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Professional Certificate in Literature Education and Training

# Literary Theory and Criticism

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Literary Theory and Criticism Vocabulary:

Literary theory and criticism are essential components of the study of literature. Understanding the key terms and vocabulary associated with these areas is crucial for educators and students alike. Below is a comprehensive list of terms that are commonly used in literary theory and criticism:

1. **Authorial Intention:** The author's intended meaning or message in a literary work. This term is often debated in literary theory as some argue that the author's intention is irrelevant to the interpretation of a text.
2. **Reader Response:** A critical theory that focuses on the reader's interpretation and response to a text. Reader response critics believe that meaning is created through the interaction between the reader and the text.
3. **Structuralism:** A theoretical approach that analyzes literature by examining the underlying structures that govern a text. Structuralists focus on binary oppositions, language, and the relationships between elements in a text.
4. **Poststructuralism:** A critical theory that emerged in response to structuralism. Poststructuralists challenge the idea of stable meanings and argue that language is fluid and constantly changing.
5. **Deconstruction:** A method of literary analysis associated with poststructuralism. Deconstruction aims to reveal the inherent contradictions and complexities within a text by examining language and the assumptions underlying it.
6. **Feminist Criticism:** A critical approach that focuses on gender issues in literature. Feminist critics analyze how gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics are portrayed in texts.
7. **Queer Theory:** A critical theory that examines sexuality and gender identity in literature. Queer theorists challenge traditional notions of identity and explore how texts can be read through a queer lens.
8. **Marxist Criticism:** A critical approach that analyzes literature through the lens of class struggle and economic power dynamics. Marxist critics examine how literature reflects and perpetuates social inequality.
9. **Psychoanalytic Criticism:** A critical theory that applies Freudian psychoanalysis to literature. Psychoanalytic critics look at how unconscious desires, fears, and motivations influence the characters and themes in a text.
10. **Postcolonial Criticism:** A critical approach that examines literature from former colonized regions and explores themes of imperialism, resistance, and cultural identity.
11. **Ecocriticism:** A critical theory that focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment.

Ecocritics examine how literature represents and shapes attitudes towards nature and the natural world.

12. Intertextuality: The relationship between texts and how they influence each other. Intertextuality refers to the ways in which texts reference, borrow from, or respond to other texts.

13. Canon: The accepted or authoritative list of works in a particular literary tradition. The literary canon is often debated and revised as scholars reassess the value and relevance of different texts.

14. Metafiction: Fiction that self-consciously addresses the conventions of storytelling. Metafiction draws attention to its own artifice and challenges traditional narrative techniques.

15. Irony: A literary device in which the intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning. Irony can be used to create humor, satire, or to highlight contradictions.

16. Suspense: The quality of a narrative that keeps the reader engaged and eager to find out what happens next. Suspense is often created through tension, conflict, and uncertainty.

17. Point of View: The perspective from which a story is told. Point of view can be first person (I), second person (you), or third person (he/she/they).

18. Symbolism: The use of symbols or objects to represent deeper meanings or themes. Symbolism can add layers of complexity to a text and invite readers to interpret the text on multiple levels.

19. Motif: A recurring theme, image, or symbol in a literary work. Motifs can help unify a text and reinforce key ideas or messages.

20. Allegory: A story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one. Allegories often use symbolism to convey deeper truths.

21. Hubris: Excessive pride or self-confidence that leads to a character's downfall. Hubris is a common tragic flaw in literature, often resulting in the protagonist's undoing.

22. Foil: A character who contrasts with another character in order to highlight particular qualities or traits. Foils are often used to emphasize the strengths and weaknesses of the main characters.

23. Paradox: A statement or situation that seems contradictory but reveals a deeper truth. Paradoxes can challenge readers' assumptions and provoke thought.

24. Satire: A literary genre that uses humor, irony, and exaggeration to criticize or mock individuals, society, or politics. Satire is often used to expose hypocrisy and social injustice.

25. Romanticism: An artistic and literary movement that emerged in the late 18th century. Romanticism emphasized emotion, nature, individualism, and the supernatural.

26. Realism: A literary movement that emerged in the 19th century. Realism sought to portray everyday life and social issues with accuracy and attention to detail.

