

Critical Study of Text: T.S. Eliot

Critical study in Year 12 English Advanced requires students to move from an **'answer-getting' disposition to a 'problem-solving'** disposition where they reflect on the multiple possibilities and processes of interpretation. Using the prescribed T.S. Eliot poems set for study, this presentation will offer practical learning activities that develop student **confidence to express their interpretations** and argue their perspectives on the aesthetic and thematic elements of texts.

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'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock',
'Preludes',
'Rhapsody on a Windy Night',
'The Hollow Men',
'Journey of the Magi'

Reading

Characterise the way reading happens in your classroom.

- reading requires open-mindedness and should be built in writing and reading units that have serious intellectual questions
- reading is a valuable process of constructing knowledge and meaning about self, text and world
- immersion in confusion, “chaos,” and “troublesome knowledge” are key classroom strategies for meaning-making.
- reading should be a reach for most students, requiring them to work from within Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development



Writing

A verb that characterises writing

Right to write
Think write
Doodle write
Hear write
Talk write
See write
Draw write
Do write
Make write
Write about
Write in
Write through
Write on
Write below
Write round
Write right
Write wrong
Write
Write re-write
Right to write

- writing is a social and rhetorical activity;
- writing speaks to situations through recognisable forms;
- writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies;
- all writers have more to learn;
- writing is (also always) a cognitive activity.



The Essay

An adjective that characterises essays

Essay writing teaches students to

- modulate self-expression and social commentary
- situate themselves historically, intellectually, and culturally
- engage rigorously and ethically with ideas, data, and texts by others
- reflect on and revise their ideas, values, and sense of self
- develop discursive, aesthetic, and rhetorical awareness
- document shifts in their thinking, commitments, and modes of expression

From Crafting Presence by Nicole Wallock



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*And I must borrow every changing shape
to find expression.*

T.S. ELIOT

Characteristics of a problem solving disposition

- curiosity,
- reflection,
- consideration of multiple possibilities,
- a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error,
- a recognition that more than one solution can “work”

Close & Critical Study

Close Study

- informed understanding
- ideas and characteristics of the text
- may affect those responding to it
- the ways composers (authors, poets, playwrights, directors, designers and so on) portray
- enjoyment

Critical Study

- detailed analytical and critical knowledge
- textual integrity and significance
- investigate and evaluate the perspectives of others
- own rich interpretation of the text, basing their judgements on detailed evidence drawn
- contexts of composition and reception

ADVANCED MODULE B: CRITICAL STUDY of LITERATURE

In this module, students develop detailed analytical and critical knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a substantial literary text

Through increasingly informed and personal responses to the text in its entirety, students understand the distinctive qualities of the text, notions of textual integrity and significance.

Students study one prescribed text. Central to this study is the close analysis of the text's construction, content and language to develop students' own rich interpretation of the text, basing their judgements on detailed evidence drawn from their research and reading

In doing so, they evaluate notions of context with regard to the text's composition and reception

investigate and evaluate the perspectives of others; and explore the ideas in the text, further strengthening their informed personal perspective

Students have opportunities to appreciate and express views about the aesthetic and imaginative aspects of the text by composing creative and critical texts of their own.

Through reading, viewing or listening they critically analyse, evaluate and comment on the text's specific language features and form

