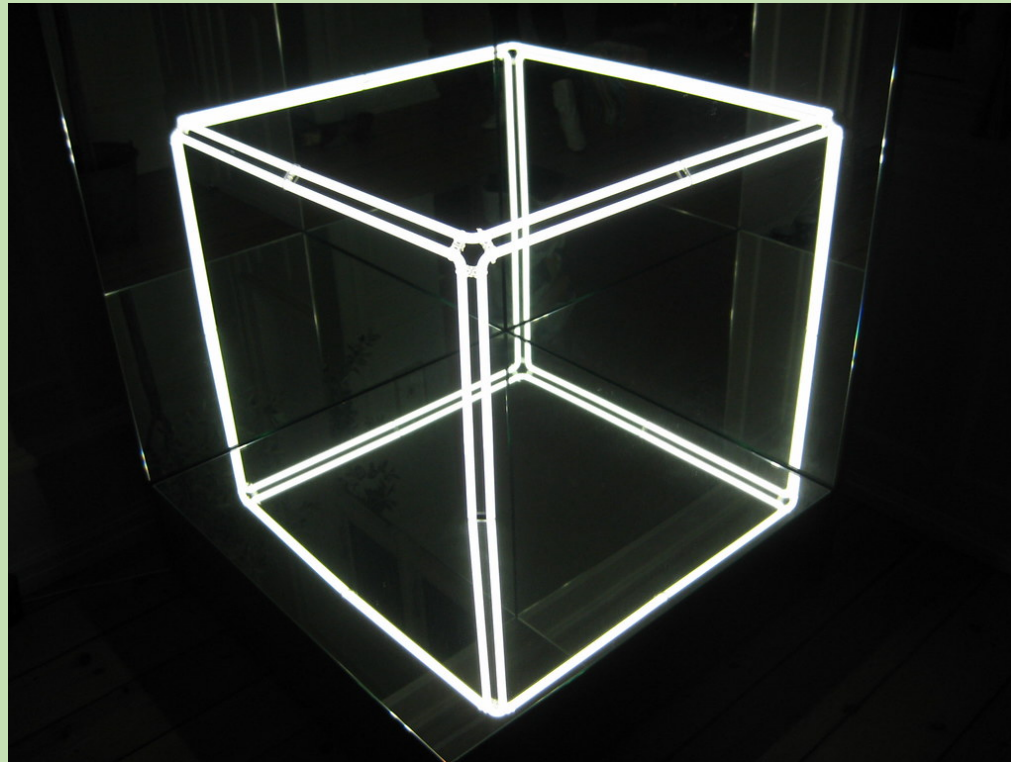


Question 3: Meaning of the work as a whole.

How would you analyze the picture below?

What are its elements? What is their relationship?



Adapted from a presentation
by Jonathan Miller

What do we recognize about this cube?

What is its pattern?

What are its elements?

What is its function?



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What is the function of this set of dice?

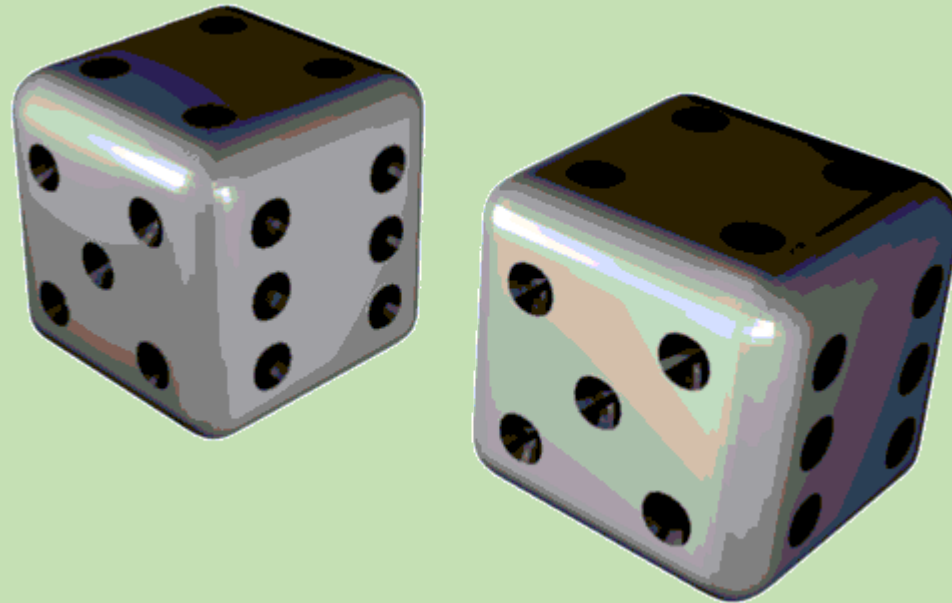
What is ambiguous about the possible function?

