

**NOTES**

Chapter 7, “Deconstruction: Postmodern Theory and the Postmodern High School Student” in *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* by Deborah Appleman defines deconstruction as “a practice of reading that begins with the assumption that meaning is a textual construction (97). It seeks to show that a literary work is usually self-contradictory (98).

Reading a text with a deconstruction lens requires the reader to question the very assumptions that are brought to analysis to uncover the self-contradictions within a text.

Assumptions of Deconstruction

1. Meaning is made by binary oppositions, but one item is unavoidably favored (or “privileged”) over the other.
2. This hierarchy is probably arbitrary and can be exposed and reversed.
3. The text’s oppositions and hierarchy can be called into question because texts contain within themselves unavoidable contradictions, gaps, spaces, and absences that defeat closure and determining meaning. All reading is misreading (Appleman 152).

Strategies for Reading with a Deconstructionist Lens

1. Identify the oppositions in the text. Determine which member appears to be favored, and look for evidence that contradicts that favoring.
2. Identify what appears central to the text and what appears to be marginal and excluded.
3. Expose the text’s indeterminacy. Whereas formalism assumes the opposite: that if you read closely enough, the text will fail to make sense—or at least will contradict itself (Appleman 152).

Questions Deconstructionists ask about Literary Works

1. What do we learn about the ideologies (or ideologies) operating in the text by analyzing the text’s self-contradictions rather than trying to resolve those contradictions into some overarching theme? (Tyson 452).

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.