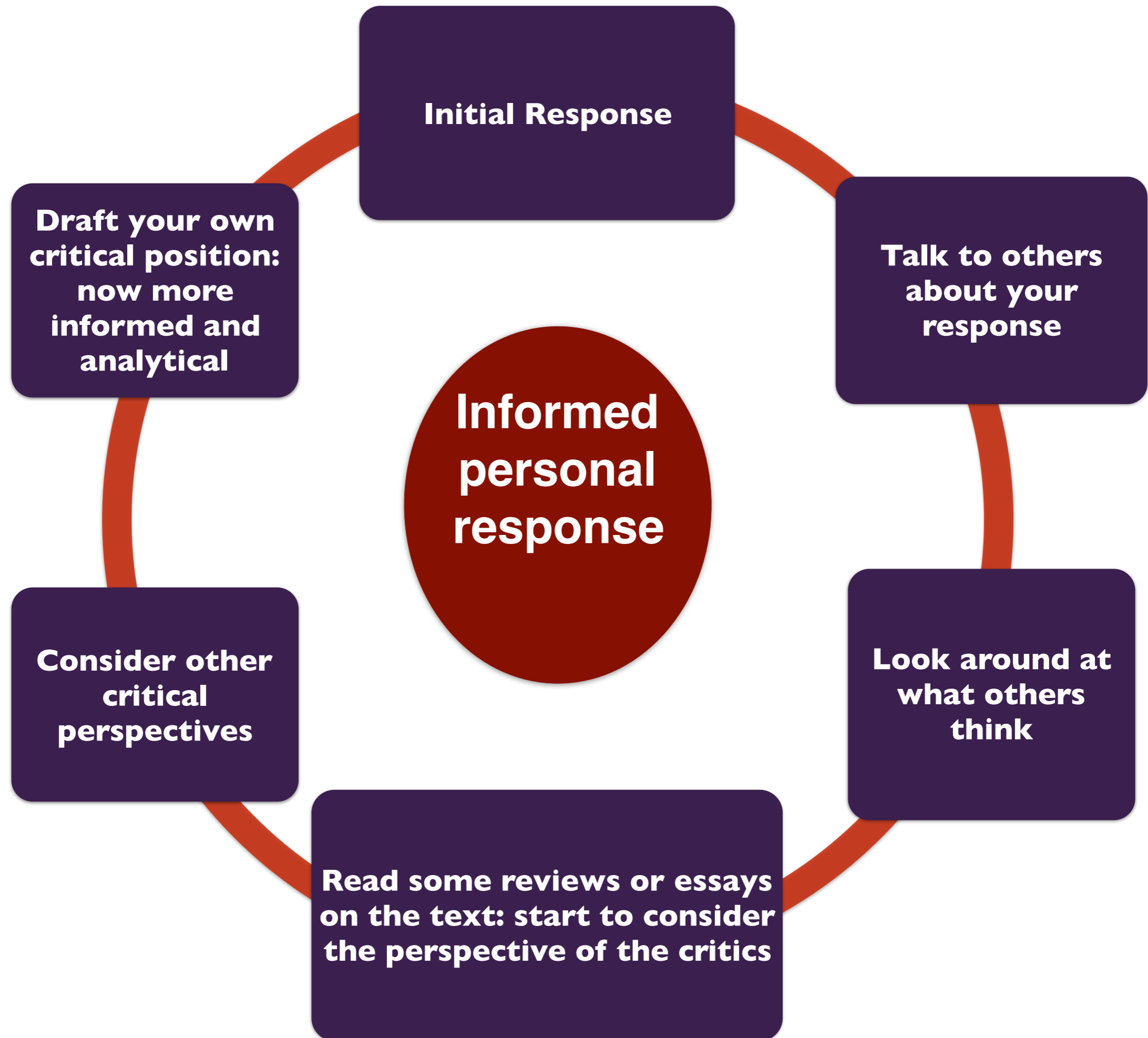
They express complex ideas precisely and cohesively using appropriate register, structure and modality. They draft, appraise and refine their own texts, applying the conventions of syntax, spelling and grammar appropriately.

Opportunities for students to engage deeply with the text as a responder and composer further develops personal and intellectual connections with the text enabling them to express their considered perspective of its value and meaning

So, careful attention to reading matters



- What counts as knowledge and wisdom in critical study?
- What does it mean to “know” something as a reader?
- What are the threshold concepts of our discipline that we want to be teaching to make this module meaningful?
- What are the “right questions” for us to ask?
- What are the “big questions” we want our students to engage with?
- Do students engage in first, second and third draft reading?



Eliot: A possible sequence

| | |
|--|---|
| Personal engagement | This phase engages students with the text and its ideas, captures students' interest, leads them to confront aspects of the text, introduces students to distinctive elements of the text and presents the context of composition. |
| Development of knowledge and understanding of the prescribed text | This phase involves exploration of the ideas that are expressed in the text through detailed and close analysis of its construction, content and language, and examines how particular features of the text contribute to textual integrity. The phase includes reading and re-reading, viewing and re-viewing the prescribed text. Through discussion and a range of teaching and learning activities, students come to develop their knowledge and understanding of the text so that they can imagine, articulate, critically analyse and evaluate the text's distinctive qualities. They also draft, appraise and refine their own written and spoken texts. |
| Development of an informed response | In this phase others' perspectives of the text are explored and tested against students' own understanding, informed by notions of context. In this phase there is an investigation and evaluation of ways of understanding the text. |
| Articulation of an informed personal response and understanding PERSONAL INVESTMENT IN CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT | This phase affirms a deep individual understanding of the text through thoughtful exploration of questions of textual integrity and significance, with a heightened sense of the complex processes by which meaning is made. Students are able to argue a sustained personal response to the text, based on close textual reference. |

Personal Engagement

- Point of view and the the ‘flaneur’: Baudelaire it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - (LS)
- Exploration of evocative images drawn from a poem - extracting a metaphor in a creative writing activity , experimenting with intertexts- (PF, RW)
- Experimenting with parodies of nursery rhymes - (HM)
- Developing sentence fragments to suggest social relationships (HM)
- Looking at the notion of being *between*
- Explore other dramatic monologues: consider how the monologue shapes response
- Appropriations of the poems

