
Responding

Responding means deconstructing or critically reacting to a text that has been produced.

The relationship between a text and a responder is a dynamic one, and the concept of meaning is complex. Some aspects of a text's meaning are explicit or can be easily identified from the language used to convey ideas, values, information and experiences. Other aspects of meaning are implicit and need close analysis or deconstruction. Thus, a text such as Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* may be valued, on one level, as a masterpiece of world literature, stimulating insight into the workings of the human heart, but be regarded, on another level, as a document of English colonialism.

Meaning

Meaning is the value a text has for you, and so it is subjective and contextual.

The idea that language creates meaning rather than conveys or contains meaning is the basis for the Area of Study. When you are responding to a text, you need to analyse how language is applied to the concept on which a text is based.

EXPLICIT MEANING

Explicit meaning is meaning that is a result of the responder's reading and interpretation of the composer's perspective or intended meaning. It is clearly stated in an arrangement of ideas and points that are based on the composer's assumptions.

The text's explicit meaning is subjective or personal because the responder's own ideas and assumptions or values and beliefs shape it. When you compare the meaning that members of a group receive, you will find that there are some aspects of meaning that they will agree on, others they will not agree on, and some that they just did not see. The aspects of meaning are all parts of the ideas or concepts on which the text is based. When we respond to a text, we are reacting to the experience of participating as an audience in the process of the text's creation. In this process of participation, we construct analytical perceptions on the foundation of our aesthetic awareness of how language is used. So a reading includes appropriate public knowledge and the personal associations, feelings and ideas that are experienced during a reading. These are not innate but culturally learned. The unity of a response is a reflection of our personal identity, which has evolved during childhood and is modified in the passage of time. So texts do not have an objective meaning, but reader response gives them significance. Thus, individual aesthetic experience – or value-based features related to morality, beauty or truthfulness – underlies interpretation.⁴

IMPLICIT MEANING

Implicit meaning is meaning that is derived from the values and beliefs that are often concealed within a text.

Implicit values and beliefs support and maintain the social structure of the culture in which they are produced. Implicit values and beliefs need to be inferred from the gaps, silences and contradictions in a text. They often appear as “natural” or as “commonsense”, and the composer and the publisher of the text may not want

4 Brian Moon, *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*, Chalkface Press, Cottesloe WA, 1999. p 72.