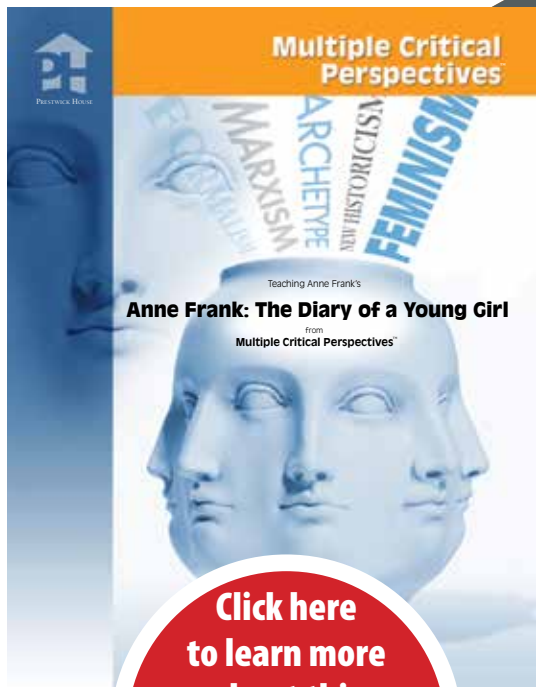




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# Multiple Critical Perspectives™

Teaching Anne Frank's

## **Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl**

from

**Multiple Critical Perspectives™**

by

Rhonda Carwell



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## General Introduction to the Work

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### Genre

**A** NNE FRANK: THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL falls within the genre of diary. Anne Frank's diary is a nonfiction piece comprising the thoughts, emotions, and observations of one girl as she experiences adolescence during her family's self-imposed seclusion in an attempt to escape from the Nazis in occupied Holland during World War II. The officially edited and published version is divided into Anne's original entries, identified by day and date. Each entry serves as a *de facto* chapter. Although translated into English and edited for publication, Anne's voice still resonates as author, narrator, and protagonist. The timing of her entries varies based on her moods and the occurrences in the Annex as the residents try to maintain some semblance of a normal life.

## Psychoanalytic Theory Applied to *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*



### Notes on the Psychoanalytic Theory

THE TERM “PSYCHOLOGICAL” (also “psychoanalytical” or “Freudian Theory”) seems to encompass two almost contradictory critical theories. The first focuses on the text itself, with no regard to outside influences; the second focuses on the author of the text.

According to the first view, reading and interpretation are limited to the work itself. One will understand the work by examining conflicts, characters, dream sequences, and symbols. In this way, the psychoanalytic theory of literature is similar to the Formalist approach. One will further understand that a character’s outward behavior might conflict with inner desires, or might reflect as-yet-undiscovered inner desires.

#### Main areas of study/points of criticism of the first view:

- There are strong Oedipal connotations in this theory: the son’s desire for his mother, the father’s envy of the son and rivalry for the mother’s attention, the daughter’s desire for her father, the mother’s envy of the daughter and rivalry for the father’s attention. Of course, these all operate on a subconscious level to avoid breaking a serious social more.
- There is an emphasis on the meaning of dreams. This is because psychoanalytic theory asserts that it is in dreams that a person’s subconscious desires are revealed. What a person cannot express or do because of social rules will be expressed and accomplished in dreams, where there are no social rules. Most of the time, people are not even aware what it is they secretly desire until their subconscious goes unchecked in sleep.



## Activity One

### Examining Conflicts Within the Annex

1. As a class, discuss what conflicts can be found in the novel. Some examples may include
  - Anne vs. Herself
  - Anne vs. Margot
  - Anne vs. Mrs. Van Daan
  - Anne vs. Mrs. Frank (Mummy)
  - Anne vs. Mr. Dussel
2. Divide the class into enough groups so that each of the conflicts identified in Step 1 is covered by at least one group.
3. Assign each group one of the identified conflicts.
4. Within their groups, the members should find examples of the conflicts Anne experiences in the novel, citing the day and date as well as a few key words from the novel for easy location later.
5. Have students, still in their small groups, discuss the following:
  - What view of Anne is revealed in this conflict?
  - What view of the other person is revealed?
  - What bias or misunderstanding on Anne's part, if any, is evident in the depiction of this conflict?
  - Whose perception of the conflict seems the most accurate? Why?
  - What evidence from the book do we have to refute or accept the blame for the conflict?
6. Reconvene the class and allow each group to present its findings.
7. Divide the class into two new groups—those who sympathize primarily with Anne and those who sympathize primarily with Anne's opponent.
8. Have each group peruse the diary and compile evidence to support its view.
9. Reconvene the class and discuss.

*NOTE: The class does not need to agree or even come to consensus. The point of the activity is simply to examine the conflicts and consider potential problems with learning about them from only Anne's perspective.*

## New Historicism Applied to Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl

### Notes on New Historicism

A COMMON TENDENCY IN THE STUDY of literature written in, and/or set in, a past or foreign culture is to assume a direct comparison between the culture as presented in the text and as it really was/is. New Historicism asserts that such a comparison is impossible for two basic reasons.

