Critical Reading & The Literary Lenses
What is Covered / Included in the Lesson

- Reading Levels: three levels of reading
- The Literary Lenses: there are five
- Assignment for reading “A Horrible Waste of War” by Ernie Pyle – read by Thursday, 8/27/15 (bring hardcopy you received on Tuesday to class).
- Bring Video Lesson notes on Thursday, 8/27/15
What We Already Know

• When you are given a text you have previously learned that you can analyze the **structure** and **content** of the text itself by using the **rhetorical square**.

• When we use the **rhetorical square** to look at a text, we focus on the following: **subject**, **audience**, **speaker**, and **purpose**.

• While **subject**, **audience**, and **speaker** are fairly direct and obvious; analyzing the **purpose** of the text can be a much more abstract undertaking.
Looking at your notes on the rhetorical square and the things to consider is a good starting place for really analyzing the purpose of a text. We must go much further to ensure we are thorough with our analysis.
Surface Level aka Level 1

Reading of the text at this level is fundamental; identifies the who, what, when, where, why & how; identifies sensory imagery, figurative language (metaphors, similes, & personification), & determines that diction is “strong” or “appealing.”
Surface Level aka Level 1

For example, a level 1 thesis or claim like the one below might be presented:

Act I, scene i of *Romeo and Juliet* is about servants from two families insulting each other.

In your notes, respond to the following question.

What is the focus of this statement?
Reading Levels

Textual Level aka Level 2

• Reading at this level is formed at the inferential or interpretative level – what is understood from “reading between the lines.” This level requires the reader to draw conclusions about the more abstract meaning of words, implied or explicit comparisons or contrasts, & look closely at symbolism by gathering clues and applying background knowledge. Elements no longer appear to be isolated, but rather as parts of a whole.

• Readers at this level notice repetition (of words, phrases, ideas) & contrasts (sharp changes in descriptions, mood or syntax).
Textual Level aka Level 2

For example, a level 2 thesis or claim like the one below might be presented:

Act I, scene i of *Romeo and Juliet* introduces the two feuding families in Verona through a street brawl between servants from both families.

In your notes, respond to the following questions.

What is the focus of this statement? How does it differ from the level 1 thesis?
Global/Universal Level aka Level 3 – the infamous ‘So what?’ Level 😊

- The deepest level of meaning is formed at a very abstract level. At this point, you – the critical reader– are not only asking “What?” but “So what?”. The “so what” is what leads us to the purpose or intention of the piece. The reader makes a connection with the text, evaluates the writer’s message and even examines his or her own position on the issue at hand.
Global/Universal Level aka Level 3 – the infamous ‘So what?’ Level 😊

- To form a more abstract understanding of a passage or a text as a whole, readers must look for the following elements:
  - **Patterns:** repetition of sequence of events, or of a series of contrasts
  - **Tone:** the cumulative effect of imagery, figurative language, diction and syntax in expressing the author’s attitude
  - **Theme:** patterns of meaning, viewed through the scope of tone can help determine purpose
Global/Universal Level aka Level 3 – the infamous ‘So what?’ Level 😊

- At this level the reader views the text by elaborating and integrating prior knowledge.
- Without relevant background knowledge of the subject at hand, it is very challenging to look at a text at this level.
Global/Universal Level aka Level 3 – the infamous ‘So what?’ Level 😊

For example, a level 3 thesis or claim like the one below might be presented:

Act I, scene i of Romeo and Juliet reveals how serious the feud between the Capulets and Montagues is through the use of horseplay in the form of insults that quickly deteriorates into physical violence between the servants. This pattern of horseplay-leading-to-violence illustrates the seriousness of the feud and its effects on all the citizens of Verona, foreshadowing the violence that will lead to Tybalt’s death.

In your notes, respond to the following questions.

What is the focus of this statement? How does it differ from the first & second?
What is the claim being made here by the writer?
Reading Levels

Each reading level builds on the previous level. We need to look at all three levels (as a reader) and then elaborate on the third level, in our writing, to reach that deep level of analysis. Without elaboration, your analysis will fall short.
We use the **literary lenses** to help us **build background knowledge** so we can look at the text at a **global level**. The **literary lenses** are a **tool** that will help us answer the “**So what?**” and read a text at the deepest level. 😊

There are **five literary lenses:**
1. Appearance vs. Reality
2. Paradox
3. Paradigm
4. Ubiquity
5. Contemptus Mundi (more Latin!)
Critical reader notes differences between initial perceptions & perceptions that later emerge.

Background knowledge being built: Initial perceptions of reality in literature, contrasted with later emerging perceptions, create meaningful insights into representations of reality.

Consider what you are reading and what it actually means.
Critical reader tries to reconcile what seem to be irreconcilable contradictions.

Background knowledge being built: **Patterns** can sometimes meaningfully contradict each other.

Consider **why the writer is presenting the paradox**. Initial acknowledgment of the paradox is important but the “why” behind it can lead us to the author’s purpose.
Critical reader shows how **societal reality is considered** in a text or how a **critical theory can be applied to a text**. Critical theories include: feminist theory, Freudian theory, race theory, etc. ***More on critical theories later this year!***

Background knowledge being built: Literary theories **uncover ideologies** in texts that allow us to better understand our own viewpoints and ideologies.

**Considered how the text might be viewed from a different personal perspective** or how a marginalized member of society would interpret the text.
Literary Lens: Ubiquity

Critical reader identifies how a form (e.g., image, symbol, syntactic pattern), repeated in a work, is important to the text’s meaning.

Background knowledge being built: Repeated patterns of language and imagery in literature are important.

Caveat: Patterns are important, but this literary lens is best used when analyzing literature and not non-fiction. ☺ That is not to say you can’t use it – just be sure you use this lens with purpose.
Critical reader focuses on how a text despairs over a condition of society, examines unresolved tensions within society, or signs that portend evil for characters or society.

Background knowledge being built: Mistrust or contempt of the present and future of the world highlights the transitory nature of happiness; unresolved tensions in literature create ambiguity.

Much of an author’s social commentary will be evident when you look at a text through this lens.

You will use this lens quite a bit, but don’t limit yourself to just this lens. Make sure you look at the others as well.
Caveat!

The lenses, like the rhetorical square, are a tool to help us become a critical reader and then by extension a critical writer. They are not an “end all be all” or meant to be a “one size fits all” way of analyzing a text. 😊