

For your homework, you will need to choose a song, cartoon, poem, or other short written or visual artifact to analyze for one of the three major lenses: psychological, gender, or social class. Annotate the artifact using the questions for the chosen lens, and then write an ACED paragraph over the artifact, answering the question: What is the author/ creator trying to show you about our society based on what you found through critical analysis?

The annotation and ACED paragraph are due Tuesday.

Highlighting:

Psychology lens

Social Class lens

Gender lens

Dialogue

Setting

Internal Dialogue

Corporate Control

Bureaucratic Control

Philosophical Control

Technological Control

Characterization

Highlight your short story similarly to how you did for your excerpt analysis. As you identify the different elements (shown on the left), highlight and consider the following questions when looking back at those highlights for annotation:

1. How does what's highlighted develop your message about the chosen problem within our society?
2. How do you believe the highlighted section or element could motivate the audience to change their thoughts or behaviors surrounding the problem?

Appendix D: Resources for Teachers

Introductions to and Overviews of Literary Theory:

- Crowley, S. (1989). *A teacher's introduction to deconstruction*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. [An accessible summary of extremely complex theory]
- Eagleton, T. (1983). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Leitch, V. B., Cain, W. E., Finke, L. A., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T. D., & Williams, J. J. (2018). *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*: WW Norton & Company. [Primary texts from the various schools of theory]
- Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). Literary theory and schools of criticism. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/index.html [Start here for a basic overview]
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print. [Very accessible for new theorists]

Literary Theory in the ELA Classroom:

- Appleman, D. (2014). *Critical encounters in secondary English: Teaching literary theory to Adolescents*. 3rd ed. Teachers College Press. [Includes lesson plans, assignment examples, text lists, and classroom vignettes]
- Eckert, L. S. (2006). *How does it mean: Engaging reluctant readers through literary theory*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. [Includes lesson plans, assignment examples, text lists, and classroom vignettes]
- Hill, C., & Malo-Juvera, V. (2018). *Critical approaches to teaching the high school novel: Reinterpreting canonical literature* (Vol. 32): Routledge. [A collection of essays that provides a number of critical starting points for analyzing canonical texts]
- Li, S. C. (2015). Advancing multicultural education: New historicism in the high school English classroom. *The High School Journal*, 99(1), 4-26. [Gives specific examples of how this particular theory can be used in the classroom]
- Schade, L. (1996). Demystifying the text: Literary criticism in the high school classroom. *The English Journal*, 85(3), 26-31. [Details a single classroom teacher's use of theory across a school year and how she used different theories throughout her curriculum]
- Wilson, B. (2014). Teach the how: Critical lenses and critical literacy. *English Journal*, 103(4), 68. [Provides an introductory activity for teaching critical lenses and lesson plans for using critical lenses with canonical literature]