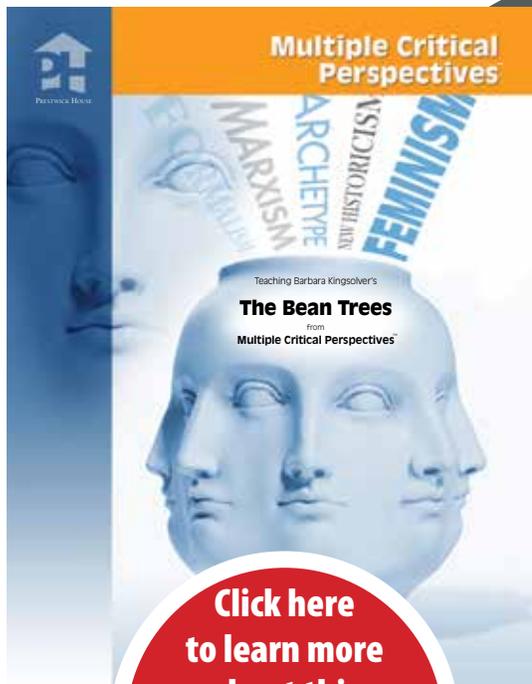




Prestwick House
Multiple Critical
Perspectives™

Sample



Click here
to learn more
about this
Multiple Critical
Perspectives!



Click here
to find more
Classroom Resources
for this title!



 **Prestwick House**

More from Prestwick House

Literature

Literary Touchstone Classics
Literature Teaching Units

Grammar and Writing

College and Career Readiness: Writing
Grammar for Writing

Vocabulary

Vocabulary Power Plus
Vocabulary from Latin and Greek Roots

Reading

Reading Informational Texts
Reading Literature



Multiple Critical Perspectives™

Teaching Barbara Kingsolver's

The Bean Trees

from

Multiple Critical Perspectives™

by

Priscilla Baker



Prestwick House

Other titles in the *Multiple Critical Perspective™* series include:

Order online at www.prestwickhouse.com

<i>1984</i>	<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	<i>Picture of Dorian Gray, The</i>
<i>Animal Farm</i>	<i>House on Mango Street, The</i>	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
<i>Anthem</i>	<i>Importance of Being Earnest, The</i>	<i>Raisin in the Sun, A</i>
<i>Awakening, The</i>	<i>Invisible Man (Ellison)</i>	<i>Richard III</i>
<i>Brave New World</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<i>Crucible, The</i>	<i>King Lear</i>	<i>Scarlet Letter, The</i>
<i>Cry, The Beloved Country</i>	<i>Life of Pi</i>	<i>Siddhartha</i>
<i>Death of a Salesman</i>	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	<i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i>
<i>Doll's House, A</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Tale of Two Cities, A</i>
<i>Ethan Frome</i>	<i>Metamorphosis, The</i>	<i>Taming of the Shrew, The</i>
<i>Frankenstein</i>	<i>Midsummer Night's Dream, A</i>	<i>Tempest, The</i>
<i>Grapes of Wrath, The</i>	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>
<i>Great Expectations</i>	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>
<i>Great Gatsby, The</i>	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Our Town</i>	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>



Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com • 800.932.4593

ISBN 978-1-93546-606-2 Item No. 307566

Copyright 2010 Prestwick House, Inc. All rights reserved.
No portion may be reproduced without permission in writing from the publisher.

A Message to the Teacher of Literature

OPEN YOUR STUDENTS' EYES AND MINDS with this new, exciting approach to teaching literature.

In this guide, you will find reproducible activities, as well as clear and concise explanations of three contemporary critical perspectives—feel free to reproduce as much, or as little, of the material for your students' notebooks. You will also find specific suggestions to help you examine this familiar title in new and exciting ways. Your students will seize the opportunity to discuss, present orally, and write about their new insights.

What you will not find is an answer key. To the feminist, the feminist approach is the correct approach, just as the Freudian will hold to the Freudian. Truly, the point of this guide is to examine, question, and consider, not merely arrive at “right” answers.

You will also find this to be a versatile guide. Use it in concert with our *Teaching Unit* or our *Advanced Placement Teaching Unit*. Use it along with our *Response Journal*, or use it as your entire study of this title. However you choose to use it, we are confident you'll be thrilled with the new life you find in an old title, as well as in your students.

Table of Contents



General Introduction To The Work 6

 Introduction to *The Bean Trees* 6

 Plot Summary 7

 Character List 9

 Theories to be Explored 12



Feminist Theory Applied to *The Bean Trees* 13

 Notes on the Feminist Theory 13

 Essential Questions for A Feminist Reading 16

 Activity One: Examining Kingsolver's Treatment of the Female Experience of Motherhood 17

 Activity Two: Examining the Role of Gender in Determining One's Future 21

 Activity Three: Examining Feminine Imagery in the Novel 23

 Discussion Questions 30

 Essays Or Writing Assignments 30



Mythological/Archetypal Approach Applied to *The Bean Trees*..... 31

Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach 31

Essential Questions for A Mythological/Archetypal Reading 37

Activity One: Examining Archetypal Characters in the Novel..... 38

Activity Two: Examining Taylor’s Journey as a Quest 39

Activity Three: Examining Archetypal Imagery in the Novel 44

Discussion Questions 49

Essays Or Writing Assignments..... 49



Formalism Applied to *The Bean Trees*..... 51

Notes on the Formalist Approach 51

Essential Questions for A Formalist Reading 54

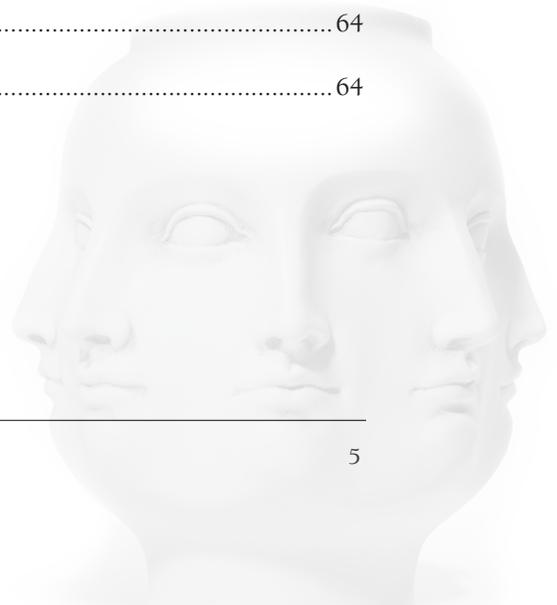
Activity One: Examining Literary and Narrative Devices as Sources of Unity in the Novel..... 55

Activity Two: Examining Point of View in the Novel..... 60

Activity Three: Examining Character Relationships in Terms of Form and Unity 62

Discussion Questions 64

Essays Or Writing Assignments..... 64



General Introduction to the Work

Introduction to *The Bean Trees*

THE *BEAN TREES*, BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S first novel, was published in 1988 to wide critical acclaim. The novel won the Enoch Pratt Library Youth-to-Youth Books Award, the American Library Association Notable Book, and the New York Times Notable Book.

During her college years, Kingsolver actively protested the Vietnam War, marking the start of many years' dedication to social and political change. The themes of social, political, cultural, and economic injustice permeate the pages of Kingsolver's poems, short stories, essays, and novels.

The novel addresses the themes of fate versus personal choice, the role of men versus women, physical versus psychological scars, person versus society, class struggle, sense of community, abuse and neglect, reverence for other cultures, and motherhood and family.

And though her novel is clearly driven by topical causes vital to all of humanity, it is also an extremely character-driven novel that skillfully exists quite simply and beautifully on its own level and on its own merits. As a result, the reader cares not just about the issues but about the characters themselves.

Plot Summary

The novel begins when Marietta (“Missy”) Greer decides she has had enough of Pittman, Kentucky and wants to start a new life, and adopt a new name. She determines she will name herself for wherever the gas tank of her 1955 Volkswagen runs empty. Her mother, a maid for wealthy families in Pittman who has raised Missy entirely on her own, fully supports her daughter’s desire to leave Kentucky and serves as a loving force throughout her daughter’s journey of self-discovery. Missy becomes “Taylor” after coasting on fumes into Taylorville, Illinois.