What are the situations in which this set of dice could function?

Could the same set of dice have several functions? Explain.

What further information do we need to determine the function(s)?

How does that make the function of the dice complex?



FRQ3 (Stable Prompt Wording from 2020)

....in a well-written essay, analyze how (the character's relationship with [X]) contributes to *an **interpretation** of the work as a whole.*

FRQ 3 (“traditional”)

...write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the particular sacrifice illuminates the character’s values and provides a deeper understanding of ***the meaning of the work as a whole***

“interpretation” ≈ “meaning”

Interpretation is a more precise word and the open nature of “interpretation” encourages students to search for ambiguities and complexities in a work

Avoid black and white and embrace grey.

“I studied literature not because it answered questions, but because it helped me understand that some questions don’t have answers, and that answers aren’t the point.”

—Unknown

What is Red Riding Hood about?

Is it story summary or plot summary? Most students will start there.



FRQ 3 specifically states **“Avoid mere plot summary.”**

We want students to draw upon understanding the story rather than drawing on specific elements. We must help students learn the questions they need to ask. We want them to be independent learners in enable them to achieve their own interpretation of a work of literature.

“Sometimes you are going to be so frustrated you’ll hate the guitar, but all of this is just part of learning.” —Jimi Hendrix



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“The roots of
education are
bitter, but the
fruits are sweet.”
—Aristotle



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“In criticizing, the teacher is hoping to teach. That’s all.”

—Dogen

Little Red Riding Hood

Thematic concept:
“stranger danger”

Thematic statement (theme):
“Strangers, like the unknown itself, can pose dangers both unforeseen and unimaginable.”

Inductive Reasoning

Induction has to do with establishing general premises.

These beans—an appropriate and random sampling—are from this bag.

These beans are white

Therefore, all the beans in this bag are white.

Deductive Reasoning

Deduction has to do with the connection of premises to determine what they may yield.

All the beans in this bag are white

These beans are from this bag.

Therefore, these beans are white.

Think of a work of literature a *rotating globe*.

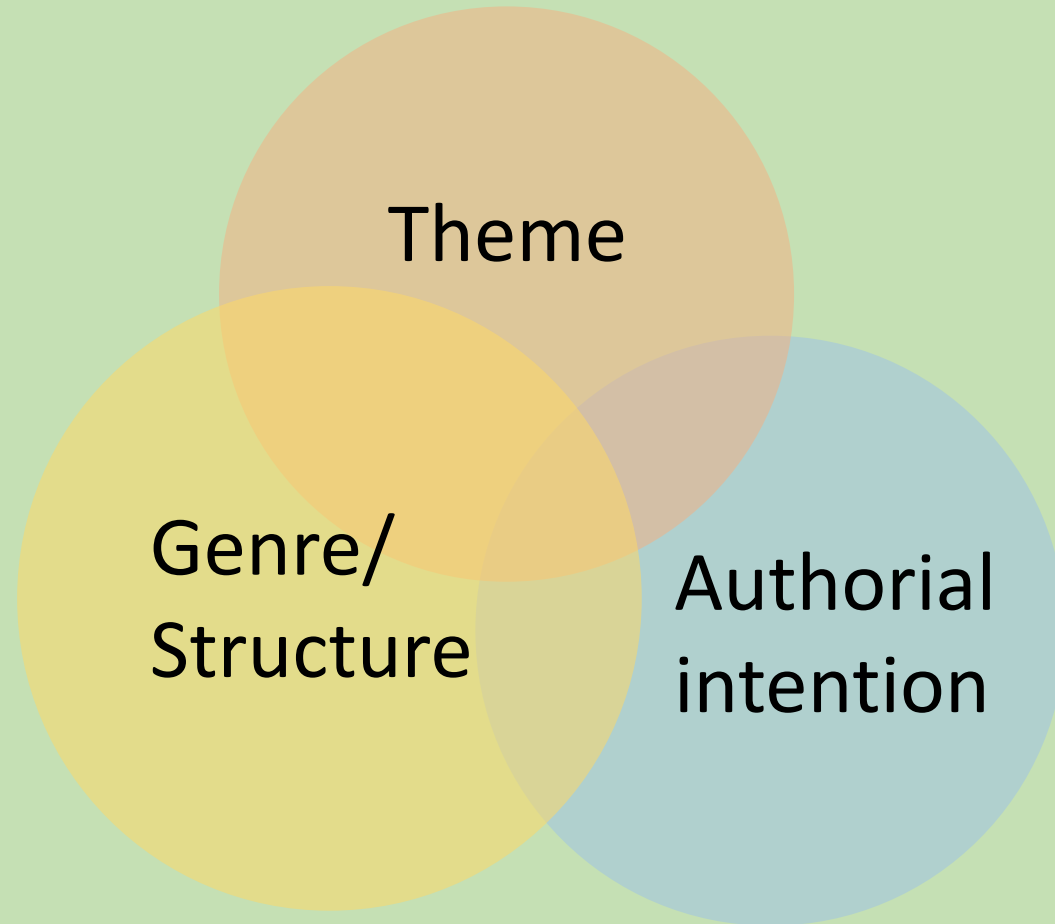
As it turns and we observe it, it looks different each time even though it is still the same. Considering a text a similar way allows us to discern complexity and tension in the work. It still requires the ability to recognize the “what,” the “how, and the “why.”



