

Throughout this course, your teacher and classmates will make reference to various concepts. Use these notes to guide your understanding. Refer to this often as the expectation is that you are familiar with each of these concepts as the course progresses and more importantly, can apply them to the texts you read in a meaningful manner.

### **The 'so what'**

This concept is a central focus of the course. It is a concept that can be applied to all other concepts and is meant to demonstrate your insightful understanding of these concepts. For example, if you identify that a character in a text repeatedly seeks validation from others, ask yourself "*SO WHAT?!*" – *what does this trait reveal about the character? What purpose does this serve in your understanding of the text?*

This is a concept that some students struggle with because it reveals the ability to think in a critical and/ or abstract manner. This is the type of thinking required in university- level humanities courses.

### **Theme (may also be referred to as the central, controlling or unifying idea)**

Theme refers to the messages or big ideas associated with a text. These ideas or messages are inferred by the reader rather than explicitly stated by a writer. When trying to uncover theme ask yourself: what do we learn, or what are we meant to learn, from reading this text? Remember: theme is never one word! Often you can get to theme by beginning with a single word (topic) and then figuring out what the writer's message is related to that word. For example: 'Love' is a topic that is addressed in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* but it is not the theme. The theme may be that love motivates people to make irrational decisions.

### **Character Development or Characterization (major and minor characters)**

**Characterization** is the method used by a writer to **develop** a character. The method includes (1) showing the character's appearance, (2) displaying the character's actions, (3) revealing the character's thoughts, (4) letting the character speak, and (5) getting the reactions of others (<http://classes.berklee.edu/llanday/resources/terms.htm>), as well as considering a character's motivations.

At this level, as with other concepts, we look to go beyond basic identification of characterization and towards the 'so what' associated with characterization. Ask yourself *why a character is developed in a particular manner, how this development relates to other concepts and / or elements and why this matters in for the author's overall purpose.* Characters, just like people in real life, are often complex and multi-faceted and thus, our understanding of a given character is always developing and shifting.

### **Conflict (all types – external and internal)**

This should not be a new concept to you. In previous English courses you have dealt with conflict. At this point however, this expectation is that you are able to go beyond simply identifying a conflict and move towards to purpose or the "so what" of a conflict. You should also be making connections between conflict and other narrative elements in order to demonstrate deep understanding.

### **Setting**

We all have a basic understanding of setting as 'time' and 'place' in a text. At the University level however, the expectation is that we move *well* beyond simply identifying time and place, and move towards the *implication* of time and place, as well as an understanding of 'context' as a key aspect of setting.

**Context** is a complex concept but think of it as "anything beyond the specific words of a literary work that may be relevant to understanding the meaning. Contexts may be economic, social, cultural, historical, literary, biographical, etc. The political context of the rule of Elizabeth and James, the religious context of Calvinism, the social context of [gender roles], for example, all have significant implications for understanding the words of Shakespeare." ("Glossary of Literary Terms." *Glossary of Literary Terms*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Feb. 2015.)

**Symbol and Motif** \*new concept at this level

**Symbol:** It is equivalent to a *sign* – anything which signifies something else. In literature, a symbol is a word or phrase that signifies something or has a range of reference.

For example, let's look at seasons as **symbols** of the human life cycle:

Spring = Birth/Childhood  
Summer = Adolescence/Young Adult  
Fall = Middle/Old Age  
Winter = Very Old Age/Death

**Motif:** An element – a type of incident, device, reference, or formula – which recurs frequently in literature. As soon as we begin to notice that an object appears over and over within the text in a pattern, we are recognizing a motif.

