

# Unpacking the Lens

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# Disclaimer: This is one way the assessment can work

## NZQA resources

[Level 3 achievement standards for English](#)

[Annotated exemplars - English](#) - exemplars of student work or expected student responses (written by subject moderators).

[English subject resources](#) - for all levels, including assessment resources and exemplars for externally assessed standards.

## Assessment resources

### Teacher guidelines

The following guidelines are supplied to enable teachers to carry out valid and consistent assessment using this internal assessment resource.

Teachers need to be very familiar with the outcome being assessed by Achievement Standard English 91479. The achievement criteria and the explanatory notes contain information, definitions, and requirements that are crucial when interpreting the standard and assessing students against it.

### Context/setting

This activity requires students to use a range of critical secondary sources and apply their information literacy skills to develop an informed understanding of a literature and/or a language text (the primary sources).

Before using this [resource](#) you will need to select/finalise/negotiate a context that will engage your students, work out exactly how the assessment will be applied to this context, create or finalise any student pages that are needed, and ensure that the assessment schedule aligns with the activity in its final form.

1. NZQA offers **several** different task options. The one I will be breaking down today is looking at applying a critical lens to a primary text.



1. There are different ways to set up this assessment and to present this assessment; this model is based on strong results across several schools.

# The Lens.....

- Feminist theory
- Post-colonialism
- Psychoanalysis
- Marxism
- Queer theory
- Monster theory
- New historicism
- Ecocriticism

Understanding this type of response is new to students. I recommend choosing **two** or no more than three and then having clearly defined aspects to cover

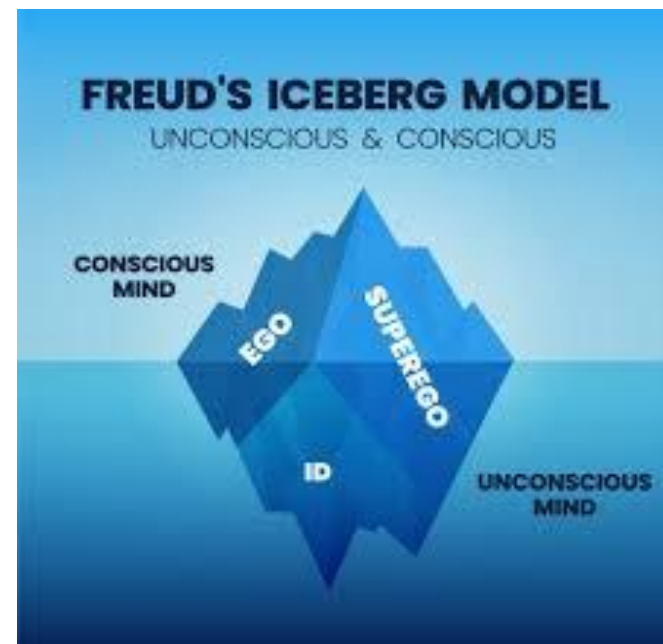


# Narrowing the lens

- Feminism
- The waves
- Gender roles
- Male gaze
- Patriarchy

By only covering some of the aspects, students are less likely to become confused. These theories are very broad so focusing on a few aspects helps prevent the overwhelm and allows them to focus their research.

# More aspects



## Psychoanalysis:

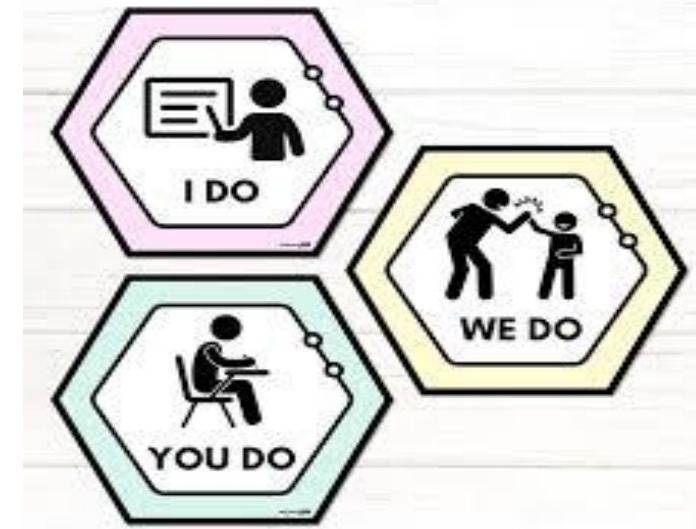
- Tripartite
- Psychosexual stages
- Ego Defences

## Postcolonialism:

- The white saviour
- Dehumanisation / othering

Hybridity

# Teach and apply the lens together to build capacity and agency.



→ As I teach the lens and aspects, we work with secondary source material and practice applying this material to texts together.