What themes are in the work?

What genre or structure is evident?

What authorial intention is pursued in the text?



Theme

Genre/
Structure

Authorial
intention

Features of a Fairy Tale

Short Story

Hero/Heroine

Evil character

Magical characters and events

Overcoming evil

Moral message

Predictable language/structure

Oral tradition

Generally has a happy ending!

Through the genre of the
Fairy Tale
Character
Setting
Plot and Structure
Narrator
Figurative Language

Narrator:

“sweet little girl”

“[e]veryone who saw her liked her”



Allegory

a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another.

A symbolical narrative

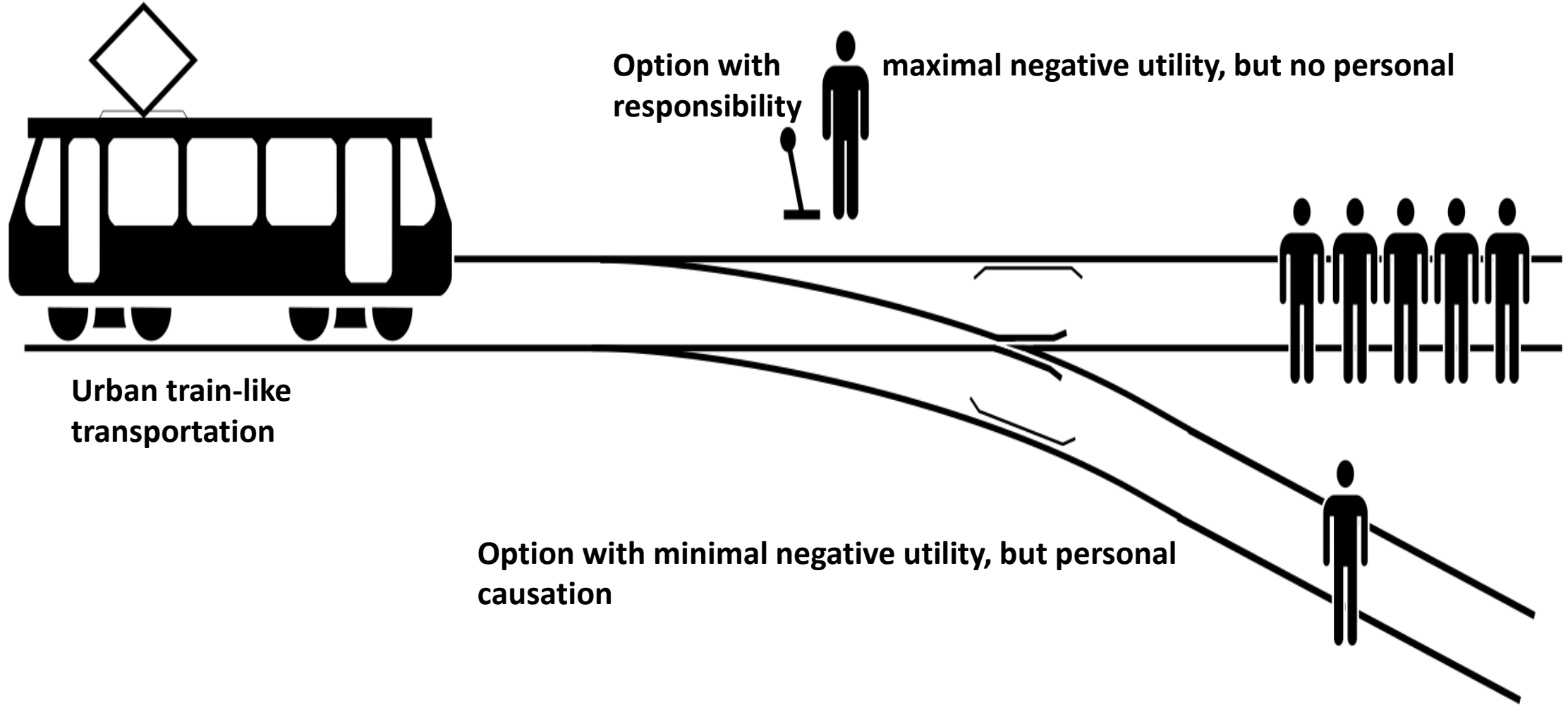
Wolf:

“walking along as though
you were on your way to
school in the village,”

“Now there is a tasty bite
for me. Just how are you
going to catch her?”



What might happen if ...? Unfortunate choice function



“do not leave the path”

“she did not know what a wicked animal he was, and was not afraid of him”

“haven’t you seen the beautiful flowers that are blossoming in the woods? Why don’t you go and take a look?”

“she ran off into the woods looking for flowers”

“Each time she picked one she thought that she could see an even more beautiful one a little way off, and she ran after it, going further and further into the woods.”

“If I take a bouquet to grandmother, she will be very pleased”

“opened her eyes [to see] the sunlight breaking through the trees and...the ground...covered with beautiful flowers”

“She walked into the parlor, and everything looked so strange and she thought, “Oh, my God, why am I so afraid? I usually like it at grandmother’s.”

“might fall down and break”

“[Psychologist Erich] Fromm ... [argues that] the tale [is] the ‘expression of a deep antagonism against men and sex.’ This story, presumably passed on from one generation of women to the next, portrays men as ruthless and cunning animals, who turn the sexual act into a cannibalistic ritual.

“For Susan Brownmiller, *Little Red Riding Hood* recounts a cultural story that holds gender bottom line by perpetuating the notion that women are at once victims of male violence even as they most position themselves as beneficiaries of male protection.”

[Literature]... tells us important truths about human nature or, more exactly, human natures. We learn things in the form 'People of type T in circumstances C will in all probability perform actions of type A'.

Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy*



2003 According to critic Northrop Frye, “Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.”

Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by the figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

2004 Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel or play, and considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2013 A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist in a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

2015 In literary works, cruelty often functions as a crucial motivation or a major social or political factor. Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which acts of cruelty are important to the theme. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing how cruelty functions in the work as a whole and what the cruelty reveals about the perpetrator and/or victim.

2018 Many works of literature feature characters who have been given a literal or figurative gift. The gift may be an object, or it may be a quality such as uncommon beauty, significant social position, great mental or imaginative faculties, or extraordinary physical powers. Yet this gift is often also a burden or a handicap. Select a character from a novel, epic, or play who has been given a gift that is both an advantage and a problem. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing the complex nature of the gift and how the gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

What questions about prompts such as those selected could we pose to students to get them to consider relationships between the central aspect of a work of fiction identified in each prompt and theme, genre or structure, and authorial intention?

How can we incorporate “Key Questions” in Skill Categories 1-6 in the “Developing Course Skills” of the Course and Exam Description (CED) for the AP English Literature program to explore complexities of meaning?

How can we incorporate “Key Questions” in Skill Category 7 in the “Developing Course Skills” section of the CED to help students craft writing strategies that will allow them to “develop textually substantial arguments about interpretations of ...a text?”

What essential terms and concepts of theme, genre or structure, and authorial intention will students need as foundations for exploring complexities of meaning in theme, genre or structure, and authorial intention?

What other resources will aid us and our students in their pursuit of exploring complexities of meaning in theme, genre or structure, and authorial intention?

Most importantly, we need to remember that our students are in different places in their work with literature. What methods of differentiation will we need to bring into our classrooms to serve each student well as we seek to develop their abilities to work with complexities of meanings of a work of literature?

Ultimately, FRQ3 is up to the “roll of the dice.”

Our teaching must not be. Preparing students for the AP Literature Exam requires skillful and deliberate effort that is responsive to the students in front of us and along side us. Identifying who is capable of developing more sophisticated analytical skills and how to lead them there will depend our knowledge of our students, our knowledge of literature, and our knowledge of literary analysis. We expect much from our students and should expect at least as much from ourselves.