After her car breaks down in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Taylor stops to have it repaired and wanders into a restaurant to find something to eat. When she returns to her car, a Cherokee woman places a child wrapped up tightly in a blanket on the front seat next to her, explaining that the child is her niece, and asks Taylor to take care of her. The woman leaves Taylor, stunned, and drives away in a pick-up truck with two other men. Unsure what to do, Taylor stops for the night at the Broken Arrow Motel. When she bathes the child, Taylor discovers evidence of physical and sexual abuse, and ultimately decides to keep her. Turtle has not yet made a sound but desperately clings to objects and to Taylor, so she names the child “Turtle” because of her strong mud turtle-like grip.

The car eventually breaks down again in Tucson, Arizona outside *Jesus is Lord Used Tires*. Mattie, the widowed owner of the store, extends considerable kindness to Taylor and the child and becomes an important mentor and friend to both of them. She offers Taylor a job at her shop and guides her through the perils of motherhood. Taylor also discovers that Mattie is providing sanctuary for political refugees from Guatemala in the upstairs of her store. Taylor becomes friends with two of these refugees, Estevan and Esperanza, who fled their country, and lost their daughter Ismene to governmental kidnappers, as a result of the political turmoil ravaging their homeland.

Looking for a place to live, Taylor responds to an ad placed by Lou Ann Ruiz, a recently separated woman raising a newborn baby. She and Taylor immediately bond over the fact that they are both natives of Kentucky and single mothers. They form a close friendship, and a supportive family unit that enables each of them to succeed. Their neighbors, Virgie Mae and Edna Parsons, also provide support by taking care of the children.

Estevan and Mattie educate Taylor about social injustice and the United States’ role in sustaining the Guatemalan government’s tyranny. Estevan also tries to educate Virgie Mae about the ills of racism and the benefits of helping others, but her prejudicial ignorance prevents her from even wanting to embrace these concepts.

Surrounded by Taylor and a network of loving friends, Turtle gradually starts to feel more secure and begins speaking and interacting with those around her. Turtle’s vocabulary consists exclusively of words pertaining to vegetables and gardening. Her progress is tested, however, when she is at the park with Edna and Virgie Mae and a stranger grabs her. Though Edna is able to hit the perpetrator with her cane, and Turtle is virtually unharmed, the child regresses to her former silent, unresponsive self in the aftermath of the incident. Turtle eventually seems to forget “the bad man,” but Taylor has a much harder time letting go of what might have happened to the child and struggles with her commitment to raising Turtle.

As a result of the incident in the park, Child Protective Services is alerted and discovers that Taylor has no legal right to Turtle. Unless Taylor can garner consent from Turtle's natural parents, Turtle will become a ward of the state. After an initial period of resignation, Taylor resolves to do whatever it takes to keep the child.

Against Mattie's wishes, Taylor insists that she and Turtle will transport Estevan and Esperanza to their new sanctuary in Oklahoma. While there, they attempt to find Turtle's family but have no success so Taylor asks her friends for help. Because they look like Cherokee Indians, Estevan and Esperanza can convincingly pose as Turtle's parents in the lawyer's office and Taylor is able to adopt Turtle formally. Taylor takes Estevan and Esperanza to the safe house and returns to her life in Tucson, with Turtle clutching the adoption certificate and naming not just vegetables, but all the people in her family as well.

Character List

Taylor Greer – the protagonist and narrator of the story. Taylor, a young woman in her 20s, is smart, passionate, determined, and fearless. Her real name is Marietta (Missy) Greer, but she changes her name as she ventures from her hometown in Kentucky to start a new life in Tucson, Arizona. Along the way, she is given an Indian child (Turtle) in a parking lot in Oklahoma. Taylor eventually becomes a committed and loving mother, develops important friendships, and fights social injustice.

Alice Jean Stamper Greer – Taylor’s mother (“Mama”) whose husband ran out on her as soon as he found out she was pregnant. She is a kind, nurturing, and completely selfless mother, and it is her model of parenting that enables Taylor to embrace her new role in Turtle’s life. Mama makes her living as a housekeeper for wealthy families.

Foster Greer – Taylor’s father and Alice Jean’s ex-husband.

Mr. Hughes Walter – Taylor’s science teacher from up north who gets Taylor her first job through his wife Lynda, the head nurse at Pittman County Hospital.

Newt Hardbine – a classmate of Taylor’s who fails several grades and ends up dead at the hospital Taylor works at after a fight with his father.

Mr. Hardbine – Newt Hardbine’s father. After a tractor tire blows up, he is thrown over the Standard Oil sign and from that point forward, Taylor is terrified of tires.

Jolene Shanks Hardbine – Newt Hardbine’s wife who ends up widowed with a baby to care for after Newt is killed in a fight with his father.

Eddie Rickett – the head of Pittman County Hospital Lab; Taylor’s boss.

Turtle – the Cherokee child (April) left on Taylor’s front car seat by the child’s aunt in a parking lot in Oklahoma. The Indian woman entrusts April to a stranger to help her niece escape the physical and sexual abuse she is suffering. Taylor names the child Turtle because of her tight grip. Through Taylor and her network of caring friends, Turtle progresses from being a frightened, almost catatonic, child to a thriving, cheerful, and self-assured one.

Mrs. Hoge – the older woman who works as a receptionist at the Broken Arrow Motel where Taylor and Turtle stay on their way to Arizona. She is a compassionate woman and lets them stay there free of charge because Taylor has no money in exchange for Taylor cleaning the guestrooms.

Irene – Mrs. Hoge’s daughter-in-law, who runs the Broken Arrow Motel.

Mattie – a widow who owns *Jesus is Lord Used Tires*; a humanitarian who runs a sanctuary for political refugees from Guatemala. She gives Taylor a job in her shop and becomes an important friend and mentor to Taylor and Turtle.

Sandi – works at Burger Derby with Taylor for a short time and helps Taylor with childcare. She is an avid horse fan and thinks Taylor must know a lot about horses because she is from Kentucky.

Lou Ann Ruiz – is recently separated from her husband and raising her son alone. Taylor answers the ad for a roommate Lou Ann has placed in the paper. The two women, both single mothers and from Kentucky, become instant friends and begin to build a nontraditional family together. Lou Ann is quite fearful and unsure of herself, and she eventually benefits from the influence of Taylor’s confident, assertive personality.

Angel Ruiz – leaves his wife and newborn son because he cannot cope with the sadness and anger he feels in the aftermath of an accident that has left him with an artificial leg.

Dwayne Ray Ruiz – Lou Ann and Angel’s son.

Ivy Logan – Lou Ann’s mother. She lives in Kentucky with her mother-in-law, Granny Logan, and comes to Tucson to help with Dwayne Ray. She is clearly prejudiced against Mexicans and cannot understand why Lou Ann would have married Angel.

Granny Logan – Lou Ann’s grandmother, who lives in Kentucky with her daughter-in-law Ivy. She also utters racist comments about Mexicans, and Eskimos and considers Angel to be a heathen because he is working on a Sunday.

Bobby Bingo – sells produce out of his truck down the street from Lou Ann’s house. He offers Lou Ann advice and provides her with an opportunity to admit that her marriage is likely over.

Lee Sing – the owner of the grocery store across the street from Lou Ann.

Virgie Mae Valentine Parsons – Lou Ann and Taylor’s elderly neighbor who lives with, and cares for, Edna Poppy. She can be extremely disrespectful and rude and has strong negative opinions about any culture different from her own.

Edna Poppy – a kind, elderly woman who lives with Virgie Mae and occasionally helps Taylor and Lou Ann with childcare. She always dresses in red, though she is blind and cannot see the color.



Father William – a priest helping Mattie with the sanctuary movement.

Terry – a doctor who visits *Jesus is Lord Used Tires* to provide treatment for refugees.

Estevan – A Guatemalan political refugee living in the sanctuary at *Jesus is Lord Used Tires*. Formerly a teacher in Guatemala, he now washes dishes at a Chinese restaurant. He forms a very close relationship with Taylor and, despite personal risk, helps her to adopt Turtle officially.

Esperanza – Estevan's wife, also a Guatemalan political refugee living in sanctuary at *Jesus is Lord Used Tires*. She struggles daily with the loss of her daughter, Ismene, and attempts suicide at least once. She forms a strong bond with Turtle, who reminds her of her own daughter and eventually plays a key role in Turtle's adoption.