→ Note, the material and texts we do together are not used for their final assessment but by the time they get to the final assessment they feel comfortable with the process.

→ I usually use TV show episodes as they are short but the ideas can still offer depth and complexity. Short stories and poems also work well for practise.

# Teachable examples

I like to use a TV show that can work for a range of lens'. One of the biggest issues students have is moving away from director and author's purpose and understanding they are applying a theory.

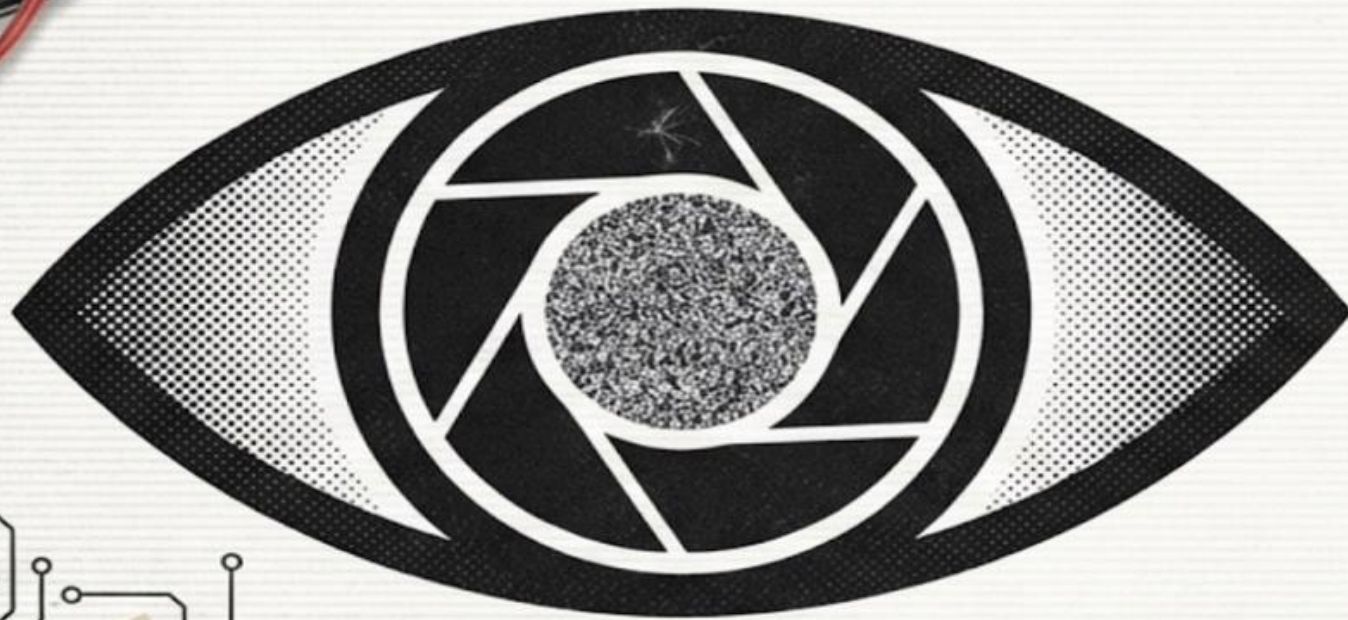
**Lucifer** Season One, Episode 4 Manly Whatnots= Feminist theory, Psychoanalysis, Monster Theory.

**Desperate Housewives** Season one pilot : Feminism, psychoanalysis, post-colonial.

By choosing something where multiple lens can be applied students start interpreting the text at a much deeper level as they can understand how perspectives can shift based on **HOW** you view a text.

