

CRITICAL LITERACY & ESL STUDENTS: STRATEGIES THAT WORK

GAE NASTASI

QATESOL '15

To start with ...

- This is NOT an academic presentation
- I am NOT an expert on critical literacy
- I do NOT have the answers

- I DO want to present some practical strategies and ideas to help students who are learning language to develop some basic understandings of critical literacy



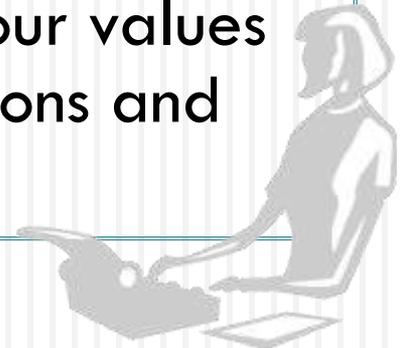
What is critical literacy?

Critical literacy is simply

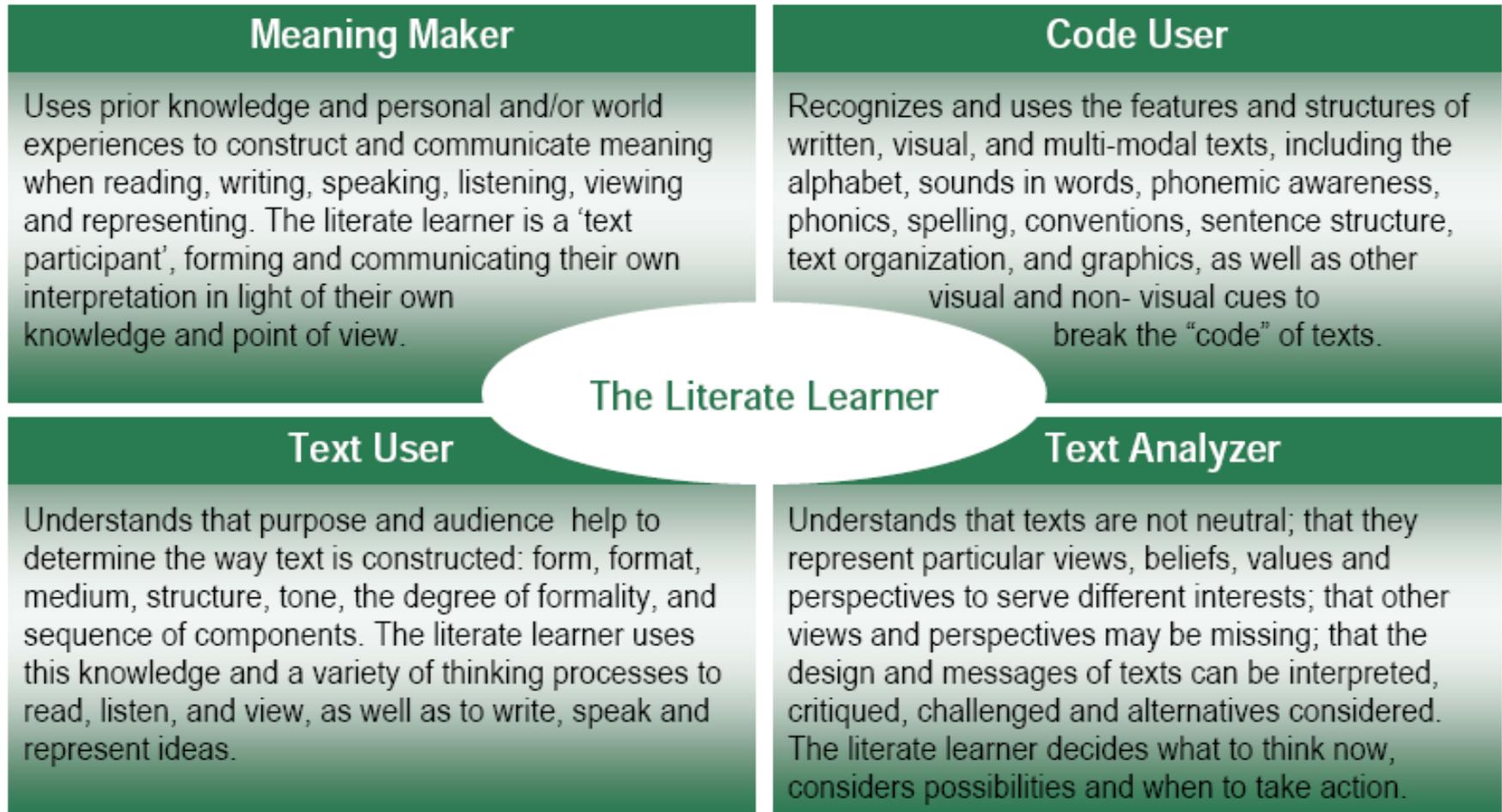
“thinking beyond the text to understand issues such as why the author wrote about a particular topic, wrote from a particular perspective, or chose to include some ideas about the topic and exclude others.”