Ismene – Estevan and Esperanza's daughter who was kidnapped by government officials in Guatemala who hoped to use the child as bait to learn the names of other political offenders. Rather than betray their friends to certain death, Estevan and Esperanza decided to remain silent and flee the country.

Cynthia – a social worker at Child Protective Services, who handles Turtle's case after the child is attacked in the park. She encourages Taylor to fight for custody of Turtle and provides her with the information necessary to do so.

Mr. Armistead – an Oklahoma lawyer near the Lake o' the Cherokees who makes Turtle's adoption legal. Posing as Cherokee Indians, Estevan and Esperanza convince the lawyer that they are Turtle's parents and are willingly giving her to Taylor.

Mrs. Cleary – Mr. Armistead's secretary. ■



Theories to be Explored

- Feminist
- Archetypal/Mythological
- Formalist

Feminist Theory Applied to *The Bean Trees*



Notes on the Feminist Theory

FEMINISM IS AN EVOLVING PHILOSOPHY, and its application in literature is a relatively new area of study. The basis of the movement, both in literature and society, is that the Western world is fundamentally patriarchal (i.e., created by men, ruled by men, viewed through the eyes of men, and judged by men).

The feminist movement in society found its approach to literature in the 1960s. Of course, women had already been writing and publishing for centuries, but the 1960s saw the rise of a feminist literary theory. Until then, the works of female writers (or works about females) were examined by the same standards as those by male writers (and about men). Women were thought to be unintelligent (at least in part because they were generally less formally educated than men), and many women accepted that judgment. It was not until the feminist movement was well under way that women began examining old texts, reevaluating their portrayal of women and writing new works to fit the developing concept of the “modern woman.”

The feminist approach is based on finding suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) within pieces of literature and exposing them. Feminists are interested in exposing the undervaluing of women in literature that has been accepted as the norm by both men and women. Feminist critics have even dissected many words in Western languages that they believe to be rooted in masculinity. Feminists argue that since the past millennia in the West have been dominated by men—whether they be the politicians in power or the historians recording it all—Western literature reflects a masculine bias, and consequently, represents an inaccurate and potentially harmful image of women. In order to fix this image and create a balanced canon, works by females and works about females need to be added and read from a feminist perspective.

Three main areas of study/points of criticism:

1. differences between men and women
2. women in power or power relationships between men and women
3. the female experience

1. Differences between men and women

- The basic assumption is that gender determines everything, including values and language.
- The canon must be expanded to include the study of those genres in which women “traditionally” write: journals, diaries, and personal letters.
- Note the differences in the topics or issues about which men and women write and the perspectives from which they write about them.

2. Women in power or power relationships between men and women

- Note and attack the social, economic, and political exploitation of women. Note whether women have any power and what type it is.
- Society has not treated all of its constituencies with equality, and literature is a means by which inequities can be identified, protested, and possibly rectified.
- Note the division of labor and economics between men and women.
- Note how men and women interact with one another in a variety of relationships (romantic, professional, etc.). Does the woman act in any way subservient to the man? Does the man treat the woman like an adult? A political and economic equal?

3. The female experience

- On the most basic level, women experience different things in life than men do. Examine what aspects of feminine life are included in the work. Note the point of view through which the events are told. Is it male or female? Pay attention to how the narrator, male or female, treats the events. For example, are they depicted with sensitivity, harshness, etc.?

- Reject any view of female personality in contrast to male personality. Feminists believe that the female personality is a separate entity from the male personality, and if judged by the same measures, is judged incorrectly. The female personality can stand independent of the male personality, just as the male can stand independent of the female.
- Examine, and possibly celebrate, the creative, life-giving role of femininity. Though traditionally women have been portrayed as dependent on men for everything, the fact is that men are dependent on women for the most basic necessity in the world—birthing children. A male’s relationship to his mother has always been portrayed as a very strong bond (whether in the Freudian theory of the Oedipal complex or modern phrases such as “Mama’s boy”).
- Explore the concept that men and women are both incomplete without each other (women cannot conceive without men, etc.) not of feminine “incompleteness” alone (Adam’s rib, Freudian theories on sexuality, etc.). ■

Essential Questions for A Feminist Reading

1. What stereotypes of women are present? Are female characters oversimplified? Weak? Foolish? Excessively naive?
2. Do the female characters play major or minor roles in the action of the work? Are they supportive or independent? Powerless or strong? Subservient or in control?
3. If the female characters have any power, what kind is it? Political? Economic? Social? Psychological?
4. How do the male characters talk about the female characters?
5. How do the male characters treat the female characters?
6. How do the female characters act toward the male characters?
7. How do the female characters act toward each other?
8. Is the work, in general, sympathetic to female characters? Too sympathetic?
9. Are the female characters and situations in which they are placed oversimplified or presented fully and in detail?
10. What are the predominant images? Are they images usually associated with women? Why or why not?
11. Do any of the work's themes touch upon any idea that could be seen as a feminist issue? Is the theme supportive or disparaging of women?
12. Overall, do you think that the female characters are believable (based on women you know)? For that matter, do you think that the male characters are believable?

Activity One

Examining Kingsolver's Treatment of the Female Experience of Motherhood

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Bean Trees*: Feminist Activity One Graphic Organizer.
2. Divide the class into five groups or a number of groups divisible by five.
3. Assign each group, or allow each to choose, a different character.
4. Instruct groups to respond to all questions on the handout relevant to their assigned character with specific references to the text.
5. Separate your chalk/dry erase board into columns with the following characters as headings for each: Mama, Taylor, Lou Ann, Esperanza, Mattie. Have students write page references on the board as well as on their handouts for ease of sharing information with the class.
6. Reconvene the class and have each group report on its findings. All students should take notes on alternate characters that they did not research.
7. In full-class discussion, consider the following:
 - Compare and contrast each character's background and upbringing.
 - What role models of motherhood does each character have?
 - What role do men play in each character's life as a mother? How does that affect each woman's attitude towards men?
 - What kind of support network has each character developed? What are they able to do as a result of that support network that they would not be able to do otherwise?
 - How does each evolve as a mother/mother figure throughout the novel?
 - Address questions specific to each character from the handout.
 - Contemplate the aspect of Motherhood as relevant to viewing the novel from a Feminist Perspective.



The Bean Trees: Feminist Activity One

Graphic Organizer

With specific reference to the text, including page numbers, consider the following ideas about the *Female Experience of Motherhood* with respect to your assigned character. On the next page, answer the question that is specific to your character. Be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class.

Character's Name: _____

General

1. What do we know, if anything, about her own upbringing and how it might have affected her outlook on becoming a mother?

2. What other motherhood role models does she have? What significant things does she learn from each?

3. What role, if any, do men play in her life as a mother? How does this affect her attitude towards men?

4. Define her support network, if any. What does that network provide her with that she would not be able to accomplish on her own? Why is this so important?



5. How does she evolve as a mother throughout the course of the novel? Trace the arc of her outlook, psychologically and emotionally. In what ways does her outlook stay the same?

Specific to Mama

1. How is Kingsolver able to create such a strong sense of Mama as a mother even though she is only physically present in the novel in two chapters?

Specific to Taylor

1. How and why is Taylor's experience different from the other mothers in the novel?

Specific to Lou Ann

1. Explain Lou Ann's attitude towards pregnancy and how it is pertinent to viewing the novel from a feminist perspective.



Specific to Esperanza

1. How is Kingsolver able to give you such a strong sense of Esperanza as a mother even though Ismene is not actually in the novel?

Specific to Mattie

1. Though Mattie is not a mother herself, she displays many nurturing characteristics associated with motherhood. What are those characteristics?

2. Explain Mattie's attitude towards work and social activism and how it is pertinent to viewing the novel from a feminist perspective.

Activity Two

Examining the Role of Gender in Determining One's Future

1. Have the class consider the following quotation from *The Bean Trees*:

“A girl, poor thing. That fact had already burdened her short life with a kind of misery I could not imagine.”