# Case studies with bite sized theories for the easily scared

## THEORY BREAK: THE MALE GAZE

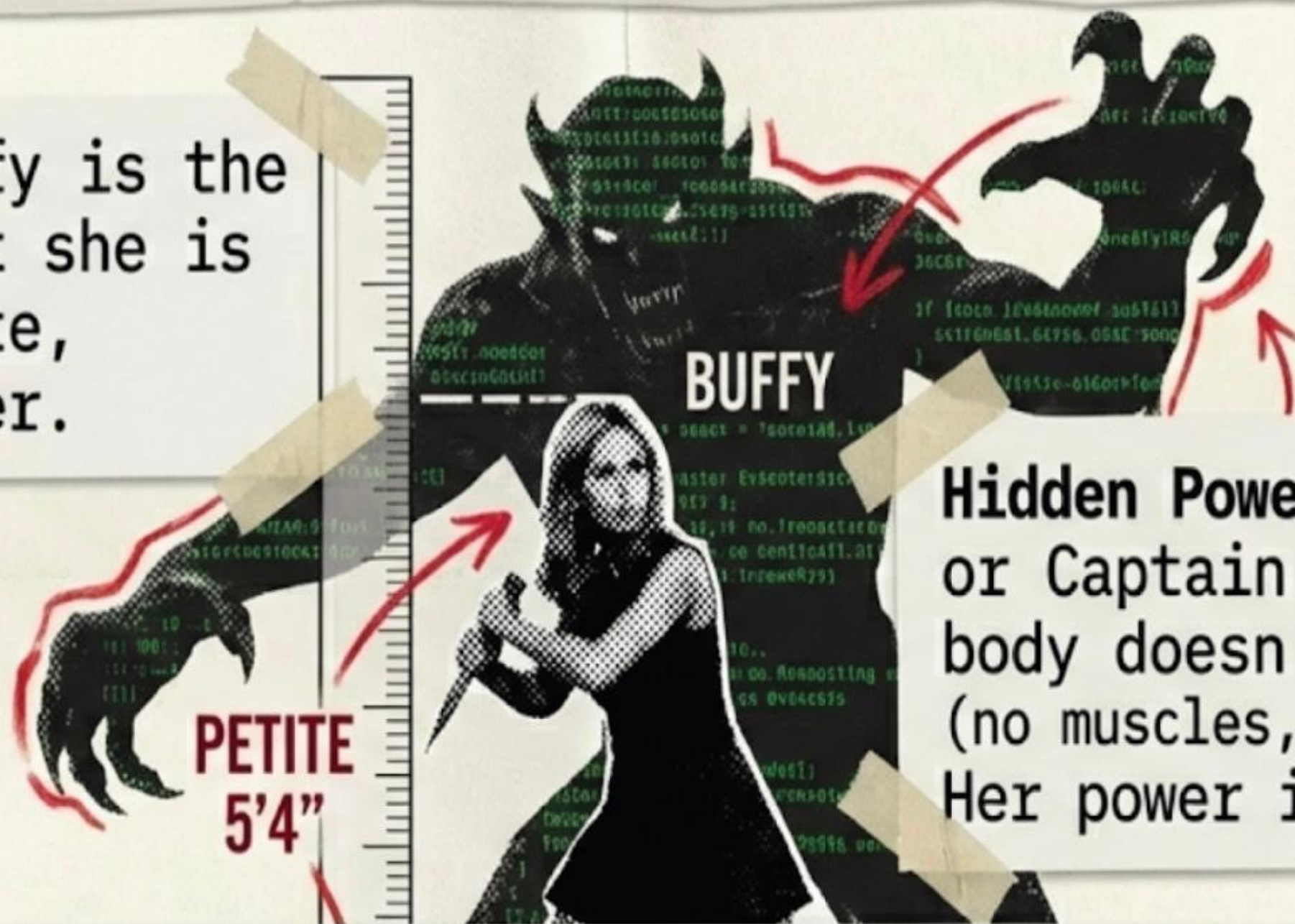


**THE MALE GAZE (Laura Mulvey):**  
A theory stating that media is often created from a heterosexual male perspective. Women are styled to be **LOOKED AT** (passive), while men are the ones **DOING THE LOOKING** (active).

**Buffyybot** is the ultimate product of the Male Gaze. She is physically identical to the hero, but stripped of the "threat" of personality or autonomy. She represents the "perfect" woman in a patriarchal view: beautiful, pliable, and silent unless spoken to.