Personal Engagement

Reading from the Bottom Up

Knowledge/understanding

Annotation



Aspects of annotating:

- ▶ Gather
- ▶ Choose
- ▶ Overhear
- ▶ Steal
- ▶ Wander
- ▶ Wonder
- ▶ Track

Reflecting:

Which of the ways of reading (reading as gathering, choosing, overhearing, stealing, wandering, tracking) seemed most “helpful” to them as readers i.e. how did it help them get into the text/ understand the text in its entirety

How students might use this knowledge

- ▶ Students apply this to a text
- ▶ Reflect on the kind of annotations they have used
- ▶ Share in class
- ▶ Hypothesise about different responses by others
- ▶ Read written responses to the text by other students to figure out how the student has read the text
- ▶ Apply it to a range of texts

Knowledge/understanding



Progressive annotation (reflective process)

Annotate with questions only

- first stage: explore, experiment, evaluate
- second stage: define, develop, detail
- third stage: personalize, professionalize, polish

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Knowledge/understanding

| LINGUISTIC Read with an eye to note down and explain | MEANING Read with an eye to note down and explain | STRUCTURE Read with an eye to note down and explain | CULTURAL Read with an eye to note down |
|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• uses of words• unusual sentence structures• figures of speech• interesting sounds <p><i>that are unexpected</i></p> | words and phrases that have more than one meaning | patterns of words that relate the theme of the text the turning point in the text the impact of the opening and closing of the text | what personal and social experiences a reader needs to have had to get the text |
| These lenses describe the meaning of elements of the text. | | These lenses analyse and judge how parts of the text and other cultural material outside the text create the theme | |

Informed Personal Response

analysis is a means to understanding

- validation of the guesses at meaning
- polysemy of meaning? Can an interpretation be disproved?
- the role of cultural, historical, social, contexts
- intertexts
- what the text says NOW means more than one what the author intended to say
- stylistics such as word play

initial encounter

- the student construes some guesses at meaning

what we know before we read

- immediate situation
- textual experience (genre, canonical...)
- personal prejudice

estrangement

- the student cannot speak to the writer
- the text is uncoupled from the writer, its readers, its context
- the actual audience is what matters

understanding is a means to ownership

- Understanding happens when we place ourselves in front of the text so we can unfold or disclose the matter or injunction of the text in order to make it our own

ownership

- of meaning and of one's self
- readers understand themselves differently through textual encounters
- readers engage in ideological critique

Experimenting

Preludes 1: Version 1

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps!

Preludes 1: Version 2

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And then the lighting of the lamps.

Articulation

Guided reflection



- Write a reflection on the idea of ennui in Eliot's poetry. Treat the writing as a self-expressive exercise, that is, write for yourself and get your ideas down as quickly as you can.
- Read your reflection carefully and ask yourself the question: "Is this piece of writing making a case for something?" or "Am I adopting a position on something in this piece of writing?"
- If the answer is yes, try writing your position as a proposition or group of propositions. For each, begin with the words: "I believe that. . ."
- imagine that you want to arrange these proportions as an argument. How will you sequence your propositions to make your case?

Articulation

- Invite students to elaborate ‘Say more about...’
- Cue alternative responses ‘There is no one right answer. What are the alternatives? Who’s got a different point of view?’
- Challenge students to provide reasons:
- Make a challenging statement ‘Supposing someone said...’
- Contribute your own thoughts/experience ‘I think that/remember when...’
- Use ‘think-pair-share’ Allow thinking time: discuss with partner, then group.
- Allow ‘rehearsal’ of response
- Try out the answer: in your head and to partner.
- Invite student questions ‘Anyone like to ask Pat a question about that?’
- Use ‘think-alouds’
- Model rhetorical questions: ‘I don’t quite understand...’
- Student to invite response ‘Ali, will you ask someone else what they think?’

Discursive Responses

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-the-love-song-of-j-alfred-prufrock.html>

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Possible approaches for Mod C integration

- different representations of a particular idea
- texts where students read with or against the text
- explore a range of texts drawn from different modes and media
- examples and counter-examples of a particular way of thinking represented in the text
- intertextuality
- explorations of ambiguity, texts that do not enable 'closure' for the reader
- comparison across a particular textual concept aspect for example aspects of narrative
 - psychology of character; literary value
- interpretive community - presenting findings - texts for inclusion, texts for omission and justification

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Sheridan Blau makes this point:

I am inclined to say that the most important lesson to teach to our students about the reading of classic [for NSW read *substantial literary texts*] and often difficult texts is that strong readers of such **texts are readers who pay attention to the questions they find themselves experiencing as readers, because they value and recognise the importance of their own questions** as resources for advancing their understanding of any difficult text.