Characters on the Couch: The Psychological Approach to Literary Criticism
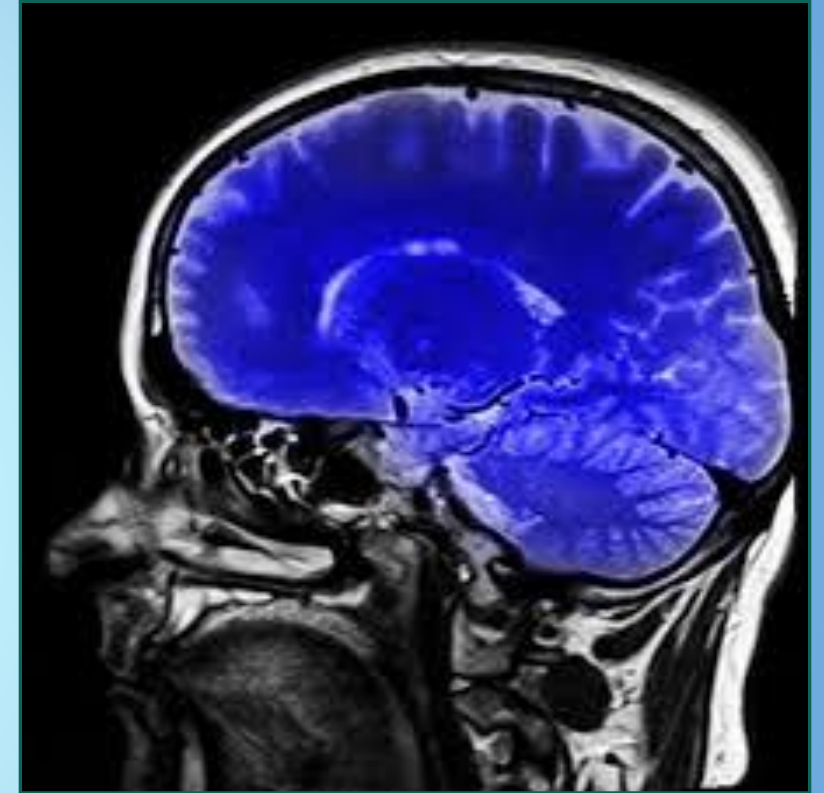
1. Question & Research Task

Why do people do the things they do? This is a question we ask not just in real life, but also when we read literature. The Psychological Approach to literary criticism can provide answers. Psychology can help us to examine textual clues-- such as a character's actions, speech, thought, and backstory-- to understand that character's motivations. Readers can also use psychological analysis to look closely at the life of the author and determine what psychological factors influenced the author's work.

For this Slam Dunk, you will assume the role of a screen writer and analyze the motives of a literary character. You will use the theories of one or more famous psychologists as the basis for your analysis.

The human brain
Image Source: Pxhere

In this Slam Dunk, you will conduct brief, focused research to respond to the inquiry question:

How does the lens of psychological literary criticism help us understand character motivation?

2. Information Sources

Review the sources below to learn more about famous psychologists and their theories. Think about which of these theories can be applied to characters you have read about in English class this year.

| Erikson	Freud	Horney	Jung	Kohlberg	Maslow	Rogers
• Erik Erikson • Stages of Psychosocial Development • 8 Stages with chart • Video: Psychosocial Development	• Sigmund Freud • Key Theories • Id, Ego, Superego • Oedipus Complex with chart • Video: Freud's psychosexual development	• Karen Horney • Neurotic Needs • Inner Harmony	• Carl Jung Biography • Jungian Archetypes • Model of the Psyche	• Lawrence Kohlberg • Theory of Moral Development with chart • Video: Moral Development	• Abraham Maslow • Hierarchy of Needs • The Theory of Self-Actualization • Video: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	• Carl Rogers • Contribution to Psychology • Self-Actualization and Personality Development with video

3. Student Activity

Step 1: Follow your teacher's instructions to choose a literary character to analyze.

Step 2: Use the resources on Slide 2 to explore the psychological theories you can use in your analysis. As you read about the different theories, keep track of your notes on this chart.

Step 3: As you take notes, focus on what each theorist proposes as **a motivation for human behavior.** Think about whether this theory **explains how your chosen character behaves in the text.**

Step 4: Provide the name of the source you use to answer each question. Alternately, your teacher may ask you to cite your sources in MLA format.

