Eight Critical Lenses through Which Readers Can View Texts

At least eight ways exist to read and interpret texts. Below is a list of eight critical lenses with definitions, questions, and strategies used for each. *As you read, consider shifting your perspective or viewpoint, or the LENSES THROUGH WHICH YOU READ.* What lenses might offer you more *insight* into the text?

Reader Response Lens
Definition: Reading a text for personal meaning
Questions and Strategies:
1. In what ways is the text familiar to your life? Think of events in the story, the types of characters, or the setting… Can you relate to it on a personal level?
2. In what ways is the text different than your life?
3. How did the text affect you?
4. How has the text increased your interest in the subject matter?
5. How has the text changed your worldview?

Socio-Economic Lens
Definition: Reading a text for its socio-economic issues
Questions and Strategies:
1. Explore the way different demographics are represented in texts.
2. What world view does the text represent?
3. What does the text say about class structures?
4. Analyze the social effects of the text.

Historical Lens
Definition: Reading a text for its contextual significance. This would include information about the author, his or her historical moment, or the systems of meaning available at the time of writing.
Questions and Strategies:
1. Research the author's life and relate the information to the text. Why did the author write it? What is the author's worldview?
2. If the author is writing on a debatable issue does he or she give proper consideration to all sides of the debate? Does he or she seem to have a bias?
3. Research the author's time (political history, intellectual history, economic history, etc.) and relate this information to the work.
4. Upon reading the text, how has your view on the given historical event changed?

Gender Lens
Definition: Reading a text for its gender related issues or attitudes towards gender. The assumption here is that men and women are different: they write differently, read differently, and write about their reading differently. These differences should be valued.
Questions and Strategies:
1. Consider the gender of the author and the characters: what role does gender play in the text?
2. Observe how gender stereotypes might be reinforced or undermined. Try to see how the text reflects or distorts the place men or women have in society.
3. Imagine reading the text from the point of view of someone from the opposite gender.

Race Lens
Definition: Reading a text for it issues of race, heritage, and ethnicity.
Questions and Strategies:
1. Analyze how the text discusses race, heritage, and ethnicity. Or, consider what images of "others" are presented in the text. How are these "others" portrayed?
2. Are there any unfair stereotypes? Are there any generalities that hold truth?
3. Analyze the text for how it deals with cultural conflicts, particularly between majority and minority groups.

Psychological Lens
Definition: Reading a text for patterns in human behavior. While everyone's formative history is different in particulars, there are basic recurrent patterns of development for most people.
Questions and Strategies:
1. Is the way the characters act believable?
2. Why do certain characters act the way they do?
3. Think of what is a general viewpoint on life for children, youth, young adult, middle-aged, or elderly people. Do the characters follow the patterns associated with these groups?
4. Think of the range of human emotions. How do they come to play in the text? (happiness, anger, depression, indifference, confusion, etc.)
5. What did you think of any moral/ethical choices that the characters made? What would you have done?
6. Think about the broader social issues the text attempts to address.

New Criticism Lens
Definition: Reading a text for the unity and complexity of its form. The focus should be on the text itself.
Questions and Strategies:
1. What types of symbolism are in the text?
2. What themes recur throughout the text?
3. Were the plot and subplots believable?
4. Where could the story go from here?
5. What did you think of the ending?
6. What is the great strength -- or most noticeable weakness – of the text?
7. Does the story fit an archetype? (i.e. romance, tragedy, comedy, satire, irony). How do those "types" manifest themselves?

Spiritual Lens
Definition: Reading a text for its spiritual and faith related issues
Questions and Strategies:
1. Analyze the text for its issues as they relate to one's faith in a higher being.
2. Compare aspects of the text as they relate to religious writings/scriptures.
3. If one believes in a higher being or creator, how does that creator speak to the reader through the text?
4. What does the text say about various world religions?
5. What does the text say about faith? Grace? Love? Forgiveness? Hope?