http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/scholasticprofessional/authors/pdfs/Sample_pages_Critical_Literacy.pdf

“the ability to continually ask questions of a text (talking back to the text) in ways that enable us to look below the surface meanings to see how we are being influenced and affected. This critical ability helps us examine our values and attitudes and to consider alternative positions and points of view” (Lohrey 1998:9).



Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model



Critical Literacy in the Australian Curriculum



SEVEN GENERAL CAPABILITIES

- ❑ Literacy
- ❑ Numeracy
- ❑ Information and communication technology (ICT) capability
- ❑ Critical and creative thinking
- ❑ Personal and social capability
- ❑ Ethical understanding
- ❑ Intercultural understanding

Critical Literacy is not overtly stated BUT FIVE capabilities have critical literacy embedded in them

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/General-capabilities>

ENGLISH FOR ESL LEARNERS SENIOR SYLLABUS 2007 (AMENDED MARCH 2009)



2. Global Aims

Through studying English for ESL Learners, students should develop:

- ability to communicate in written and spoken Standard Australian English with confidence, clarity, accuracy and appropriateness for social, academic, business and creative purposes
- language skills and strategies to learn independently and collaboratively
- ability to think critically and creatively to meet the demands of current and future studies
- willingness and capacity to become discriminating and discerning readers, writers, listeners and speakers
- appreciation of Standard Australian English as the main language of communication in Australia
- understanding of Australian cultural references in communication
- ability to participate confidently and effectively in Australia's diverse cultures and to contribute to enriching them.

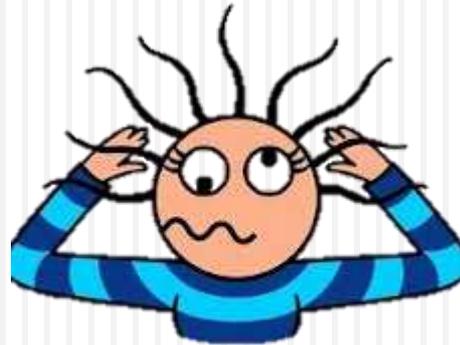
Other subject areas



- [ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY TEMPLATE FOR SENIOR SCIENCE.doc](#)

Critical Literacy and ESL students

- The English syllabus makes three assumptions:
 - Our students have a native-like grasp of English
 - Our students possess particular cultural knowledge and understandings
 - Our students can deal with abstract concepts

