**What are we doing when we interpret a literary text?**

When we interpret a literary text, the words of the text are the materials we use to move the discussion from technique to larger concerns. Pointing out patterns and devices is not an end in itself; we explore the writer’s devices in order to explain how the text allows us to experience something more important and meaningful.

* Start with one or more of the literary features at the bottom of this sketch, but use these as a lens to look toward a much farther horizon (above).
* The middle box is a list of schools of thought about literature that have developed over the last 75 years or so. You don’t have to reference these now, but when you get to graduate school, you’ll need to know and use some of these ideas. They provide a lens and an explanation of goals and methods.

The Universal

**History Society The Mind**

Historical Contexts Literary Traditions National Identity The Family

Biographical contexts Issues of representation Human Developmental Drama

Race, class, gender, sexuality archetypes

New Historicism Marxism Post-Colonial Studies Psychoanalytic Theory

Reader Response Feminism Structuralism Post-structuralism Freudianism

Biographical Criticism Deconstruction Formalism

theme narrative forms allegory poetic forms

setting character conflict plot symbolism allusion

foreshadowing personification metaphor rhyme meter alliteration

flashback diction connotation tone simile/metaphor ambiguity

imagery repetition denotation

Words Words