2. Then have students answer the following questions:

- To what is Taylor specifically referring in this quotation? What is so significant about Taylor’s word choice here?
- With reference to the following characters, explain in what ways gender *has* determined what path their lives have taken:

- Taylor
- Lou Ann
- Mama
- Newt Hardbine
- Jolene Shanks
- Sandi
- Ivy Logan
- Esperanza
- Estevan
- Angel

- With reference to the following characters, explain in what ways gender has *not* determined what path their lives have taken:

- Taylor
- Mama
- Mattie
- Lou Ann
- Cynthia
- Estevan
- Angel

- In comparing the two lists above, what *character traits* have allowed some characters to evade the traditional roles associated with them?
 - In comparing the two lists above, what *circumstances* have allowed some characters to evade the traditional roles associated with them?
3. Discuss the significance of the fact that Kingsolver has only one positive male character in the entire novel. How is the reader's perception of the male gender with respect to the novel affected by this? How fair, or realistic, do you think this depiction is?
 4. To make the topic more relevant, discuss the following questions with respect to today's professional society:
 - Are there particular professions that are more specific to one gender over another? Why is that, do you think?
 - Are men and women compensated differently for the same jobs?
 - Do you see these issues ever changing in the future?
 5. For overall closure, have students reflect on traditional gender roles for men and women in the past versus the present. How have those roles changed in recent times? How are they still the same? And how do they see these roles as functioning in 10, 20, 50+ years?

Activity Three

Examining Feminine Imagery in the Novel

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Bean Trees: Feminist Activity Three Identification and Location of Potential Feminine Images*.
2. Have students brainstorm a list of prominent or recurring image motifs that could potentially be interpreted as “feminine” or as “feminist.”

NOTE: You may need to acknowledge that many of the images the students identify are based on stereotypes or might be stereotypical themselves, but that if they are associated with feminism or femininity, they are still valid.

NOTE: Even if you have not yet done the Mythological/Archetypal activities, allow students to identify motifs that are potentially feminine from an archetypal perspective.

The point is for students to think about how this book about women and by a woman incorporates society’s and Western culture’s notions about femininity.

3. Have students, working in pairs, reread the passages indicated on the *Identification and Location* handout and note all potential feminine images listed.
4. Have students continue perusing the novel for
 - additional occurrences of the listed image(s)
 - occurrences of images not specified on the handout.
5. Reconvene the class and have students answer the following questions with respect to each of the identified and located archetypal images:
 - What makes each image distinctly feminine? Which ones are positive? Which ones are negative?
 - Which images are controlled by men? Which are controlled by nature? Why is this distinction significant?
 - What kind of language does Kingsolver use when describing these images? Note specific examples of literary devices and their effects on the description.

- What sort of commentary is the author making about femininity and the feminine experience through the use of these images?
4. If you have already done Archetypal Activity Three (which also focuses on the use and recurrence of feminine images as a point of discussion), compare and contrast the meanings of the images when read from a feminist perspective as opposed to an archetypal perspective. How does the lens through which you examine the text change your overall perception?

The Bean Trees: Feminist Activity Three

Identification and Location of Potential Feminine Imagery

Shapes

round shapes in:

- Chapter 1: “The One to Get Away” paragraph starting, “I jumped when she pecked...” through, “As I watched her...”
- Chapter 2: “New Year’s Pig” paragraph starting, “On the bus...” through, “She got off the Roosevelt Park stop...”

additional occurrences:

shape images identified by students:

Commentary:



Gardens

Mattie's garden in Chapter 2: "Jesus is Lord Used Tires" paragraph starting, "Can you believe tomatoes..." and ending with the paragraph starting, "I said I could..."

additional occurrences:

garden images identified by students:

Commentary:

Colors

colors in:

- Chapter 1: “The One to Get Away” paragraph starting, “I picked out one...”
- Also in Chapter 1: paragraph starting, “After I washed...”
- Chapter 2: “New Year’s Pig” paragraph starting, “Top-heavy, chin-high stacks...”
- Chapter 7: “How They Eat in Heaven” paragraph starting, “But Esperanza was the one...” through, “Sometimes I get homesick...”

color images identified by students:

Commentary:



Feminine Images

birds in:

- Chapter 7: “How They Eat in Heaven” three paragraphs starting, “I said I didn’t know...”
- Chapter 8: “The Miracle at Dog Poo Park” paragraph starting, “He put up more of the x-rays...”

additional occurrences:

New Year’s Day in Chapter 12: “Into the Terrible Night” paragraph starting, “The whole Tucson Valley...” and ending with the paragraph starting, “Fair’s fair...” at the first break page.

additional occurrences:

wisteria vines in:

- Chapter 8: “The Miracle of Dog Poo Park” two paragraphs starting, “The gravel path...”
- Chapter 13: “Night-Blooming Cereus” paragraph starting, “We followed her out...” through the paragraph starting, “After you pluck them...”
- Chapter 17: “Rhizobia” paragraph starting “But this is the most interesting thing...”

additional occurrences:

Fanny Heaven in:

- Chapter 2: “New Year’s Pig” two paragraphs starting, “Top-heavy, chin-high stacks...”
- Chapter 10: “Ismene” paragraph starting, “I hate that place...” through the end of the chapter.

additional occurrences:

Mattie’s calendar in Chapter 13: “Night-Blooming Cereus” paragraph starting, “In the morning I left her asleep...”

additional occurrences:

feminine images identified by students:

Commentary:

Discussion Questions

1. With respect to gender roles, which characters would you consider to be stereotypical? In what ways are they stereotypes of gender expectations? What role do these stereotypical characters play in the novel?
2. Consider the roles of fathers and husbands as distinct from mothers and wives as seen in the novel. What makes these roles distinct? In what ways are they similar?
3. There are many different forms of “family.” Compare the traditional nuclear family with the family structures seen in the novel. How are they more or less functional than what we traditionally associate with the concept of what it is to be a family?
4. What is the effect on the novel of using a female first-person narrator? How would the novel have been different if narrated in the third person? What do we gain in perspective from the author’s use of narrative technique? And what, perhaps, do we lose as a result of that choice?
5. In what ways might the Feminist Movement be compared with the Sanctuary Movement or the Cherokee Trail of Tears?
6. Do you feel the novel treats men unjustly or unsympathetically? Why or why not? Do you think Kingsolver’s portrayal of women is believable in the context of which she is writing?

Essays or Writing Assignments

1. Write a well-supported essay in which you discuss examples of misogyny and misandry found in the novel. Analyze the impact of these incidents on the characters involved and consider how they affect the overall tone of the work.
2. Feminist theory implies that men and women are incomplete without one another. With regard to *The Bean Trees*, write an essay in which you discuss this statement as fact or fiction with specific support from the text.

Mythological/Archetypal Approach Applied to *The Bean Trees*

Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach

MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHETYPAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM are all very closely interrelated. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud's theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who read texts with the mythological/archetypal approach are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is "a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested" ("The Problem of Types in Poetry" 1923). He believed that human beings were born innately knowing certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology (long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe). Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.) Every culture has a creation story, a life after death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When reading a work looking for archetypes or myths, critics look for very general recurring themes, characters, and situations. In modern times, the same types of archetypes are used in film, which is why it has been so easy for filmmakers to take a work like Jane Austen's *Emma* and adapt it into the typical Hollywood film *Clueless*. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern authors allow readers to know the characters in a work with little or no explanation. Imagine how cluttered stories would be if the author had to give every detail about every single minor character that entered the work!

Three main points of study:

- archetypal characters
- archetypal images
- archetypal situations

1. Archetypal Characters

- the HERO: a figure, larger than life, whose search for self-identity and/or self-fulfillment results in his own destruction (often accompanied by the destruction of the general society around him). In the aftermath of the death of the hero, however, is progress toward some ideal. While this applies to modern superheroes such as Superman (Clark Kent searching for the balance between his super self and his mortal self), it also applies to the Christian faith's Jesus Christ (a mortal man who comes to terms with his destiny as the Messiah), and thousands of other literary and religious figures throughout history.

Some variations of the HERO figure include:

- the “orphaned” prince or the lost chieftain's son raised ignorant of his heritage until he is rediscovered (King Arthur, Theseus);
- the SCAPEGOAT: an innocent character on whom a situation is blamed—or who assumes the blame for a situation—and is punished in place of the truly guilty party, thus removing the guilt from the culprit and society.
- the LONER or OUTCAST: a character who is separated from (or separates him or herself from) society due to a physical impairment or an emotional or physiological realization that makes this character different. Jesus goes into the desert to discern his destiny; Buddha leaves society to come to terms with his philosophy. Victor Frankenstein travels to remote locales to avoid people when he realizes that he has created a monster. Often, the Hero is an outcast at some point in his or her story.