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27. **Modernism:** A literary movement that emerged in the early 20th century. Modernist writers experimented with new forms, styles, and themes in response to the social and cultural upheavals of the time.
  28. **Postmodernism:** A literary and cultural movement that emerged in the second half of the 20th century. Postmodernism rejects traditional notions of truth, authority, and narrative coherence.
  29. **Meta-narrative:** A grand or overarching story that seeks to explain the meaning of life or history. Postmodernists challenge meta-narratives and question their validity.
  30. **Hybridity:** The mixing of different cultural, linguistic, or artistic traditions. Hybridity is a key concept in postcolonial theory and challenges rigid notions of identity and purity.
  31. **Dialogism:** The interaction of multiple voices or perspectives in a text. Dialogism emphasizes the polyphonic nature of language and challenges the idea of a single, authoritative voice.
  32. **Simulacrum:** An image or representation that copies or imitates something real but lacks substance or authenticity. The concept of simulacra is central to postmodern theory.
  33. **Binary Opposition:** A pair of contrasting terms or concepts that are used to create meaning. Binary oppositions are common in structuralist analysis and can reveal underlying tensions in a text.
  34. **Intertextual:** Referring to the relationships between texts. Intertextual references can enrich a text by drawing on the meanings and associations of other works.
  35. **Deus ex Machina:** A plot device in which a seemingly unsolvable problem is suddenly resolved by an unexpected or improbable intervention. Deus ex machina is often criticized for its lack of realism.
  36. **Meta-text:** Text that comments on or refers to another text. Meta-texts can provide insights into the creation and interpretation of literature.
  37. **Teleology:** The study of purpose or design in nature, history, or literature. Teleological interpretations look for underlying patterns or meanings that suggest a predetermined end or goal.
  38. **Epistolary:** A novel or literary work written in the form of letters. Epistolary novels use letters to convey the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the characters.
  39. **Canonical:** Referring to works that are considered authoritative or essential in a particular literary tradition. Canonical texts are often studied and revered for their cultural or artistic significance.
  40. **Metafictional:** Referring to fiction that self-consciously addresses its own fictionality. Metafictional works draw attention to the constructed nature of storytelling.
  41. **Poststructuralist:** Referring to theories or approaches that challenge the assumptions of structuralism. Poststructuralist critics emphasize the instability and complexity of language and meaning.
  42. **Ecocritical:** Referring to the study of literature and the environment. Ecocritical approaches examine how

literature reflects and influences attitudes towards nature and ecology.

43. Interdisciplinary: Involving multiple disciplines or fields of study. Interdisciplinary approaches to literary theory draw on insights from diverse areas such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy.

44. Metaphorical: Referring to language that uses metaphor to convey meaning. Metaphorical language can create vivid imagery and evoke emotional responses in readers.

45. Intertextual: Referring to the relationships between texts. Intertextual references can enrich a text by drawing on the meanings and associations of other works.

46. Deconstructive: Referring to the practice of deconstruction. Deconstructive readings aim to reveal the underlying contradictions and complexities in a text.

47. Postcolonial: Referring to literature from former colonized regions. Postcolonial approaches examine how literature reflects and responds to the legacies of imperialism and colonialism.

48. Queer: Referring to theories or approaches that focus on sexuality and gender identity. Queer theorists challenge traditional norms and explore alternative ways of understanding identity.

49. Feminist: Referring to theories or approaches that focus on gender issues. Feminist critics examine how literature reflects and perpetuates gender inequalities.

50. Marxist: Referring to theories or approaches that analyze literature through the lens of class struggle. Marxist critics examine how literature reflects and critiques social and economic power dynamics.

51. Psychoanalytic: Referring to theories or approaches that apply Freudian psychoanalysis to literature. Psychoanalytic critics explore how unconscious desires and motivations shape literary texts.

52. Postmodern: Referring to theories or approaches that challenge traditional notions of truth and authority. Postmodern critics emphasize the instability and plurality of meanings in literature.

53. Archetype: A universally recognized symbol, character, or theme that appears in literature across cultures and time periods. Archetypes represent fundamental human experiences and emotions.

54. Meta-narrative: A grand or overarching story that seeks to explain the meaning of life or history. Meta-narratives are often criticized for their totalizing and exclusionary tendencies.

55. Metafiction: A self-conscious form of fiction that draws attention to its own artificiality. Metafictional works often challenge traditional narrative conventions and play with the boundaries of storytelling.

56. Irony: A literary device in which the intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning. Irony can create humor, satire, or reveal underlying contradictions.

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