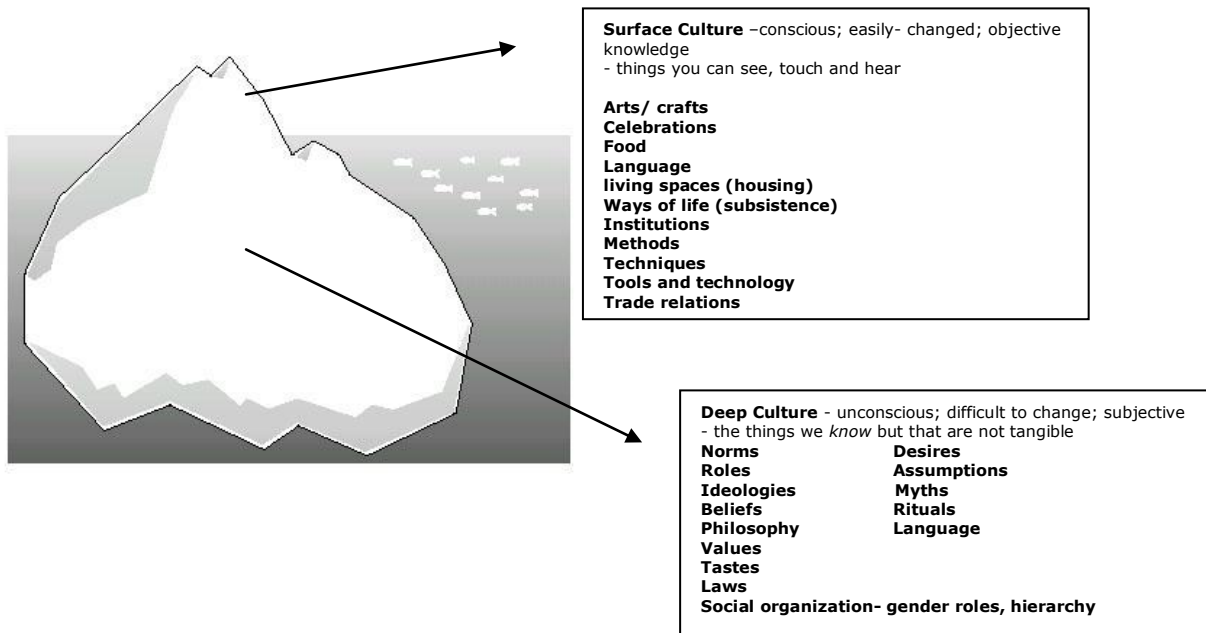
For example, let's look at doors as a recurring **motif**. In the *Harry Potter* series, there are many instances where the characters encounter doors – sometimes with positive results and sometimes with negative results. As readers/viewers, we can predict the outcome because we've encountered doors before and can access our prior knowledge.

**Culture** \*new concept at this level

This is a massive concept that is difficult to define. A few definitions include:

- ❖ The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.  
(Source: <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html>)
- ❖ A **culture** is a way of life of a group of people--the behaviours, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.  
(source: <http://www.tamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html>)

Think of it this way: culture is a diverse set of intertwined concepts that are shared by a group of people. Consider also using the "Iceberg Model" when thinking about culture. This analogy equates culture to an iceberg. The 'surface' culture is visible to the observer. The 'deep' culture is below the water, not visible to people.



**Clash of cultures and groups OR Clash of people within a culture** *\*new concept at this level*

The term implies tension or conflict between *or* within cultures in a given text. Because the concept of culture itself is so broad, the causes, manifestations and outcomes of any given clash can be equally as diverse.

When considering this concept in terms of a text, always ask yourself what the purpose or implications of the clash are on the overall narrative.

**The 'Isms'** (racism, sexism, feminism, classism, post- colonialism) *\*new concept at this level*

**RACISM:** Racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of one race and the disadvantage of other races. The critical element that differentiates racism from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systemic ways with far- reaching outcomes and effects.

**CLASSISM:** The institutional, cultural, and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign differential value to people according to their socioeconomic class; and an economic system which creates excessive inequality and causes basic human needs to go unmet.

**SEXISM:** The cultural, institutional, and individual set of beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women, and denigrate values and practices associated

**FEMINISM:** - set of beliefs that aim to overcome sexism and promote women.

**POST- COLONIALISM-** Simple definition: "of, or relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony"

More Complex Definition:

- Doesn't indicate only a specific or materially historical event (ex. the departure from a colony)
- Seems to describe the second half of the twentieth century in general as a period in the aftermath of the heyday of colonialism
- A position against imperialism Eurocentrism
- Post- colonial theorists examine Western ways of knowledge production and dissemination