Two common variations of the LONER are

- the UNDERDOG, the smaller, weaker, less-worldly-wise character, who usually emerges victorious at the end of the story;
- the guilt-ridden figure in search of redemption.

- the VILLAIN: the male or female personification of evil. Note that, while nearly all literature has an antagonist to provide conflict with the protagonist, not all antagonists are villains. Villains are indeed personifications of evil. Their malice is often apparently unmotivated, or motivated by a single wrong (or perceived wrong) from the past. The villain's malice is often limitless, and rarely is the villain reformed within the context of the story. Examples of archetypal villains are Satan, and Loki (from Norse mythology).

Some variations of the VILLAIN figure include:

- the “mad scientist”
- the bully
- the TEMPTRESS: the female who possesses what the male desires and uses his desire (either intentionally or unintentionally) as a means to his ultimate destruction. Examples are Eve, Juliet, Lady Macbeth.
- the EARTH MOTHER/GODDESS: Mother Nature, Mother Earth—the nurturing, life-giving aspect of femininity.
- the SPIRIT or INTELLECT: the often-unidentified feminine inspiration for works of art and literature. Examples would be Dante's Beatrice, Shakespeare's Dark Lady, etc.
- the SAGE: largely of Eastern origin, the sage is the elderly wise man; the teacher or mentor. Examples from Western literature would be Merlin and Tiresias. Yoda from *Star Wars* and Gandalf from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are contemporary derivations.

Some variations of the SAGE include:

- the wise woman, the witch. Note that, while the male SAGE's wisdom is usually spiritual or philosophical (often with political or military applications), the wise woman's wisdom tends to be more an understanding of the workings of nature, thus the connection of the wise woman with witchcraft, and all of the associated superstitions.
- the stern, but loving authority figure.
- the oracle: male or female prophet, fortune-teller, sooth-sayer.

2. Archetypal Images

- **COLORS:** red as blood, anger, passion, violence; gold as greatness, value, wealth; green as fertility, luxury, growth; blue (the color of the sky) as God-like holiness, peace, serenity; white as purity; etc.
- **NUMBERS:** three for the Christian trinity; four for the four seasons, the four ancient elements (earth, water, fire, air); twelve for the months of the solar year; etc.
- **WATER:** the source of life and sustenance; cleansing or purification; baptism.
- **FIRE:** ambiguously both protective and destructive; on an archetypal level, fire symbolizes human knowledge and industry (Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind when there were no other gifts left to give.)
- **The FOUR ANCIENT ELEMENTS:** fire, water, air, and earth
- **GARDENS:** natural abundance; easy, beautiful life; new birth, hope; Eden, the original Paradise from which humankind was expelled.
- **GEOMETRIC SHAPES:** a triangle for the trinity; a circle for perfection and eternity, wholeness, union.
- **CELESTIAL BODIES:** the sun (masculine) is both the giver and destroyer of life; the moon (feminine) marks the passage of time and controls the course of human events. Seedtime, harvest, etc., are all determined more by the phases of the moon than the phases of the sun.
- **MASCULINE IMAGES/SYMBOLS:** columns, towers, boats, trees, etc.
- **FEMININE IMAGES/SYMBOLS:** bodies of water, caves, doorways, windows.
- **CAVES:** ambiguously can represent the womb (the source of life) and the grave; often represent the entrance to the underworld (related to the grave); as well as to the unexplored regions of the human soul.
- **YIN AND YANG:** any scheme that suggests that each of a pair of opposites partakes of the other's nature, complements the other, and essentially completes the other; without balance, the world would erupt into chaos.



3. Archetypal Situations

- the QUEST: the hero's endeavor to establish his or her identity or fulfill his or her destiny.

Variations on the QUEST can include:

- the Faustian bargain: the selling of one's soul to the devil (metaphorically representing the notion that one would "give anything" in order to ...) in exchange for unlimited power, knowledge, wealth, etc. Examples include King Midas.
- the pursuit of revenge for a real or perceived wrong.
- the descent into the underworld. (Note that this is usually one part of the quest rather than the entire quest itself.)
- the RENEWAL OF LIFE: death and rebirth, resurrection as seen in the cycle of the seasons, the phases of the day, sleeping and waking. Examples are "Sleeping Beauty," "The Secret Garden," etc.
- INITIATION: coming of age, rites of passage. Some examples include the first hunt, weddings, teenage angst films.
- THE FALL: any event that marks a loss of innocence, a devolution from a paradisiacal life and viewpoint to a tainted one.
- REDEMPTIVE SACRIFICE: any voluntary loss, especially a loss of life, that results in another's gaining or regaining a desired state.
- the CATALOG OF DIFFICULT TASKS: (labors of Hercules, Cinderella's treatment by her stepmother and stepsisters, etc.).
- the END OF THE WORLD: usually apocalyptic, involving warfare, a huge battle, a metaphoric final battle between good and evil.

Variations on the end of the world include

- Armageddon: the final battle between good and evil according to the Christian New Testament (book of Revelation), in which evil is finally vanquished, evildoers receive their eternal punishment, and God reigns over a newly-created Heaven and Earth;

- Ragnarok: the final battle between two feuding segments of the Norse pantheon. Both sides are largely decimated, as is the human race. Two humans survive to repopulate the human world and worship a new pantheon formed of the gods who survived the battle.
- the Great Flood
- the TABOO: the commission of a culturally forbidden act (incest, patricide), often unknowingly or inevitably. Any act or attitude that could be seen as “unnatural,” a crime against the ways Nature is supposed to operate.
- the BANQUET: fellowship; nourishment of the body and soul; display of wealth; often used as a symbol for salvation, Heaven. ■

Essential Questions for A Mythological/Archetypal Reading

1. Examine all of the characters—major and minor—and their situations. What archetypes seem to be present?
2. How do any of the characters change over time? What events or people make them change?
3. What is suggested in the setting (time of day, season of year, location—garden, body of water, etc.) that might suggest an archetypal reading?
4. What types of symbols are used? What do they represent?
5. How are the symbols in this work different from the traditional uses of those symbols? What is significant about this difference?
6. What myths are at work in different parts of this work? What features of the story are reminiscent of other stories you know?

Activity One

Examining Archetypal Characters in the Novel

1. Copy and distribute Notes on the Archetypal/Mythological Approach.
2. Divide the class into five groups, or a number of groups divisible by five.
 - Each group will need to address one of the following archetypal character types: HERO, VILLAIN, TEMPTRESS, EARTH MOTHER, and SAGE.
3. Assign each group, or allow each to choose, a different archetypal character type and instruct students to:
 - Reread closely the *Notes on the Archetypal/Mythological Approach* character description that pertains to their assigned archetype.
 - Find as many characters as possible that fit the assigned archetype with specific references to the text for support.
 - Remember that concepts or groups of people can parallel these archetypes as well.
4. For visual reference, have students write on the board their assigned archetype and the characters from the novel they will be discussing with the class.
5. Have each group reveal their findings to the class. Make sure they include the following in their analysis:
 - What role does this particular archetypal character play in other characters' lives? In the novel as a whole?
 - Consider the effect on the novel if this archetypal character were absent.
 - Does the archetypal character exist primarily as a stereotype or as a unique person? In what ways?
6. In closing, discuss in what ways an archetypal reading of the characters is beneficial. Distracting.

Activity Two

Examining Taylor's Journey as a Quest

1. Copy and distribute the handouts: *The Bean Trees: Archetypal Activity Two Information Sheet* and *The Bean Trees: Archetypal Activity Two Graphic Organizer*.
2. Have students, either individually or in pairs, consider Taylor's journey as an Archetypal Quest and complete the graphic organizer to indicate which events and characters correspond to the elements of the hero's quest. Remind them that some of the stages may be represented metaphorically rather than literally.
3. Reconvene the class and in full-class discussion, consider the following:
 - What are the motivations for Taylor's journey? How does "destiny" play a role?
 - Do Taylor's motivations change? If so, how and why?
 - Discuss the preparations Taylor makes for her journey:
 - financial
 - circumstantial
 - emotional
 - Whom does she meet that helps her with these preparations?
 - What social and emotional skills must she acquire to be successful?
 - Discuss the personal and geographic obstacles Taylor encounters throughout her journey. What other sorts of obstacles does she encounter? How would these obstacles tie to a major theme or themes in the novel?
 - At what moment or moments in the novel is the reader sure Taylor's quest will be a success? In what ways, if any, can it be considered unsuccessful?
 - How does Taylor now measure success? How is this different from the beginning of the novel? In what ways has she fundamentally changed?