First, the “truth” of a foreign or past culture can never be known as established and unchangeable. At best, any understanding of the “truth” is a matter of interpretation on the parts of both the writer and the reader. This is most blatantly evident in the fact that the “losers” of history hardly ever get heard. The culture that is dominated by another is often lost to history because it is the powerful who have the resources to record that history. Even in recent past events, who really knows both sides of the story? Who really knows the whole of the Nazi story? Or the Iraqi story? New Historicists argue that these unknown histories are just as significant as the histories of the dominant culture of power and should be included in any world view. Since they often contradict “traditional” (i.e., the winner’s) history, there is no way to really know the absolute truth.

Second, while the text under consideration does indeed reflect the culture in which it was written (and to some degree in which it is set), it also *participates* in the culture in which it is written. In other words, its very existence changes the culture it “reflects.” To New Historicists, literature and culture are born of one another. For example, although Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* certainly reflected the culture of the South during the mid-20th century, it also became a tool to raise awareness of, and change certain elements of, that culture.



## Activity One

### Tracing History Through Anne's Diary

1. Copy and distribute the handout: New Historicism Fact Sheet: A Brief Timeline of World War II Events.
2. Divide the class into groups of two or three.
3. Have students examine the Fact Sheet and find the entries in Anne's diary that correspond to the key events listed.
  - Remind students that, often, Anne's mention might occur considerably later than the actual event since news was often slow to reach the Annex.
  - Also remind students that Anne does refer to dates and events that occurred previous to their time in the Secret Annex, so those should be noted as well.
4. Have students note events and personal reflections in each entry that corresponds with the Fact Sheet.
5. Have students note key impressions and details from Anne's mention of the event.
6. Have students note any historical events that Anne does not mention. Have them speculate why Anne chose not to mention this event.
7. Reconvene the class and discuss the following:
  - What pattern emerges in terms of the events Anne mentions and those she does not?
  - What impact does the war overall have on Anne's account of her life?
  - Do any specific events have a particular impact on Anne? If so, which events? What is the impact?
  - What world views are expressed by Anne's account of the events?
  - What is revealed about Anne's character by her account of historical events?
  - Is Anne's account of the war the account of the "winner" or "loser" of history? How can you support your point?

*NOTE: It is not necessary for students to agree, or even come to consensus. There are strong arguments for both positions, that Anne's account, being written while she was in hiding from an oppressor, represents the account of the powerless. However, the diary was found, edited, and published only after the side represented by Anne emerged victorious from the war. Had Anne's side remained the oppressed and powerless, Anne's diary probably would have been destroyed.*

## Feminist Theory Applied to Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl

### 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).

In the 1960s, the feminist movement began to form a new approach to literary criticism. 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 less intelligent than men, at least in part because they generally received less formal education, and many women accepted that judgment. It was not until the feminist movement was well under way that women began examining old texts, reevaluating the portrayal of women in literature, and writing new works to fit the developing concept of the “modern woman.”

The feminist approach is based on finding and exposing suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) in literature. Feminists are interested in exposing the undervaluing of women in literature that has long been accepted as the norm by both men and women. They have even dissected many words in Western languages that reflect a patriarchal worldview. Arguing that the past millennia in the West have been dominated by men—whether the politicians in power or the historians recording it all—feminist critics believe that Western literature reflects a masculine bias, and, consequently, represents an inaccurate and potentially harmful image of women. In order to repair this image and achieve balance, they insist that works by and about women be added to the literary canon and read from a feminist perspective.



## Activity One

### Viewing Issues in Anne's Diary from a Feminist Perspective

1. Open the class with a discussion of the basic ideas of the feminist approach. Review the basic ideas of what one would look for in reading a book through the feminist perspective.
  2. Remind students that, one issue of the feminist perspective is to expand the canon of core curricular works to include genres more typical of female writers, including diaries.
  3. Divide the class into same-gender groups.
  4. Assign each group, or allow each to choose, one of the following topics to explore from the feminist perspective:
    - Anne's Relationship with Peter
    - Adolescence/Emerging Sexuality
    - Relationships Between the Adult Males and Females
    - Political and World Views
- Try to have each topic covered by at least one group of each gender.
5. Have each group peruse Anne's diary for mention of its assigned topic.
  6. While they examine the diary, have them consider the following:
    - What details of this issue can be interpreted as gender-related? (For example, what physical details might a female point out that a male might not—or *vice versa*? What emotions are involved that might be different if the issue involved persons of a different gender mix?)
    - How might these details be different if the diary were written by an adolescent male instead of an adolescent female?
    - To what extent does Anne's gender affect the credibility of her account? Why?
    - To what extent is "credibility" a legitimate concern when examining a work like a diary?