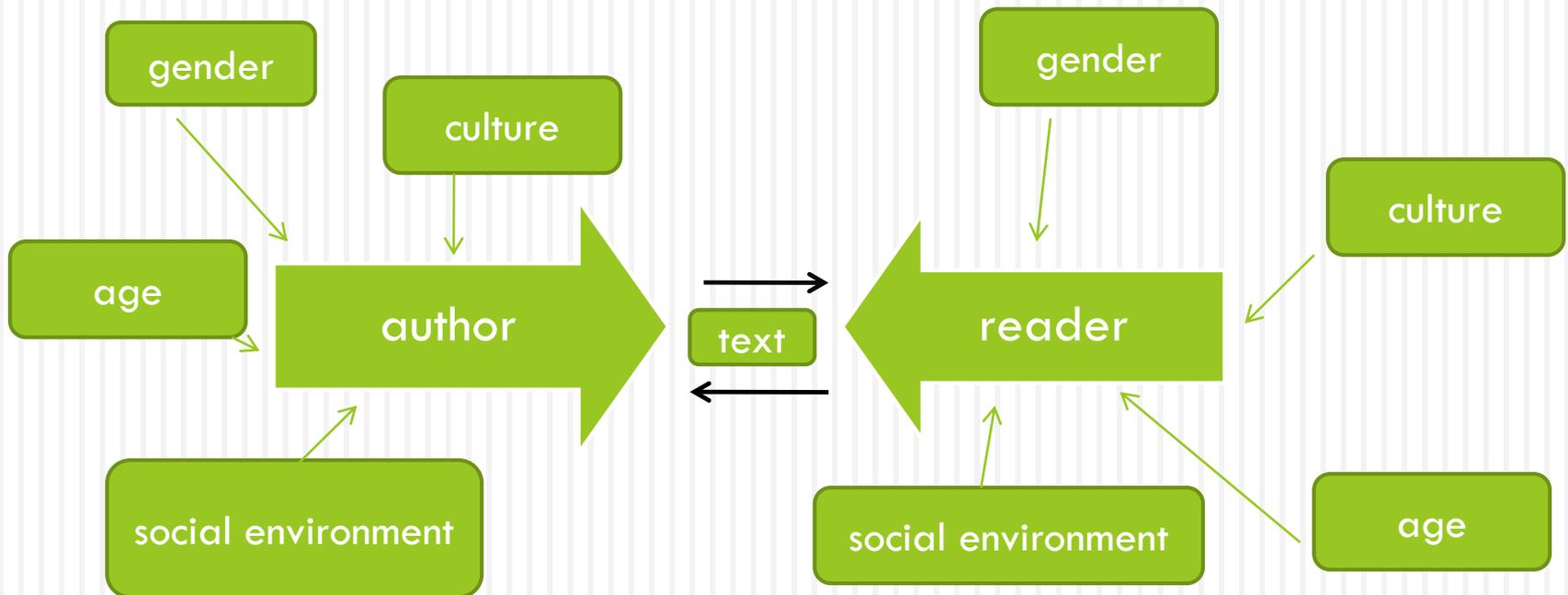


Basic premises of critical literacy

- *text* is defined as a “vehicle through which individuals communicate with one another using the **codes and conventions of society**”

the purpose of texts

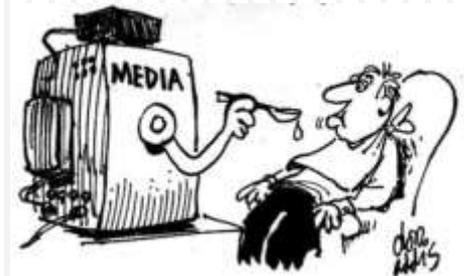
- The purpose of texts is to **create meaning**
- Creating or **constructing** meaning is dynamic



Basic Premises of Critical Literacy

- 1. All texts are constructions.**
- 2. All texts contain belief and value messages.**
- 3. Each person interprets messages differently.**
- 4. Texts serve different interests.**
- 5. Each medium develops its own “language” in order to position readers/viewers in certain ways.**

(adapted from Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, pp. 34–36)



STRATEGIES

- Make it **HANDS ON**
- Make it **VISUAL**
- **BREAK IT DOWN**
- Build on **PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**
- **QUESTION, QUESTION, QUESTION**



activity

cars

**Russian car comes in second!
American car comes in next to
last.**

(from a headline in a Russian newspaper describing the results of a test comparing the quality of different cars)



- Each country represents a car
- Recreate the headline – can you make the headline true?
- Remove the **English** car – make the headline true
- Remove the **Italian** car – make the headline true
- Remove the **French** car – make the headline true
- Recreate the headline using only two cars – what happens??

How can it be used?

