

What are Critical Responses?

Critical responses involve citing or referencing a text's specific details, words, images, passages, actions, or events that support opinions and perspectives. To listen, read or view critically, learners need to challenge the assumptions they bring to texts. They also need to become aware that texts contain biases, often intentionally created by authors, so they must learn to consciously accept or resist the ideas, beliefs, and opinions expressed in texts. Critical responses require learners to think about how texts are constructed and question the reliability and validity within texts.

Critical literacy provides learners opportunities to engage with issues of social justice and equity to facilitate positive change. Responding critically to texts and to the world requires learners to examine the relationship between language and power and how power is used by individuals and groups to privilege one group over another. It involves looking beyond the literal meaning of fiction and non-fiction texts to observe what is present and what is missing, to question and analyse the text's complete meaning and intention.

What does it look like in the classroom?

A more complex level of response emerges when students extend from a purely personal response to a critical response to various texts. Teachers can scaffold learning by posing **initial critical** questions around text that stem from students' personal questions. Teachers can ask, model, and guide **deeper critical** questions to support learners as they move to increasingly independent critical responding.

Personal Questions	Initial Critical Questions	Deeper Critical Questions
What were my first thoughts about the text? What in the text caused those thoughts? What confused me or surprised me in this text?	What is the main idea of the text? Why do I agree or disagree with what the author is saying? How would changing the point of view make the text different? Who is the audience?	What do I think the author's purpose is for the listener/reader/viewer? How did they accomplish this? Whose interests are best served by the text? Whose voices, points of view, and perspectives are silenced/omitted?

Teachers can

- model a Think Aloud that questions what the text is saying
- use Think-Aloud to model a critical response to texts
- explicitly point out particular perspectives/assumptions and values embedded in a text and model appropriate responses
- focus mini-lessons on concepts such as the language used in texts that privileges individuals or groups of power
- provide learners with opportunities to deconstruct a range of texts with a variety of perspectives
- guide discussions using carefully selected questions that help learners focus on thinking critically
- ask and model more probing questions to guide and move learners to increasingly independent thinking

Learners should engage in learning experiences that encourage critical questioning and responding.

Learning experiences might include

- reading like a writer, noting the author's craft/writing techniques
- transforming a text by changing the ending, writing a sequel, or rewriting in another genre
- listening to persuasive messages for the purpose of evaluating the speaker's argument and evidence
- assessing whether the teacher's and other students' comments are supported by fact and logic
- drafting a piece of writing, making critical choices about content/ideas based on the purpose and intended audience
- questioning, analysing, and challenging the authority of the text (who wrote it, what was written, how it was written)
- reading and responding from a resistant perspective (close reading)
- listening critically to understand and analyse information and ideas (oral reports, debates and counter arguments, opinions)
- writing counter texts to give voice to perspectives that are often missing
- reading critically to analyse opinions

How do I know it's working?

A critical response extends from personal response, and learners become more independent in their understanding of the

- author's craft and style
- text structure
- author's purpose
- values inherent in the text
- instances of bias and stereotyping
- point of view expressed and not expressed in the text.