



Chapter 4 “What’s Class Got to Do with It?: Reading Literature Through the Lens of Privilege and Social Class” in *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* by Deborah Appleman defines constructions of class, as constructions of authority (56).

Reading texts with a class lens requires the reader to focus on questions of power and money. Who has the power/money? Who does not? What happens as a result?

Assumptions of Class Constructions

1. Karl Marx argued that the way people think and behave in any society is determined by basic economic factors.
2. In his view, those groups of people who owned and controlled major industries could exploit the rest of the population, through conditions of employment and by forcing their own values and beliefs onto other social groups.
3. Marxist criticism applies these arguments to the study of literary text (Appleman 149)

Strategies for Reading with a Class Lens

1. Explore the way different groups of people are represented in texts. Evaluate the level of social realism in the text and how society is portrayed.
2. Consider how the text itself is a commodity that reproduces certain social beliefs and practices. Analyze the social effect of the literary work.
3. Look at the effects of power drawn from economic or social class (Appleman 149)

Questions Class Constructionists ask about Literary Works

1. How is the text shaped by its (intentional or unintentional representations of classism?
2. Does this representation support or undermine these socioeconomic ideologies? (Tyson 451).

References

- Appleman, Deborah. (2009). *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* (2nd ed). Urbana, Illinois: NCTE.
- Tyson, Lois. (2006). *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* (2nd ed). New York, NY: Routledge.

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