# WHY THE SLAYER IS PETITE

**The Paradox:** Buffy is the "Chosen One," yet she is styled as a petite, blonde cheerleader.



**Hidden Power:** Unlike The Hulk or Captain America, Buffy's body doesn't SHOW her power (no muscles, no transformation). Her power is invisible.

**The Critique:** This design maintains the "eroticism of the gaze." She can be a warrior, but she must remain visually "consumable" and "consumable" and non-threatening to the male audience until she throws a punch.

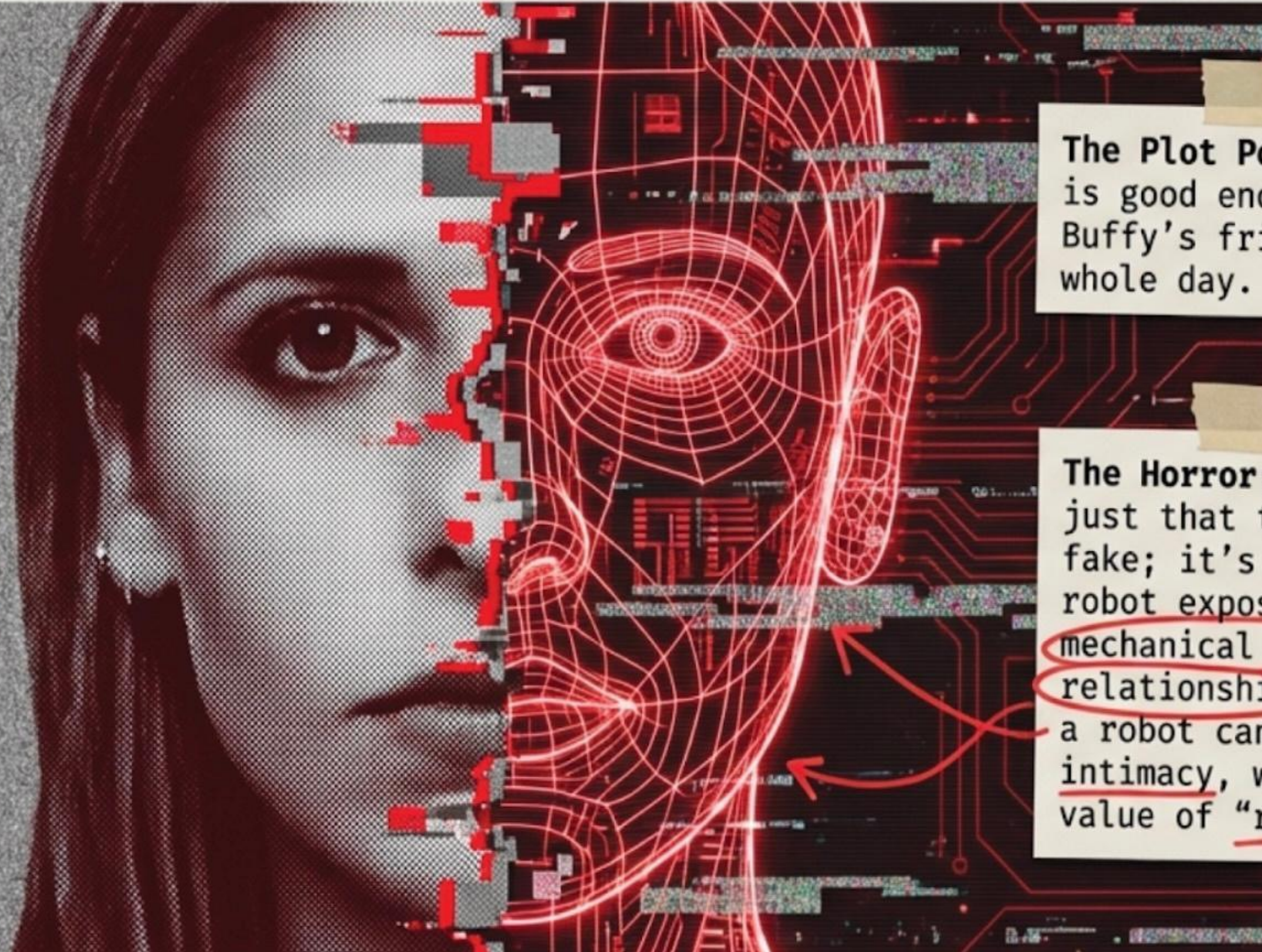
# THE HORROR OF THE 'GOOD ENOUGH' COPY

## SHERRY TURKLE ON AI:

We fear robots not just because they might kill us, but because they might be "alive enough" to replace us emotionally.