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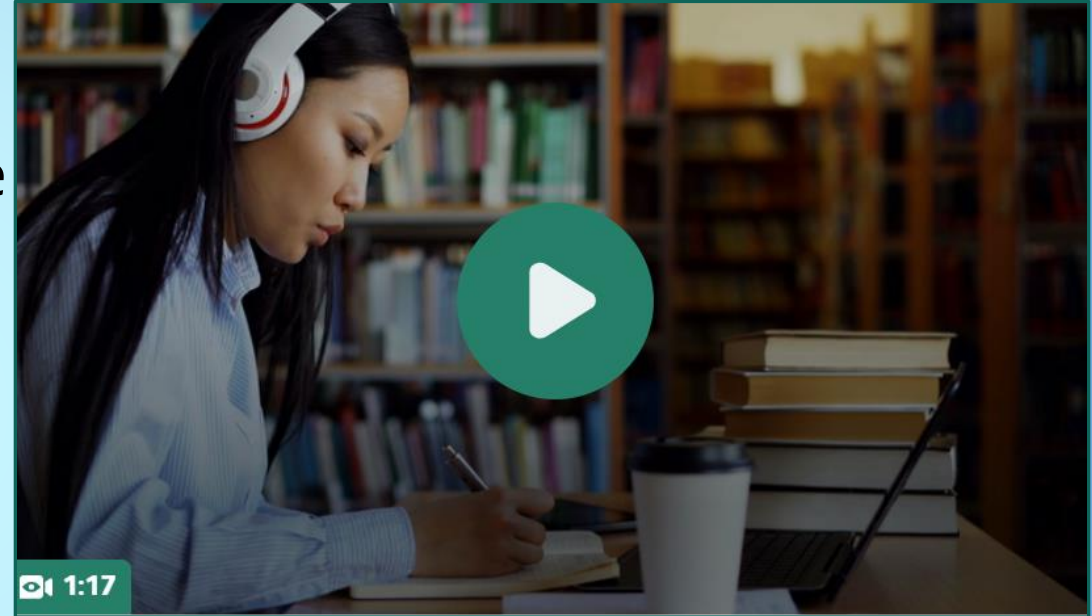
What do we mean when we talk about motivation? If you need a refresher, watch the video in the article linked above.

Image Source: Verywellmind.com

4. Assessment Activity

How does the lens of psychological literary criticism help us understand character motivation?

Imagine you are a screen writer, and the character is your subject.
You have been asked to present your character motivation sketch to the film's director. Create a speech, letter or PowerPoint presentation analyzing your character for this important meeting.

A successful analysis will:
- Explain the character's background (What happens to the character in the text?)
- Examine at least two important scenes from the text
- Use at least one psychological theory to explain your character's motivations in these two important scenes
- Be at least three paragraphs in length
- Use appropriate form and tone for a professional presentation, speech, or letter
- Use proper CUPS (capitalization, usage, punctuation, spelling)

Your teacher may choose to grade your work according to this rubric.

Image Source: Rawpixel

5. Enrichment Activities

Sigmund Freud's famous psychoanalytic couch, on display at the Freud Museum in London.

Image Source: Robert Huffstutter, Wikimedia, CC 2.0 license

Time to put yourself on that couch!

Choose an important decision that you have made in your life. Write a short journal entry about your decision.

- Did you make a good or a bad choice? Explain.
- Use at least one psychological theory to explore your motivation in making this decision.
- How can understanding your motivation for this choice help you make future decisions? What might you do differently? What might you do the same?

6. Teacher Resources

Grade 10 English Language Arts

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

Reading: 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Writing: 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

AASL Standards Framework for Learners - Inquire: Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.

Think: Learners display curiosity and initiative by: I.A.2 Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning.

Create: Learners engage with new knowledge by following a process that includes: I.B.1 Using evidence to investigate questions. I.B.3 Generating products that illustrate learning.

Share: Learners adapt, communicate, and exchange learning products with others in a cycle that includes: I.C.1 Interacting with content presented by others.

Grow: Learners participate in an ongoing inquiry-based process by: I.D.2 Engaging in sustained inquiry.

ISTE Standards for Students:

3. Knowledge Constructor – 3d. Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

Grade 10

Time Frame: 1-2 90 minute class periods

Differentiation:

Direct students to use comprehension tools included in databases, such as: audio read-aloud, labeled reading levels, and embedded dictionaries.

- Have students use learning supports provided in BCPS Digital Content found in the AppsPortal. Refer to Digital Content Snapshot/Support pages as needed.

Learning Styles:

Visual, Auditory, Active, Reflective, Global Understanding, Analytical Understanding

Notes to the teacher:

Teachers should choose/ approve what character students will examine for the assessment piece of this lesson.

- Provide students with login information as needed to authenticate BCPS Digital Content. Login information is on the **BCPS Digital Content** page in the Apps Portal.
- Consider using the Schoology Assignment App feature to assign Google Docs for students to access, edit, and submit through Schoology.