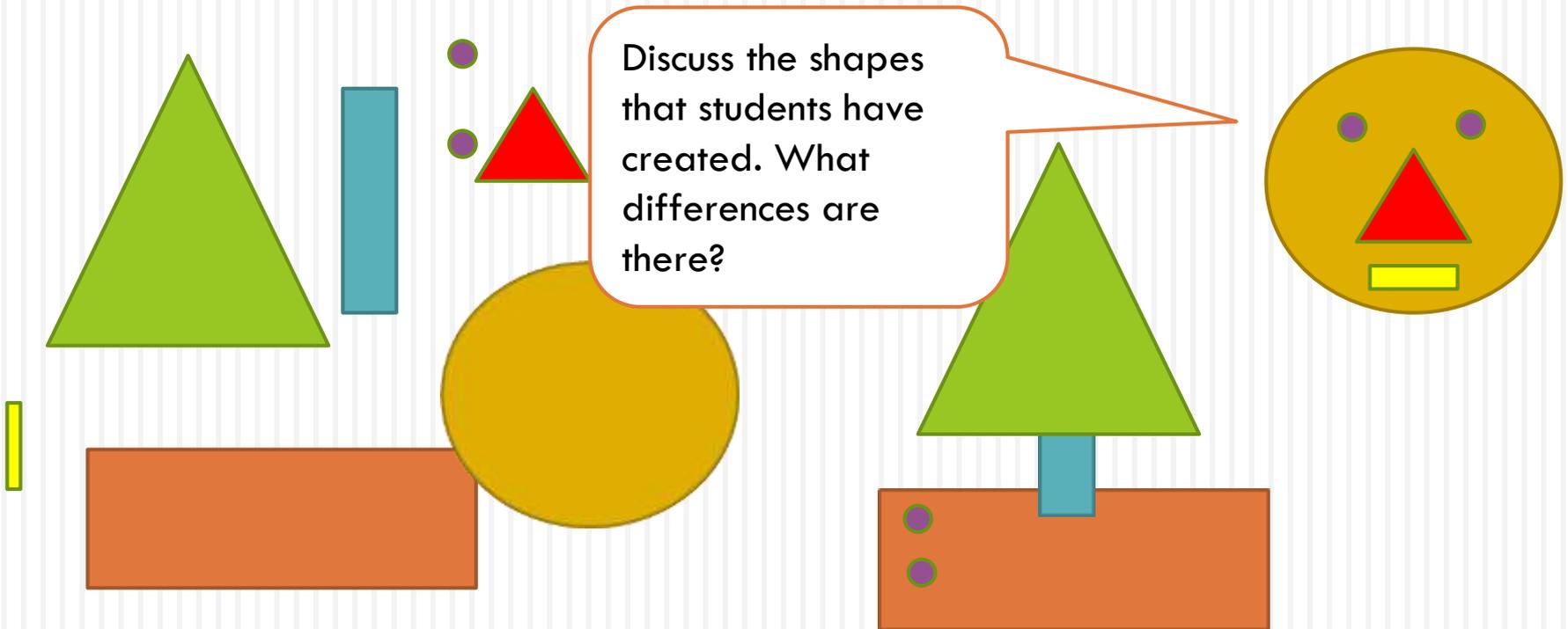
- understanding that texts are not neutral, “hidden agenda”
- understanding how language reveals biases
- how language can manipulate/propaganda
- media unit

activity

shapes

Cut up a series of shapes e.g.