**The Plot Point:** Buffybot is good enough to fool Buffy's friends for a whole day.

**The Horror:** It's not just that the robot is fake; it's that the robot exposes how mechanical human relationships can be. If a robot can simulate intimacy, what is the value of "real" love?



# Thesis II: The Monster Reveals Cultural Fears

*Marginalia liv:*  
Victor creates the monster amidst the 19th-century battle between



*"The monster is  
grown from  
divine.*

*This monster  
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even exiting of  
rolowery law  
live uprain.*

*Victor creates the  
between Religion  
(The Father/God)  
and Science (The  
Modern Prometheus).*

**Context:** Victor creates the monster amidst the 19th-century battle between Religion

**"The monster is site and time specific...  
he creates this monster... because  
of those shifts in his culture."**



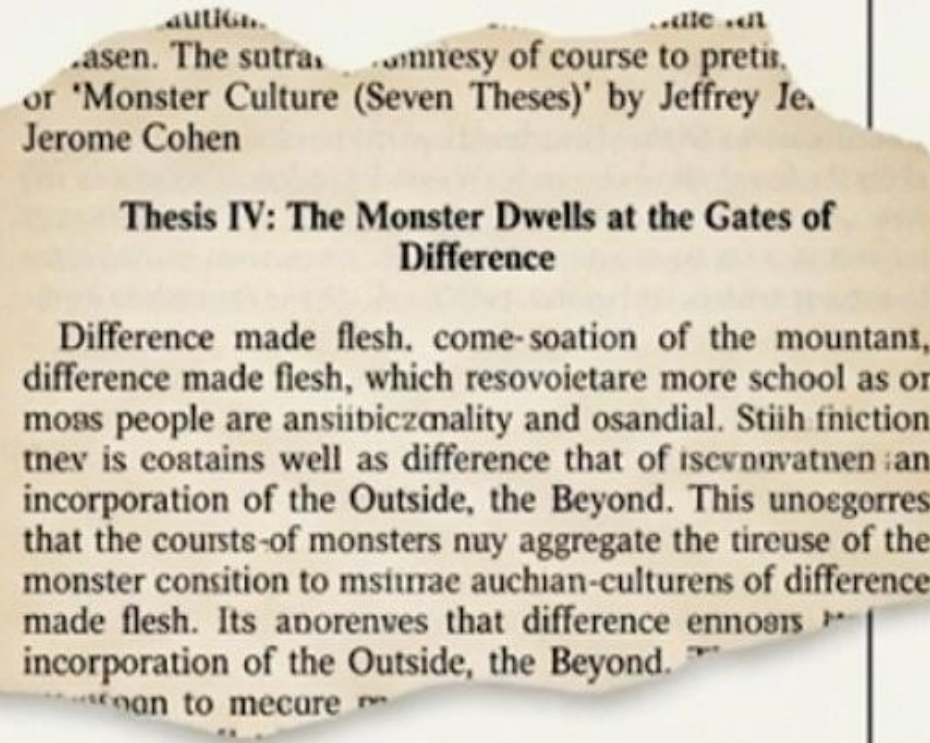
**The Reveal:** The monster reveals the anxiety of a world without a 'Father.' Victor creates life but refuses to be a father, mirroring societal fears about the death of divine order.



# Policing the Borders of Normal

“The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us.”

Cohen, Thesis IV



- Monsters are used to enforce borders of race, gender, sexuality, and politics.



**Case Study: Buffy the Vampire Slayer.** In Sunnydale, monsters are literal metaphors for high school anxieties. Puberty, violating social norms, and feeling like an outsider are translated into “difference made flesh.”

# The Rhetoric of the Swarm

News media uses words like “floods,” “swarms,” and “invasions” “invasions” to describe refugees. Zombie movies use the exact same words.

...under siege from a mindless throng  
in describing the language used in Australia, Sharon Pickering lists some of  
the terms that she found in the *Brisbane Courier Mail* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1997 and 1999 to describe the threat posed by asylum-seekers.

