

## Lesson Plan: Aging Studies Critical Literary Analysis

**Overview**

Students use their existing knowledge of literary and cultural analysis methods to develop a basic framework for aging studies analysis. A pre-test and a post-test assess the attainment of the lesson's primary objective.

**Objectives**

## Primary Objective:

Students develop their understanding of how *age* can be conceptualized as an embodied identity category, similar to race, gender, sexual orientation, and many others.

With this exercise, students

- Critically compare and contrast age-based differences with other forms of difference
- Employ their existing knowledge to develop a critical approach to literature and culture
- Create a framework for a form of literary and cultural analysis that they can use to engage in future critical analyses
- Develop an understanding of how *age* can be conceptualized as an embodied identity category, similar to race, gender, sexual orientation, and many others

Using this framework in future lessons can lead students to

- Develop an understanding of what is a normative age and how non-normative ages are “othered” in literature and culture
- Recognize the stereotypes, hierarchies, and privileges of different ages
- Analyze associations between age-related words/phrases and the literary and cultural values
- Improve their awareness of their own beliefs about age, aging, and old age
- Consider how aging studies concepts intersect with other aspects of their studies
- Increase their ability to respond appropriately and respectfully to people across the age spectrum, including in workplace environments

**Time**

One class meeting (45 – 85 minutes), plus time for the pre-test and the post-test.

Ideally, students take the pre-test toward the beginning of the term, this lesson plan is deployed during the semester, and students take the post-test toward the end of the term, to minimize the interactive effects among the tests and the lesson.

**Resources Needed**

- Student access to computers and the internet to take the pre-test and the post-test.
- Paper or electronic summaries of several different approaches to literary analyses, such as the ones included as an Appendix with this lesson plan.
- Scratch paper or a computer for each pair of students to complete the assignment.

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## **Preparation**

\*\* Students should complete the [pre-test](#) before this lesson.

Required: Students have previous exposure to several different approaches to literary analysis and have used those approaches to analyze texts.

Suggested: Students have read and analyzed a text for which aging studies analysis is relevant. For a list of text options, see the Anthologies section below.

## **Lesson Plan**

1. Direct students to the brief summaries of approaches to literary analysis and give them time to review the approaches.
2. With the class, briefly review the kinds of difference those techniques lead readers to explore, including a discussion of the social hierarchies those differences create. The summaries included in the Appendix to this Lesson Plan explore *race*, *ethnicity*, *gender*, and *class*, and include questions that help students develop their textual analyses.
3. Tell students that *age* can be considered a similar kind of difference.
4. Ask them to create a summary and set of questions for an analytical model focusing on age.
5. Explain that the summaries and questions they have about other analytic approaches can be used as models.
6. Have students work in pairs or small groups create a one-paragraph summary of Aging Studies analysis and a set of Aging Studies analytical questions.
7. Working in pairs or small groups, have students reconsider a previously-analyzed text using the Aging Studies critical framework and questions they developed. Suggest that they may find ways to refine their summary and questions as they analyze the text.
8. Have the whole class discuss what they learned when developing the summary and questions and doing the analysis, and ask how this could impact their understanding of other texts (texts the class has read or just texts in general).
9. As time permits, have students explore other class texts using their Aging Studies analytical frameworks.
10. End the class by summarizing the new areas explored using Aging Studies and by asking students to consider their newfound techniques when they read the next literary course text.
11. Administer the [post-test](#).

## **Assessment**

The instructor should administer the [pre-test](#) and [post-test](#) to assess student learning.

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### **Anthologies of Literature about Aging and Old Age**

- Alexander, Jo, Debi Berrow, Lisa Domitrovich, Margarita Donnelly, and Cheryl McLean, eds. *Women and Aging: An Anthology by Women*. Corvallis, OR: Calyx Books, 1986.
- Cole, Thomas, and Mary Winkler, eds. *The Oxford Book of Aging*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Cruikshank, Margaret, ed. *Fierce With Reality: An Anthology of Literature on Aging*. St. Cloud, MN: Northstar Press, 1995.
- Fowler, Margaret, ed. *Songs of Experience: An Anthology of Literature on Growing Old*. New York: Ballantine Books/Random House, 1991.
- Kohn, Martin, Carol Donley, and Delese Wear, eds. *Literature and Aging: An Anthology*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1992.
- Raja, Ira, ed. *Grey Areas: An Anthology of Contemporary Indian Fiction on Ageing*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Sennett, Dorothy, ed. *Full Measure: Modern Short Stories on Aging*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1988.
- Sennett, Dorothy, and Anne Czarniecki, eds. *Vital Signs: International Short Stories on Aging*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1991.

### **Additional Aging Studies Tests**

#### Tests of Attitudes and Stereotypes about Aging and Old Age

Implicit Association Test: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.html>  
Measures subconscious stereotypes. There are IATs for many variables; *age* is one of them.

Polizzi, Kenneth G. "Assessing Attitudes Toward the Elderly: Polizzi's Refined Version of the Aging Semantic Differential." *Educational Gerontology* 29.3 (Mar. 2003): 197-216.

