ENGLISH 9B Q4  
INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL LENSES/LITERARY THEORY

**What is literary theory?**  
*The way we “see” (read and understand) literature depends upon what kind of “glasses” we are wearing (the “lens” we see it through).*

We refer to critical lenses as perspectives.

* + We ask you to do this because no single lens gives us the clearest view, so it’s important to consider multiple lenses so we develop a better understanding of the text.
  + It also allows us to discover new and interesting things about the text and our world.

There are many different types of theories/lenses/perspectives, but we will be using these three to analyze *Of Mice and Men*.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the literary theory documents in this packet for each of the three theories below and take notes to help you understand each. Review the Power Point presentations linked on my website (msmauer.com) and select one theory “lens” through which to read and analyze the novella *Of Mice and Men*.

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| **Theory**  (a.k.a. critical lens, perspective, or interpretation) | **Guiding Questions**  (to help you “read” a text through this lens) |
| **Psychoanalytical Criticism:** “The text is seen as kind of a dream.” | * What makes the character the way they are? Why do they do what they do? * What are the characters’ subconscious fears? Desires? * Are they healthy, or exhibiting madness? * Do they have issues with authority? * Can they adapt and function in their world? * Do they have an epiphany? * What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author? |
| **Marxist Criticism**  “Marxist criticism views literary works as reflections of the social institutions from which they originate.” | Think about the characters’ physical descriptions, actions/purpose in the novel, social group, hopes and aspirations and answer the following questions:   * Is each character in a position of power? If so, how? If not, why? * Does the character’s physical description substantiate the person’s role in the novel? How? * If the ranch is a microcosm of American society, what social group do each of the character’s represent? * What comment is Steinbeck trying to make about each group and their role in society? |
| **Feminist/**  **Gender**  **Criticism**  “The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet.” –Adrienne Rich, poet | * Is the author male or female? * Is the text narrated by a male or female? * What types of roles do women have in the text? * Are the female characters protagonists or secondary and minor characters? * Do any stereotypical characterizations of women appear? * What is Steinbeck’s attitude toward women in society? * How does Steinbeck’s culture influence his attitude? * Who holds the power in that society? * Which characters show power or weakness? How? * Do the female characters speak differently than the male characters? Compare the frequency of speech for the male and female characters. |