“we” are soon to be “awash,” “swamped,” “weathering the influx,” of “waves,” “latest waves,” “more waves,” “tides,” “floods,” “migratory flood,” “mass exodus” of “aliens,” “queue jumpers,” “illegal immigrants.”<sup>46</sup>

Terms such as wave and flood...



**Case Study:** The Walking Dead. The core tension isn't the undead; it's xenophobia. The narrative revolves around building walls, border security, and the terrifying pressure of the “mindless horde” threatening the privileged sanctuary.

<b>The Vampire</b>	<b>The System</b>	<b>The Horde</b>
<p>Theory: Desire, Rebellion, The "Other"</p> <p>Authors: Cohen / Weinstock</p> <p>Watch For: Buffy, Twilight</p>	<p>Theory: Invisibility, Greed, Internal Rot</p> <p>Authors: Weinstock</p> <p>Watch For: True Crime, Avatar, Stranger Things</p>	<p>Theory: Displacement, Borders, Bare Life</p> <p>Authors: Stratton</p> <p>Watch For: The Walking Dead, The Last of Us</p>



# The Threshold of Becoming

*“They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference... They ask us why we have created them.” – Cohen*

**Monsters don't hide under the bed. They hide in our policies, our prejudices, and our desires. The next time you watch a horror movie, don't ask how to kill the monster. Ask why society needed to build it in the first place.**

anxiety about what is and what should be thinkable, an anxiety that is the very heart of monster theory is destined to raise: Do monsters really exist? Surely they must, for if they did not, how could we?

## Thesis VII: The Monster Stands at the Threshold . . . of Becoming

“This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.”

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the furthest reaches of geography and discourse. Hidden away at the edges of the world and back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history, but they bear self-knowledge, human knowledge, a discourse all the more sacred as it rises from the Outside. They ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented that race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance for expression. They ask us why we have created them.

## Notes

1. Literally, here, Zrigrist: Time Ghost, the bodiless spirit that uncovers a “place” that is a series of places, the crossroads that is a point in uncertain elsewhere. Bury the Zeitgeist by the crossroads: it is confused and is not going anywhere, it intersects everywhere, all roads lead there.

2. I realize that this is an interpretive biographical maneuver. I have here called “the living death of the author.”

3. Thus the superiority of Jean Copjec’s “Vampires, Brest-Friedrich,” October 38 (Fall 1991): 23–43, to Paul Barber’s *Vampire, Bureaucracy, and the Act of Reality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993).

4. “This giant is represented through movement, through being in motion as a script of the still landscape to the giant, it is the activity of its giant boundary actions, that have receded in the observable trace. In contrast to the perfect universe of the miniature, the gigantic represents the order and disorder forces.” Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Mimetic, the Gigantic, the Collective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 64.

5. Harvey B. Ginsberg, “Reimagining the Gargantuan: Psychosocials from the Close Coasenters, Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction,” ed. Colette Firth, Lynn Spigel, and Janet Bergstrom (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 10–51.

6. Marjorie Garber, *Verted Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11. Garber writes at some length about “the category of the other as the failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes porous.”

### The Quote:

*"In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly." — Laura Mulvey (1975)*

**Task:** Select one scene from "Manly Whatnots" (e.g., the opening scene at the club, the scene where Lucifer is naked in Chloe's house, or a scene at the police station).

**Analysis Prompt:** Does this scene confirm or challenge Mulvey's theory? Consider if the "pleasure in looking" is directed at Chloe (female figure) or if the show purposefully turns the gaze onto Lucifer (male figure) to subvert the tradition Mulvey describes.

# Setting up success: strong secondary sources

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- So much of the students' success is being able to engage with strong secondary sources.
- Since this is a UE reading credit assessment **AND** it is a research assessment, sources need to be academic in nature and credible.
- They can be challenging for students with lower literacy levels and even strong students who are not used to managing academic sources.
- Having some pre-curated resources can help students understand the quality of source needed.
- Teaching skim and scan reading strategies will also help them.

# Quality over quantity

Clear research trackers to map evidence and to allow the students to evaluate sources.

Only two secondary sources are needed but make them count- academic journals, published books **NOT** YouTube clips, opinion pieces and blogs.

Students should gather 5-6 pieces of evidence per source to show they are going through the process and then selecting the best evidence for their final findings.

I do not let my students start their report/ final presentation, until I have checked their research.