- Compare and contrast Taylor's original quest with what her quest actually ended up being.
- For which category or categories was there the greatest challenge in finding an archetypal correlation in the novel? Why is that? Do you think the absence of the correlation prevents an overall archetypal reading?
- Overall, does the novel adhere to criteria of a heroic quest and, if so, in what ways is it beneficial to read the novel from the archetypal perspective?

The Bean Trees: Mythological/Archetypal Activity Two

Information Sheet

There are certain steps or stages into which the Quest can be divided:

- **The Call:** Typically the hero is challenged to embark on the Quest or is called to it by a god or god-like figure. Usually there is a sense of destiny associated with the call to the Quest—this is the Hero's purpose; it will be his or her defining moment.
- **The Decision:** The Hero makes an intentional decision to accept the challenge of the call and pursue his (or her) destiny. There is usually a sense that this decision is irrevocable—the ship sails, the bridge burns, the home planet is destroyed, etc. At this point, the Hero must go forward; there is no turning back.
- **The Preparation:** This is a period during which the Hero learns what he or she needs to know in order to complete the Quest. He or she develops the skills, builds the strength, gathers the tools and other materials, and collects the allies he or she will need to succeed. Often the Hero will meet a MENTOR, an older, wiser individual who has the knowledge and skills the Hero needs. This MENTOR may or may not be supernatural.
- **The Obstacles:** This is the Quest itself, the journey to the place where the treasure is hidden or the captive is imprisoned. It is a long trip. It is a dangerous trip. Many of the hero's allies (met during the Preparation) will desert him, be rendered incapable of continuing, or die. The Hero will lose many, if not all, of the tools and weapons collected during the Preparation and will have to continue the Quest alone.

Some of the Obstacles encountered might be in the form of persons, some may be geographical, and some might take the form of mythical or legendary animals or beings.

- **The Climax:** This is, of course, the moment when the Hero is at the point of either succeeding or failing. The failure might be physical, emotional, or psychological. The Climax also involves the moment when it becomes obvious that the Hero will succeed.
- **The Return:** After the successful Quest, the Hero always returns home, *but he or she always returns a changed person.*



The Bean Trees: Mythological/Archetypal Activity Two

Graphic Organizer

In the spaces provided, list the specific character, event, etc., from *The Bean Trees* that corresponds to the indicated stage of the Quest. If you do not find a correspondent, leave the space blank. Consider, also, that some of the stages may also be represented metaphorically rather than literally.

The Call: _____

The Decision: _____

The Preparation:

- mentor(s): _____

- acquisition of knowledge: _____

- allies: _____

The Obstacles

- people: _____

- geography: _____

• mythical beings/animals: _____

• other: _____

The Climax: _____

The Return: _____

Activity Three

Examining Archetypal Imagery in the Novel

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Bean Trees*: Archetypal Activity Three: Identification and Location of Potential Archetypal Images.
2. Review with students the list of archetypal images in the “Notes...” section of this unit.
3. Have students brainstorm a list of prominent or recurring image motifs that could potentially be interpreted from an archetypal perspective.
4. Have students, working in pairs, reread the passages indicated on the *Identification and Location* handout and note all potential archetypal images listed.
5. Have students continue perusing the novel for
 - additional occurrences of the listed image(s)
 - occurrences of images not specified on the handout.
6. Reconvene the class and have students answer the following questions with respect to each of the identified and located archetypal images:
 - Within the context of each occurrence, what do the images have in common? How are they different?
 - How is each image significant to an archetypal reading of the scene? Of the novel as a whole?
 - What other examples of archetypal images are present in the novel?
 - What value is there in reading the novel through the lens of Archetypal imagery?
7. If you have already done Feminist Activity Three (which uses these same images as a point of discussion):
 - Compare and contrast the meanings of the images when read from an Archetypal versus a Feminist Perspective. How does the lens through which you read the text change your overall perception?



The Bean Trees: Mythological/Archetypal Activity Three

Identification and Location of Potential Archetypal Images

Shapes

round shapes in:

- Chapter 1: “The One to Get Away” paragraph starting, “I jumped when she pecked...” through, “As I watched her...”
- Chapter 2: “New Year’s Pig” paragraph starting, “On the bus...” through, “She got off the Roosevelt Park stop...”

additional occurrences:

shape images identified by students:

Commentary:



Gardens

Mattie’s garden in Chapter 2: “Jesus is Lord Used Tires” paragraph starting, “Can you believe tomatoes...” and ending with the paragraph starting, “I said I could...”

additional occurrences:

wisteria vines in:

- Chapter 8: “The Miracle of Dog Poo Park” two paragraphs starting, “The gravel path...”
- Chapter 13: “Night-Blooming Cereus” paragraph starting, “We followed her out...” through the paragraph starting, “After you pluck them...”
- Chapter 17: “Rhizobia” paragraph starting “But this is the most interesting thing...”

additional occurrences:

garden images identified by students:

Commentary:

Colors

colors in:

- Chapter 1: “The One to Get Away” paragraph starting, “I picked out one...”
- Also in Chapter 1: paragraph starting, “After I washed...”
- Chapter 2: “New Year’s Pig” paragraph starting, “Top-heavy, chin-high stacks...”
- Chapter 7: “How They Eat in Heaven” paragraph starting, “But Esperanza was the one...” through, “Sometimes I get homesick...”

color images identified by students:

Commentary:



Feminine Images

Fanny Heaven in:

- Chapter 2: “New Year’s Pig” two paragraphs starting, “Top-heavy, chin-high stacks...”
- Chapter 10: “Ismene” paragraph starting, “I hate that place...” through the end of the chapter.

additional occurrences:

Mattie’s calendar in Chapter 13: “Night-Blooming Cereus” paragraph starting, “In the morning I left her asleep...”

additional occurrences:

feminine images identified by students:

Commentary:

Discussion Questions

1. What types of symbols are used in the novel? What do they represent?
2. Discuss the evolution of several characters (besides Taylor). What events or influences make them change? Can any of these characters be considered “heroic”?
3. What other mythical or Biblical allusions exist in the novel? What is the significance of each and how do they contribute to an overall archetypal reading of the work?
4. Give examples from the novel of the *renewal of life*, *initiation*, *taboo*, and *the banquet*. What purpose do each of these archetypal stages serve?
5. Considering the stages of the *archetypal situation*, which stage occurs with the greatest prevalence in the novel? Why is this significant to this particular novel?
6. How do the novel’s various settings encourage an archetypal reading?
7. Discuss how the author’s political and social agenda is revealed through an archetypal reading of the text.

Essays or Writing Assignments

1. *The Bean Trees* lacks a traditional archetypal “villain.” However, there are villainous aspects in the novel which impede certain characters’ abilities to succeed. In a well-organized essay, discuss the literal and conceptual villains present in the novel and how, or if, the characters overcome these villainous obstacles.
2. In a well-written essay, trace Turtle’s journey as an *outcast* on an archetypal *quest*. Be sure to discuss which aspects of her quest are not within her control due to age and circumstance. What is the overall effect of this lack of control? Ultimately, can Turtle, then, truly be seen as an archetypal character?



Formalism Applied to The Bean Trees



Notes on the Formalist Approach

The formalist approach to literature was developed at the beginning of the 20th century and remained popular until the 1970s, when other literary theories began to gain popularity. Today, formalism is generally regarded as a rigid and inaccessible means of reading literature, used in Ivy League classrooms and as the subject of scorn in rebellious coming-of-age films. It is an approach that is concerned primarily with *form*, as its name suggests, and thus places the greatest emphasis on *how* something is said, rather than *what* is said. Formalists believe that a work is a separate entity—not at all dependent upon the author’s life or the culture in which the work is created. No paraphrase is used in a formalist examination, and no reader reaction is discussed.

