**Story/Novel Study: Questions for Analysis**

In your groups, you should look closely at the stories you have read. Consider the following questions to guide your discussion. Always ensure you are reading closely and looking for evidence in the stories to support your ideas.

**Themes**

- What main ideas—**themes**—does the author explore? Don't forget to talk about the title, often a clue to a novel or story's theme.

- Are the writer’s viewpoints communicated directly or indirectly?

- What techniques are used to communicate the themes? (characters, symbols, narrator, tone, irony, rhetorical devices, etc.)

- What attitude toward life or society is the writer expressing?

- What is your opinion about the themes? Do you share the writer’s concerns about society, the world, and/or relationships?

- Do the themes carry any social or historical significance based on the country and/or time period in which the story is set? (You may have to do some research for this!)

**Characters**

* Describe the main **characters**—their personality traits, motivations, inner qualities, and conflicts.
* How are they characterized? In what ways do we learn about them (direct, indirect) and how does this affect your impressions?
* Motivations: Why do they do what they do? Are their actions justified?
* What personality traits seem to help or hinder the central character in the achievement of his/her purpose? (What is his/her greatest asset? What is his/her greatest flaw?)
* What characters support or oppose the central character? Why?
* Are the characters realistic (round), or stereotypes (flat)? Do they represent a point of view or opinion (perhaps that of the author)?
* Do you admire or disapprove of them? Why?
* Do/does the character(s) change? What does the main character learn? How does this relate to themes of the story?

**Narration**

* Who is the narrator?
* What is the POV? Is it limited or omniscient?
* How does the narrator’s position in the story affect how he/she is relating the events? Is there a chance of bias? Is the narrator reliable?
* What are the limitations of the narrator? What is left out?
* Look at the language used by the narrator – how does this affect your understanding/perception of the story’s events and characters?

**Setting**

- Where and when is this story set?

- When was the story written? How might the time and place it was written have influenced the type of setting portrayed in the story? (You will need to do research for this!)

- What details are we given about this society? How is it described? (note any devices used, as well as the tone)

- Describe the society in as much detail as possible. You can fill in gaps with your own ideas of what it would be like.

- Setting often has a large effect on characters and plot. Consider the extent to which the “setting”/time and place contributes to the characters’ behaviour and to the plot.

- Does/do the setting(s) symbolize anything? How do they relate to themes?

**Literary Devices**

* What literary and/or stylistic devices are used throughout the story? (Look back and find as many as possible, including: symbols, imagery, connotative diction, syntax, metaphor…).
* When are they used (to describe setting, character…)?
* What kinds of images do they create?
* Why do you think they are used in particular places? What do they emphasize or make clear?
* How do they contribute to the writer’s tone? Do they hint at how the writer feels about certain characters or concepts?
* How do the literary devices contribute to you understanding of character?
* How do literary and stylistic elements contribute to your understanding of theme?

**Plot & Structure**

* Is the **plot** engaging—does the story interest you?
* What drives the plot? Is this a plot/event-driven story: a fast-paced page-turner? Or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development?
* What is the central conflict? What type of conflict is it?
* Were you surprised by the plot's complications? Or did you find it predictable, even formulaic?
* What is the climax?
* Is the conflict resolved? How? If not, why not? (What does this suggest?)
* Talk about the **structure**. Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories or segments?
* Does the time-line more forward chronologically...or back and forth between past and present (are there flashbacks, etc.)?
* Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?
* Are any elements unjustified or unnecessary? Justify your point of view if there is something you would change.
* Is the ending of the story ‘right’ or ‘just’? How so?
* WHY is the story structured in a particular way? What is the effect on the reader? Might the structure link to the story’s theme(s)?