

Reader-Response Literary Criticism

The purpose of Reader-Response literary criticism is to understand the dynamics of how readers bring meaning to a text. Reader-response critics believe that meaning resides not just in the text itself, but in the way the text is read. Thus, the reader's own interpretation (what they bring to the text) is important to the actual meaning of the text. These critics believe that every text includes openings or gaps that readers fill with their own thoughts. They also believe that the "true" meaning of a text is subjective, and that meanings can change over time, and over populations. Many of these critics are also interested in the process of determining meaning, and will study how readers read the text, their development of interpretations, and the dynamics of the text –to-reader interactions.

Questions to ask when engaging in Reader-Response criticism:

1. How do interpretations of the work vary from reader to reader? What beliefs and experiences lead readers to their interpretations?
2. How have your own interpretations of the work varied from the different times you've read it? What accounts for the differences?
3. How have interpretations of the work differed from one historical period to another, or from one location to another? What are the experiences of the readers that account for that difference?
4. What do you find appealing or unappealing about the work?
5. What in your own life leads you to your interpretations of the work?
6. As you read the text, how did your interpretation grow or change, and what was the cause of that growth or change?
7. Every reader belongs to a set of "interpretive communities" that influence their reading of a text. These communities might be a group of friends, a school, or the entire Western civilization. Consider the communities to which you belong. What expectations from those communities, or shared beliefs, concepts, behaviors, etc. have influenced your reading of the text?
8. What impact my your age or gender have on your reading of a text?
9. What previous experiences with other texts or media might influence your reading of a text?

What personal or cultural traits of yours might influence most of your reading/interpretation?

I am not a very religious person, so any work that requires making religious connections to analyze the symbolism would not be an effective read for me. Also, I have done a lot of research + projects on the feminist movement, so I automatically make connections about gender discrimination when I read.

List at least four of your interpretive communities, and then list some of the shared beliefs or expectations that may influence your reading of a text.

Interpretive community	Shared Beliefs/expectations
ICS	At ICS, we care a lot about our grades, so being able to comprehend a work would be important in case there was a test on it.
The United States	In the US, we have our own culture separate from the rest of the world. The way that we understand our literature and make historical connections.
Teenage Age Bracket	As a teenage interpreting literature, we have not (possibly) experienced the time period during which the story was written, so it is foreign to us.
Female Gender	As a female, we are naturally sensitive to gender discrimination.