Students make a picture using the shapes

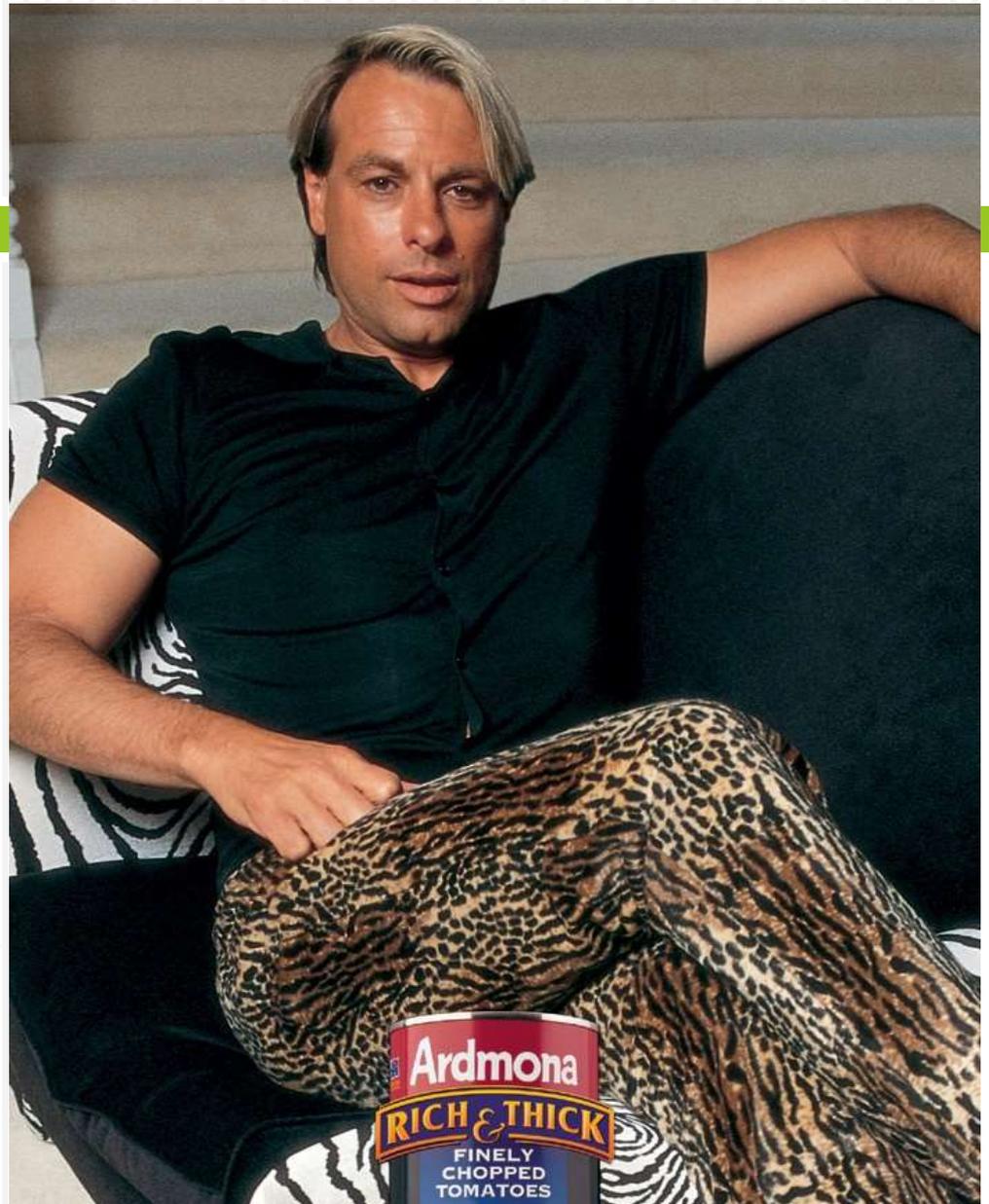


How can it be used?

- shows how cultural/social backgrounds or background knowledge can influence understanding/construction of a text
- way of introducing different perspectives

visuals

- Look at this text.
- How does it create a meaning for me that it may not create for you?
(focus on how I 'read' it differently)





What codes are operating here? Who can understand these messages? Who cannot?



how can it be used?

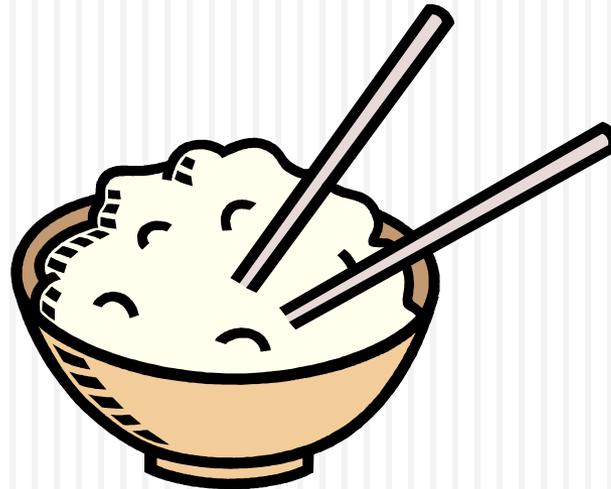
- different factors (personal experience, culture, age and background knowledge e.g.) shape our understanding of a text
- advertising/media unit

Example of a unit of work

- Year 9 C2C unit – representations of Australian identity
- Challenging topic for Year 9 ESL/low literacy students
- KEY CONCEPTS:
 - IDENTITY
 - AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY
 - REPRESENTATION

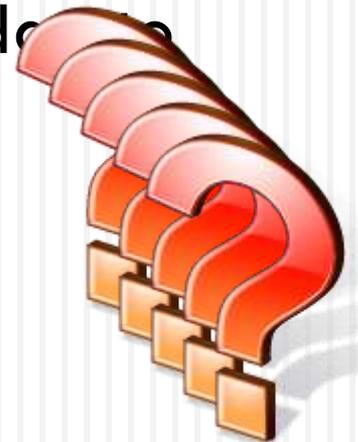
Introducing Representation

- Aim: to highlight how our cultural backgrounds changes the way we see things
 - Ask the students to think of rice
 - Describe what they imagine/see when they think of rice
 - Write the answers on board
 - Ask students why they all have different pictures of rice



DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT

- [REPRESENTATION.ppt](#)
- The key is to elicit information from students through **QUESTIONING**
- **QUESTIONING** helps the students engage and move from **PASSIVE** recipients of knowledge to **ACTIVE LEARNERS**



Questions / Discussions



➤ gnast1@eq.edu.au