Originally, formalism was a new and unique idea. The formalists were called “New Critics,” and their approach to literature became the standard academic approach. Like classical artists such as da Vinci and Michaelangelo, the formalists concentrated more on the form of the art rather than the content. They studied the recurrences, the repetitions, the relationships, and the motifs in a work in order to understand what the work was about. The formalists viewed the tiny details of a work as nothing more than parts of the whole. In the formalist approach, even a lack of form indicates something. Absurdity is in itself a form—one used to convey a specific meaning (even if the meaning is a lack of meaning).

The formalists also looked at smaller parts of a work to understand the meaning. Details like diction, punctuation, and syntax all give clues.

Three main areas of study:

- form
- diction
- unity

1. Form

- Cadence—how the words sound. When a character or a narrator is speaking, the sound of what he or she is saying, or how he or she is saying it, can give clues as to who the character is and why he or she is in the work.
- Repetition—saying the same word, phrase, or concept over and over. Obviously, when something is repeated several times, it must be important.
- Recurrences—when an event or a theme happens more than once. Like repetition, when something is repeated, it is for a reason.
- Relationships—the connections between the characters. By looking carefully at the connections among the people in the story, one can understand the meaning of a work. Every character is put into the story for a reason. The reader's job is to find that reason.

2. Diction

- Denotation—the dictionary definition of a word. Obviously, understanding the meaning of the words used is vital to understanding a text. If a reader does not know what the words mean, he or she can have no idea what is being said.
- Connotation—the subtle, commonly accepted meanings of words. Even though a word may technically mean one thing, the way it is used in society will often place a slightly different spin on the word. Take for instance the word “condescension.” Though it literally means “the act of coming down voluntarily to equal terms with a supposed inferior to do something,” modern use of the word gives it a negative cast—when someone “condescends” now, he or she is acting superior to someone else.
- Etymology—the study of the evolution of a word's meaning and use. Etymology is especially helpful when one is studying an old text in which the words might literally mean something different from what they mean today. A close study of words also helps a reader understand why the author uses a particular word rather than a synonym.

- Allusions—links from the text at hand to other works. Though this area is less formalist than the others (because it reaches outside of a text for meaning), it is still valuable to consider all of the “connotations” of the word used. There is a reason the author wanted to link his or her text to that of another author, and studying the allusion is the only way to reveal that reason.
- Ambiguity—is the use of an open-ended word or phrase that has multiple meanings. Just as the formalist asserts that a lack of form is a form, ambiguity can be used to connect several loose ends in a work. The author can use ambiguity to help reveal his or her meaning.
- Symbol—a concrete word or image used mainly to represent an abstract concept. Understanding the use of a word or image to suggest deeper meanings can help a reader gain more from the text. The meaning of the text can be found in the many facets of a symbol.

3. Unity

- The use of one symbol, image, figure of speech, etc., throughout a work serves as a thread to connect one particular instance with every other occurrence of that symbol. Unity helps remind the reader of what has already happened and shows him or her how what is happening currently relates to earlier events or forthcoming events.
- Formalist critics do not look for perfect unity. They look for tension and conflict. Irony and paradox are very important—irony being the use of a word or a statement that is the opposite of what is intended or expected, and paradox being the existence of two contradictory truths. This tension is what drives the work. ■

Essential Questions for A Formalist Reading

1. Does the work exhibit the characteristics of a particular form, or does it have a unique form?
2. In what manner is this story told? Chronologically? Via flashbacks?
3. Is there closure in the narrative? Or is the reader left guessing?
4. What is the point of view of the narrator? How does this point of view affect the story being told?
5. Is the author using a meter? What effect is achieved?
6. Is there any sound that keeps recurring throughout the work? What is it? What does it mean? How does it affect the work?
7. How does any rhythm in the words affect the work?
8. Where are examples of foreshadowing?
9. Are there any visual patterns in the work? What do they do for the work?
10. What details of the setting seem to indicate meaning? (Time of day, season, physical location, weather?)
11. What would a diagram of the plot look like?
12. Are there any unfamiliar words? Look them up.
13. Are there any paradoxes in the work? Any ironies? What are they? What effect do they have on the tone or plot of the work?



Activity One

Examining Literary and Narrative Devices as Sources of Unity in the Novel

1. Copy and distribute the Notes on the Formalist Approach and the handouts: *The Bean Trees: Formalism Activity One Graphic Organizer One*, *The Bean Trees: Formalism Activity One Graphic Organizer Two*, and *The Bean Trees: Formalism Activity One Graphic Organizer Three*.

NOTE: Ideally, students should complete Graphic Organizer One for homework the night before beginning the in-class activity.

2. Put columns on the board with each device/symbol/motif as a heading.
3. Have students report their *Graphic Organizer One* findings and record additional examples of each device/concept on *Graphic Organizer Two*.
4. Divide the class into pairs or small groups.
5. Have each group compile a tally of the number of occurrences and recurrences of the devices and concepts on *Graphic Organizer Three*.

NOTE: Depending on time available, you may want to redistribute the groups at least one time in order for students to compile as complete a tally as possible.

6. Reconvene the class and discuss the following:
 - Of the devices Kingsolver uses, which are the most prevalent? What recurrences of particular incidents of these devices are notable? (e.g., A metaphor comparing grief to a broken-winged bird appears three times. Anna-Marie frequently—at least five times—speaks in alliteration, especially using the letters.)
 - Which of the devices are related to *cadence* (or sound)? How does cadence affect the reader's perception of the work?
 - What do these devices contribute to the *tone* of the novel?
 - What do these devices contribute to the *meaning* of the novel?

- How does the author's use of these devices help to *unify* the work as a whole? Do certain devices contribute more to the novel's unity than others? How?

7. Continue the discussion with the following:

- Of the symbols and motifs Kingsolver uses, which are the most prevalent? What recurrences of particular incidents of these symbols and motifs are notable? (e.g., Three times throughout the novel Taylor points out the quality of the light coming in the window and the fact that she is sitting in the shadows. The symbol of the black bird as an evil omen appears at the end of every third chapter.)
- What do these symbols and motifs contribute to the *tone* of the novel?
- What do these symbols and motifs contribute to the *meaning* of the novel?
- How does the author's use of these symbols and motifs serve to *unify* the work as a whole? Do certain symbols and motifs contribute more to the novel's unity than others? How?

8. To close, have students draft thesis statements that address the contribution of

- literary and narrative devices in general to the overall structure of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*;

OR

- one particular literary or narrative device to the overall structure of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*.

NOTE: As an enrichment assignment, you may want your students to use their thesis statements and the data they gathered in this activity and write the essay.



The Bean Trees: Formalist Activity One

Graphic Organizer One

Directions: Find and note one or two examples of each the following devices or concepts in the novel. Briefly describe the device and include the number of the page on which you found it.

Device	Example	Page #
metaphor		
simile		
repetition		
onomatopoeia		
alliteration		
hyperbole		
personification		
paradox		
irony		
Symbols/Motifs	Example	Page #
dreams		
colors		
beans/wisteria		
birds		
Broken Arrow Motel		
light/dark		
home		
names		



The Bean Trees: Formalist Activity One

Graphic Organizer Two (Additional Examples)

Directions: Note one or more examples of the devices/concepts in the novel that are *different* from the ones you identified in Organizer One. Briefly describe the examples and include the number of the page on which it was found.

Device	Example	Page #
metaphor		
simile		
repetition		
onomatopoeia		
alliteration		
hyperbole		
personification		
paradox		
irony		
Symbols/Motifs	Example	Page #
dreams		
colors		
beans/wisteria		
birds		
Broken Arrow Motel		
light/dark		
home		
names		



The Bean Trees: Formalist Activity One

Graphic Organizer Three (Tally and Evaluation)

Directions: After you record your own findings and those of your classmates, take a tally of the various occurrences of each device. As you consider the discussion questions, note ideas you have about the relative significance or impact of each.