#### Tests of Facts about Aging and Old Age

Facts on Aging Quiz: <http://cas.umkc.edu/agingstudies/AgingFactsQuiz.asp>  
Facts (and Myths) on Aging Quiz: <http://www.egyptianaaa.org/EducationAgingQuiz.htm>  
Sokolovsky's Comparative Gerontology Quiz: <http://stpete.usf.edu/~jsokolov/quiz.htm>  
Some Facts Related to the Aging Process T/F Quiz: <http://www-distance.syr.edu/agefact1.html>

#### Life Expectancy Calculators

Living to 100 Life Expectancy Calculator: <http://www.livingto100.com/>  
The Longevity Game: <http://www.northwesternmutual.com/learning-center/the-longevity-game.aspx>

### **Additional Resources**

[www.AgingStudies.org](http://www.AgingStudies.org): website includes suggested readings, syllabi for humanities-based aging studies classes, and links to other websites.

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Appendix I: Literary Analysis Frameworks

### **Cultural Studies Analysis and Multicultural Analysis**

Cultural Studies criticism considers the social context in which literary and other texts are created. Cultural Studies critics usually argue that meaning and value are social constructions—ideas created by a particular society at a particular point in time (e.g., human skulls have been used as politically meaningful drinking cups in England, but that tradition is no longer followed). Cultural Studies explores the practices of the dominant culture surrounding an author to consider the ways that a text reflects, reinforces, and/or rejects the values those practices reflect, often focusing on how marginalized people and beliefs navigate within the larger culture.

Multicultural Criticism explores the ways in which literary and other texts reflect, reinforce, and/or subvert the cultural assumptions about and locations of minority and marginalized cultures. Multicultural applies to texts produced within and outside the dominant culture. Some multicultural critics argue that language itself limits equality, and that a new language must be developed to accurately assess and respond to gender-based inequalities. Much like Cultural Studies and Feminism, Multicultural Criticism improves readers' awareness of the ways that literature and other texts reflect, resist, and shape cultural beliefs.

1. In this text, what items and beliefs are valued? What things or actions are good and what are evil? What makes them good or evil?
2. In this text, what is humanity's relationship with God and fate?
3. In this texts, are humans generally good or bad, and what makes them that way?
4. What characters are meant to be sympathetic and what makes them sympathetic? What characteristics do unsympathetic characters have?
5. In what identity categories is the author part of the majority cultures and in what categories is the author part of a minority culture? How do those social locations impact the author's presentation of the text?
6. In what identity categories are the main character/s part of the majority cultures and in what categories are the main character/s part of a minority culture? How do those social locations impact the presentation of the text?
7. In what identity categories is the reader, assumed to be part of the majority cultures and in what categories is the reader assumed to be part of a minority culture? How do those assumptions impact the presentation of the text?
8. In what identity categories are you part of majority cultures and in what categories are you part of a minority culture? How do those social locations impact your response to the text?
9. What is the text asking you to consider about the cultures in the text and/or about your culture?

### **Feminist Analysis**

Feminist criticism considers the ways in which literary and other texts reflect, reinforce, and/or subvert the social assumptions about and locations of women, gender-based roles, and other social inequalities, revealing and challenging inequities of power created by differences in gender and other identity categories (race, ethnicity, class, bodily ability, age, religion, family status, education, etc.). Some feminist critics argue that language itself limits equality, and that a new language must be developed to accurately assess and respond to gender-based inequalities. Feminist criticism improves readers' awareness of the ways that literature reflects and shapes assumptions about men, women, and gender.

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Appendix I: Literary Analysis Frameworks

### **Feminist Analysis (continued)**

1. In this text, what are considered male characteristics and roles, and what are considered female characteristics and roles? How do expectations differ for people of different genders?
2. Do people of different genders have social and political equality? If not, what hierarchies are there?
3. Is the difference between/among genders clear or is there some grey area?
4. Is the difference between/among genders considered a product of nature, or do cultural influences help create that difference?
5. What value is given to the characteristics of one gender versus the characteristics of the other gender?
6. What is the gender of the author? Of the main character/s? Of the assumed reader? How do those genders impact the readers' experiences of the text?
7. In the text, do gender differences create conflict/s? If so, do those conflicts get resolved?
8. How would the piece differ if the author were of the other gender? What if the gender of the main character was changed?
9. How would a female (you or a friend of yours) respond to the story; especially consider how a female's response would be different than that of a male.

### **Marxist/Socialist/Materialist Analysis**

Materialist Criticism is a form of Cultural Analysis that focuses on the ways in which economics and politics impact society, emphasizing the role that money, production, and reproduction play – that is, the way that social class divisions work—in creating equal or hierarchical social relationships and connections to power. Marxism and Socialism were economic and political frameworks first; those ideas apply to the world of the author and the world in texts as well.

1. In this text, how important is the possession of money? What else in this text holds high value?
2. How do people in the text get things or services?
3. How does money work in this text – who has it and who does not? How do people get more?
4. What does money buy? Is money important? If so, how?
5. Does the text suggest that the culture in which it is set is optimal, functional, or dysfunctional? How does money factor into that consideration?
6. Of what social class is the author? How does the author's economic situation impact the creation, production, and distribution of the text?
7. Of what social class is the assumed reader? How does the assumed reader's economic situation impact the acquisition and reception of the text?
8. The main character/s? Which economic group/s are made visible? Which are ignored or devalued?
9. Where do you fall on the class spectrum? How do your experiences of class and your social location impact your experience of the text?