

# Critical Theory & Pedagogy Presentation

eng 7800 / spring 2019 / ohio university / chang



Our seminar covers a survey of video game studies, scholarship, games, and other texts. One of the best ways to explore and understand a text is through close reading and close playing. Another way to explore and understand a text—using what you have gained through reading and watching—is through lively discussion and questioning both the text and your experience of it. And, finally, a third way to explore and understand a text is to teach the ideas, material, and possibilities to someone else, to students, to your colleagues and peers.

You will be a required to sign up (at least once) for an online “presentation” and discussion curation during the

course of the semester. For a particular week, the presentation asks you to digest the assigned theoretical readings, to make connections between readings and an example game, and to think creatively and practically about how (and why) to present the material. Your presentation will require forethought, planning, and perhaps some light research—think of the presentation as a short teaching demonstration, an exercise in online pedagogy, and an opportunity for professionalization. Once you have signed for a particular week and a particular episode, consider the following tasks and goals:

- 1) Ahead of time, read scholarly texts and play the game(s) assigned in that week. A key text will be assigned to you for that week to “teach” to the seminar. Work with the instructor to help you narrow the scope of the presentation.
- 2) Identify and summarize two or three main points or arguments from the scholarly text, articulating the key takeaways from the reading and making connections to other readings.
- 3) Generate a presentation and discussion prompt, which includes 1-2 paragraphs that frame and introduces the whole discussion, 2-4 paragraphs that summarize the reading, 1-2 examples to help demonstrate, elaborate, contextualize, or complicate the reading (this could be the week’s game or a game of your choosing), and 1-2 critical questions or provocations to get the discussion going.
- 4) Post the polished discussion prompt to the class blog by the due date and time (either Mondays or Thursdays by noon). Posts should be no more than 1,500 words and should include images, video clips, and other media. Think creatively and innovatively about the format, organization, multimodality, and accessibility of your presentation (i.e. avoid a wall of text).
- 5) Once the discussion prompt is posted, you will be expected to help answer the posed questions, explore ideas raised by the texts, and keep the discussion thread moving. Not every single reply needs a response, but you must respond at least three times before the closing date of the thread.
- 6) When appropriate, the professor will serve as moderator.

Your presentation and discussion curation will be graded on relevance, completeness, organization, engagement with the texts, and the overall quality of the “lesson plan,” critical questions, facilitation and responses, and write-up. Think of the presentation as an opportunity to engage the affordances and limitations of online teaching, of teaching theoretical and challenging texts, and of teaching digital games.

## Guidelines and Due Dates

**Format:** online presentation prompt and discussion curation  
refer to specific passages or moments in the texts for the week  
750 to 1,500 word framing post, examples, critical questions, and media, include if necessary a bibliography of sources used

**Due:** on your sign-up date, at least once during the semester  
post should include the presentation date and topic as the subject line (e.g. “1/14 DISCUSSION: Gee, Close Playing, and the Romanticization of Digital Games”)

## What is a Critical Question?

Generating critical questions is a necessary and useful academic skill; critical questions are often the beginning of intellectual or theoretical or artistic exploration, require active and attentive reading and thinking, and can generate the beginnings of analysis, multiple perspectives on an issue, topics for research, ways to critique and understand a text, and further curiosity for the material at hand. Your critical question for your presentation should develop from a close reading of one of the week's texts and your critical thinking about the text. **What questions or concerns do you want to ask of the text? What questions or concerns does the text ask of you?** Your critical question should be developed, dimensional, and complex that pushes beyond simple questions of theme, symbolism, personal opinion, or personal reaction. Consider the following when generating your critical question; your critical question:

–May think about the larger critical questions of our class, beyond just the course goals. What does the text reveal about our “culture” or “literature” or “reading”? How and why and what does the text respond to, reassert, or critique keywords like literacy, race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and citizenship.

–Asks more than, “What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?” Critiques more than just theme, symbol, character, plot, setting. Think about the following: What is important about \_\_\_\_\_? Does \_\_\_\_\_ raise questions about representation (or how the text makes meaning), how we understand our lives and our world? Does \_\_\_\_\_ challenge or perpetuate cultural definitions, norms, traditions, ideologies?

–Begins with “How might...” or “Why...” and requires answers beyond yes or no, right or wrong, black or white. How and why and what would your answer to such a question be? In fact, critical questions often invite many different ways to answer a question and different kinds of evidence and reasoning as well.

–May focus on one section or one main idea of the text. How does the section fit the overall text? How does the main idea run through the whole text? What makes the section or idea important? What connections does it make to other texts, to the course goals?

–May be explicitly about the form, structure, language, and rhetorical or literary features of the text. What is its genre? How and why and what does it play with form? What rhetorical or literary features does it possess? How and why and what does it play with these features? How is the text answering the question, “What is important about this text?”

–Contextualizes the text in history, geography, politics, academia, and its conditions and modes of production. In other words, how and why and what is important about when the text was made, who the text was made for, where it was made, how it was made, and why it was made? What does its context tell us about our own context as we read it now?

### Insufficient Critical Questions

- What does the green light at the end of the dock in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* signify?
- In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, why does Harry choose to save both Ron and Fleur’s sister? What does this say about his personality?
- Because the author was nearly drowned as a child, the novel uses the metaphor of drowning as a main theme. If the author had not had this unfortunate accident, would the novel be different? Would the ending change?
- Is Hamlet really crazy or just pretending to be crazy?
- Do you like this novel?

### Sample Complex Critical Questions

Much has been made of the green light at the end of the dock in *The Great Gatsby*, calling it a symbol of unrequited love, the American Dream, or envy and money. Clearly *TGG* is preoccupied by the definition of and critique of class and wealth. If the green light is something unattainable, how might we think about how the novel argues about who gets to achieve the American Dream, who doesn’t, and more importantly, how these logics of inclusion and exclusion fall along gendered and raced lines. Moreover, how might the American Dream be deployed to police these lines, particularly for characters like Myrtle or Meyer Wolfsheim?

Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” troubles the definition of “mad” or “madness” through a narrator that is simultaneously, ambivalently “very, very dreadfully nervous” and “healthy” and “calm.” Given that traditional and stereotypical definitions of madness center on irrationality, wild emotions, delusions, and misperceptions, how might the story’s narrator resist these definitions with his rationality, calm, and keen perceptions? He says, “Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!” Even the ending of the story, with the narrator overcome by his too keen perceptions, does not seem wholly uncontrolled. The narrator’s confession seems more out of frustration over perceived derision than from guilt. How might reading the narrator as not mad challenge the ways madness gets defined, often mapped on to people and bodies that are deemed not “normal” or “acceptable,” and how might the story itself challenge the privileging of rationality as inherently “normal” and “good”?