Device	Example with Page #	Comments
metaphor		
simile		
repetition		
onomatopoeia		
alliteration		
hyperbole		
personification		
paradox		
irony		
Symbols/Motifs	Example with Page #	Comments
dreams		
colors		
beans/wisteria		
birds		
Broken Arrow Motel		
light/dark		
home		
names		

Activity Two**Examining Point of View in the Novel**

1. Remind the class of the two narrative voices used in the novel: third person limited (through Lou Ann) and first-person (through Taylor).
2. Briefly discuss with the class, the following:
 - What would Kingsolver have hoped to achieve by telling this story in the first person?
 - For what *reasons* might Kingsolver have chosen to employ two points of view?
 - What might Kingsolver have hoped to accomplish with the third-person sections?
3. Have students—in pairs or small groups—identify where each narrative point of view is employed.
4. For Chapters 2 and 4, which use third-person limited narration, have students answer the following questions:
 - For what reason does Kingsolver limit her third-person narration to only two chapters?
 - Structurally, why would Kingsolver have chosen these particular chapters to depart from her first-person narrative?
 - How does Kingsolver's use of third person point of view affect *how* the story is told?
 - What does the reader learn in terms of *plot* from this narration?
 - What does the reader learn in terms of *character* from this narration?
 - What is the *function* of these chapters and in what ways does the narrative technique dictate the *function*?
5. Considering the rest of the chapters, which are told in first-person narration, have students answer the following questions:
 - For what reason does Kingsolver choose first-person narration?
 - How does this point of view affect *how* the story is told?

- What does the reader learn in terms of *plot* from this narration?
 - What does the reader learn in terms of *character* from this narration?
 - What is the *function* of these chapters and in what ways does the narrative technique dictate the *function*?
6. To close, have students draft thesis statements that address the contribution of
- the combination of both first-person and third-person narrative points of view to the overall structure and meaning of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*;

OR

- one or the other of the two points of view to the overall structure and meaning of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*.

NOTE: As an enrichment assignment, you may want your students to use their thesis statements and the information they gathered in this activity and write the essay.

Activity Three

Examining Character Relationships in Terms of Form and Unity

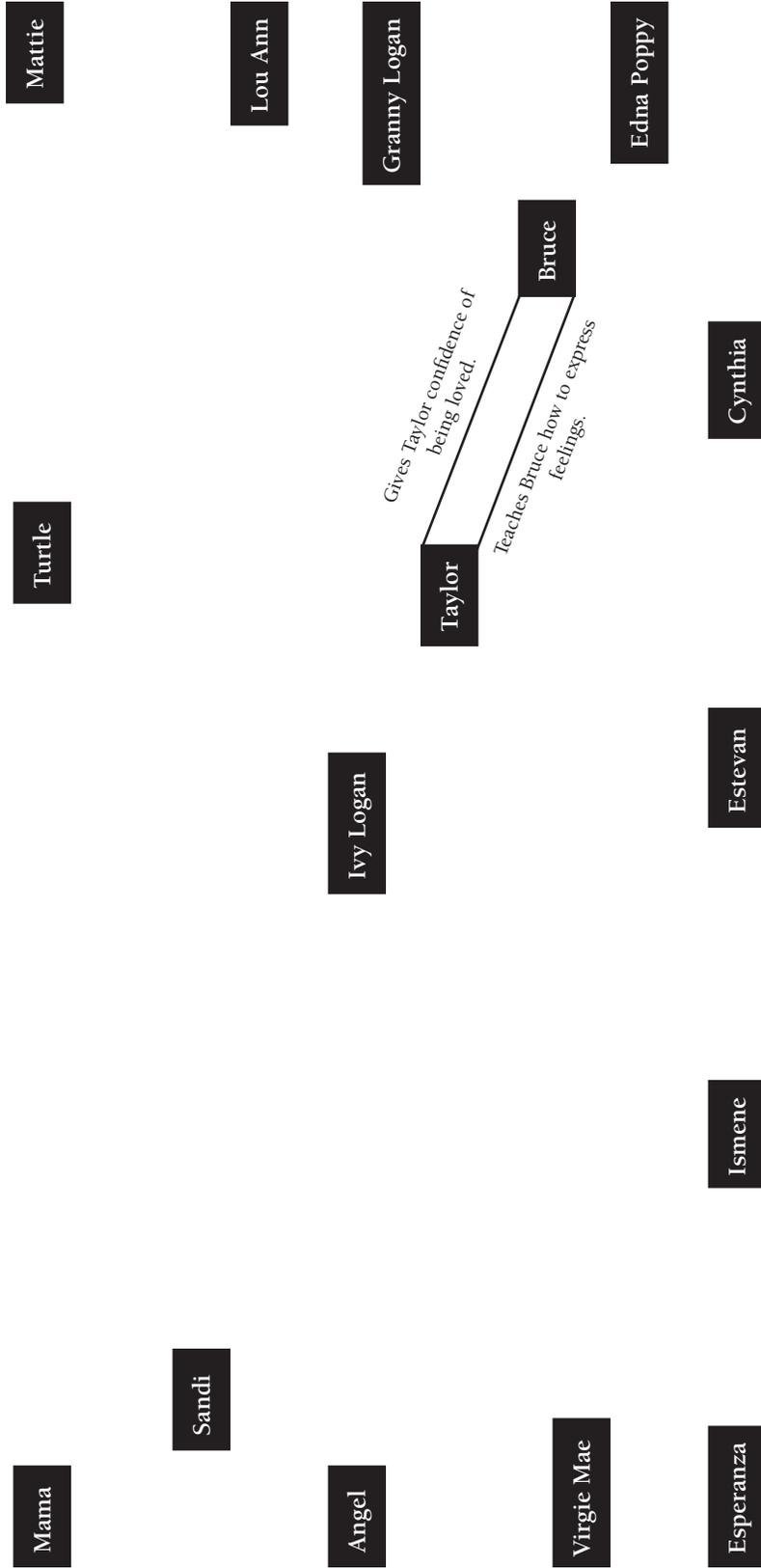
1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Bean Trees*: Formalism Activity Three Graphic Organizer: Character Map.
2. Instruct students, individually or in pairs, to draw a Character Map by visually showing the relationships between TAYLOR, as the central character, and the other characters in the novel.
 - Instruct them to show not only each character's impact on Taylor, and hers on them, but also to each other.
3. Reconvene the class and discuss the following:
 - Which character or characters have the most *connections*? Why is this?
 - What is the *function* of each character with respect to Taylor and in the novel as a whole? That is, what reason(s) did the author have for including each character?
 - How do these connections between characters contribute to the *form* and *structure* of the novel?
 - How do these connections provide a sense of *unity* in the novel?
 - How do these connections contribute to character development in the novel?
4. Finally, in closing:
 - What is the overall *effect* of these connections on the reader's perception of the meaning of the work?
 - What do we gain as readers by looking at characters as a function of *form* rather than *content*?



The Bean Trees: Formalist Activity Three

Graphic Organizer (Character Map)

Directions: Draw a Character Map by visually showing the relationships between TAYLOR, as the central character, and the other characters in the novel. Be sure to show not only each character's relationship to Taylor but also to each other, wherever appropriate. Connect characters with pairs of arrows. On each arrow, briefly write the impact each has had on the other. A fabricated response between Taylor and "Bruce" has been done for you as an example.



Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the role of irony and paradox in the novel.
2. Analyze the *tensions* which drive the novel and how they unify the work as a whole.
3. Cite examples from the novel of the author's use of *ambiguous language* (an open-ended word or phrase that has multiple meanings).
4. With regards to Taylor's Kentucky dialect, note examples of the difference between the *connotation* and *denotation* of certain words and phrases she uses.
5. Analyze the author's use of chronological versus flashback story-telling. What is the function and overall effect of juxtaposing these two techniques?
6. Sketch plot diagrams for: Taylor, Lou Ann, Turtle, Esperanza, Estevan, and Mattie. Include the basic situation, rising action and complications, climax, falling action, and resolution for each character.
7. Reflect on whether or not the novel's ending provides adequate closure or whether it is open-ended. Why or why not?

Essays or Writing Assignments

1. In a well-written essay, analyze Kingsolver's chapter titles. How does each title comment on the overall *tone* of the chapter? Trace the shifts in tone throughout the novel as seen through the chapter titles and evaluate the overall effect on the tone of the novel as a whole.
2. Kingsolver relies heavily on descriptive language and imagery to describe her settings in the novel. Write an essay in which you examine how the author's choice of details with regards to setting (time of day, season, physical location, weather) indicate meaning.