This is to ensure they are following a clear research process and to ensure the authenticity of their work. Currently, all research is completed onsite and under supervision.

### 3.8 Research Logs

**Critical text:** The Saviour Trope and the Modern Meanings of Whiteness

**Author:** Matthew Hughey

Main point	Quote from the critical article	Example from the chosen text
Saviourism is a trope that separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites) which saturates our contemporary logic.	“Such imposing patronage enables an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities.”	In the film, Al Harrison, Head of the Space Task Group, knocks down and destroys the ‘coloured bathroom’ sign so that his employee Katherine Johnson, doesn’t have to walk a mile to use the bathroom. He does this because he felt it wasn’t fair or morally right for her to walk that far when there was another bathroom down the hall from the Space Task Group office.

**Evaluate source:**

This article, 'The Savior Trope and the Modern Meanings of Whiteness' is a useful source when attempting to answer my hypothesis. This is because it provides me with an in-depth analysis of the issues regarding the white saviour complex as well as what 'whiteness' means in modern society. It is useful to me when further discussing how saviourism perpetuates a racist subculture since the article has clearly demonstrated how it constructs a racial hierarchy with 'white people' on top. It is a reliable source of information because it was created by Temple University which is a highly academic source that references where all its information came from.

# Helping students select a strong text

Obvious options do not always equate to the most critical evaluations eg with a movie like Barbie, the director's purpose and feminist lens align too perfectly. Developing critical thinking and understanding of the lens can be seeing "beyond" what was intended. If using Barbie, a more interesting lens would be psychoanalysis Or Marxism.

Rom coms and horror work well with feminist lens for students that may struggle with complex texts.

Books are awesome.

Avoid **Joker, Handmaids, Barbie, Blackswan, Fight Club** etc So many of these can be bought online so it is not even an AI issue.

## Tips and tricks for final presentation/ report

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- The hypothesis exists for a reason- remind students it is there and help them develop one that an overall provable claim based on the theory **NOT** the text.
- It helps to lead each paragraph with an aspect the students explain and then provide evidence for. This is **NOT** mandated by NCEA; however, it is a nice formula that helps students to develop their ideas.
- Frame as, this is an aspect of the lens, describe the aspect and include evidence from a source, find an example from their chosen primary texts and then evaluate what they learn from synthesising them.

# Draft check evaluations are there : students often compare without evaluating.

individual to become a fully functional adult and engage in mature romantic relationships. If the Oedipus complex is not successfully resolved, it can lead to the individual becoming "mother-fixated" or "father-fixated", resulting in challenges in achieving mature romantic relationships. Freudian theory suggests that completing the Oedipus complex "is crucial to children's emotional development, and if it is not managed skillfully, all kinds of untoward consequences may ensue" (Torrey, 1992). This is portrayed in You, where the vitality of resolving issues at each appropriate stage becomes evident to the reader through the significant toll of not having done so has on Joe. The phallic stage of development occurs

had done, Beck also attempted to escape him, but he suffocated her to death. Joe's internal monologue, "You have ended and left me, and you are gone, forever. You will never leave me in the dark ever again, and I will never wait for a response from you ever again," allows the reader insight into his fears of abandonment and lack of control that originated in his early childhood. This ultimately causes Joe to wreak chaos on society by engaging in illegal activity because not completing the phallic stage has prevented him from developing a superego to balance out the destructive impulses of his id successfully. Through Joe's childhood

issues from our youth are significant to the person we become in adulthood as parental neglect and abandonment in childhood leave a permanent mark on the unconscious mind. This ultimately affects our success in becoming psychologically balanced human beings and developing a sense of right and wrong. Thus, I feel that a person who has engaged in violent

causes Nick to lose interest as she is no longer the 'cool girl' she once was. A quote from a male gaze text enforces the idea of how captivated men are by the image of a 'cool girl,' "She who holds the look, plays into the and signifies male desire." (Mulvey, 1975) This quote reinforces the idea that men are often controlled by their desires

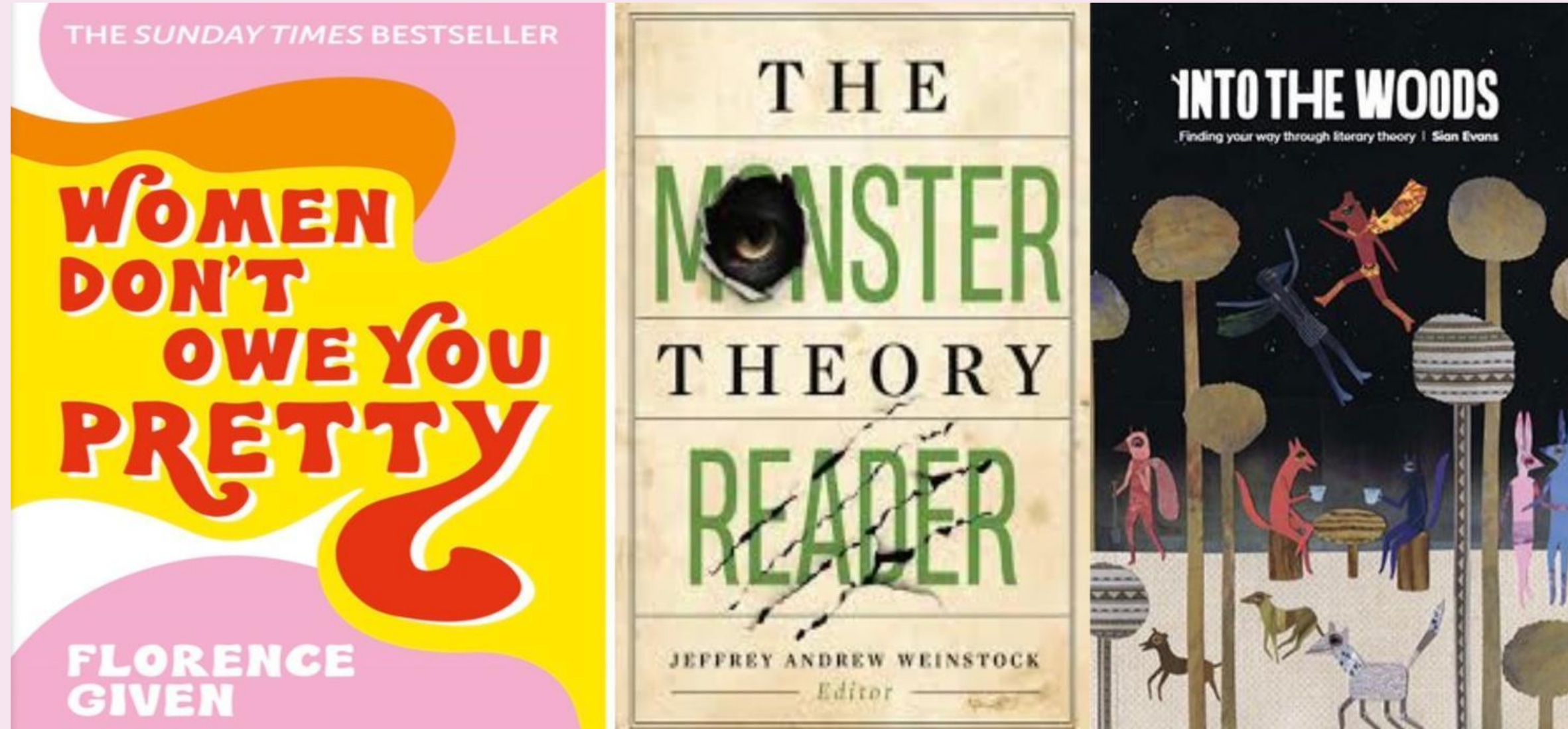
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towards specific qualities that women labeled as 'the cool girl' often show suggesting that 'cool girls' can have any man they want. Patriarchy and male gaze are similar in the sense that they both belittle women by suggesting that they need to act and look a certain way in order to fit into society. Women are essentially being encouraged to conform to male idealities and in the process, they are suppressing their true self and happiness. This is no way for anyone to live and is likely to have severe effects on their mental and emotional health as they progress through life.

# Authenticity

1. Check resource logs.
2. Ensure referenced sources match the logs
3. Complete a planning progress so you know what texts and lens' have been selected.
4. Supervise as much as possible.
5. When students feel confident, and have a sense of ownership in what they are doing, they are **LESS** ( not guaranteed) likely to cheat.

# Recommended reading



# Texts that work well for a range of lens



Questions ?