

THREE IMPORTANT CONCEPTS FOR CRITICAL READING & WRITING WORK

(See For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action, Bomer & Bomer for more concepts, such as Race, Money, Gender and more.)

Groups

- Individuals can be seen as the persons-they-are and also as members of groups. Part of the way people get to be the persons-they-are is by picking up the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings of the groups they belong to, by being like others around them.
- Some groups are pretty clearly defined in most people's thinking: males, females, Latinos, blacks, whites, Asians, poor, rich, gay, straight. But even though these categories seem rigid in our culture, they are often more fluid in particular people's experiences.
- People should be able to form purposeful, emotionally significant connections with others--in other groups and in their own group. Individuals can choose many of the groups they identify with. We are members of a gender group, a racial group, and a class group, but many of us have complex, overlapping memberships even in those categories.
- We also choose to be members of other groups that overlap those categories. We may be members of the group "joggers" along with people from other gender, race, and class groups. We can act to make our lives better as joggers, without being divided by our differences.

Power

- When one group gets more money, more political offices, more control of media, more control of institutions like schools and churches, more chances to make decisions that affect other people's lives, they have more power.
- The group that has more power gets its perspective accepted as if it's the only way things could ever be.

- Because of money, control of the military, control of police, and control of information, groups in power can force others to accept their point of view, or at least force them to pretend to.
- Changes in power relationships can only occur through the work of groups.
- Because groups can change things, talking about people only as individuals helps to keep power relations just as they are.

Fairness/ Justice

- People should have similar chances to have a happy life.
- No people should have to struggle too much just to keep their bodies healthy. No particular group should be more physically vulnerable to harm or deprivation than any other group.
- Being smaller, in size or number, should not reduce someone's chances of pursuing happiness.
- More powerful groups should not get in the way of less powerful groups' going after their purposes (assuming the less powerful groups' purposes do not include the oppression of some other groups).
- People should be heard, known, and understood by others in their group as well as members of other groups.
- People who hurt others or keep them from living fully should make it up to them. This applies to individuals as well as groups.
- Members of stronger groups should care about and work for the interests of more vulnerable groups.
- Other people's pain should always be significant to people, even if the other people are from a different race, gender, class, nationality, or set of beliefs.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL READING

- **Is this story fair?**
- **How does this text address the points of view (perspectives) of other groups, especially those who usually don't get to tell their side?**
- **How does this text make you think about justice in the world?**
- **Whose perspective is missing in this text? What would it be like if we put it back?**
- **How does this text deal with individuals and groups? Are the people acting alone and in competition with one another, or does the text help us imagine people working together?**
- **How does money figure in this text?**
- **Are there groups you belong to in this text? What do they look like here? If your own groups are missing, what would they say if they were in the book?**

- **What really hard things are happening in this text? Are these things happening in the world now? Where?**
- **How different are people allowed to be in this text? Does it assume everyone is happy and good in the same ways?**
- **If the character in your book has problems, can you see how those problems are about having or not having money, struggling with others for power, or being cheated or helped by society's rules?**
- **Who has "power" in your text? How does that power get shown?**
- **Where do you notice yourself resisting the book, the characters, or the author? What does your resistance say about the book, and what does it say about you?**
- **How does this book help you think about social issues you care about or causes you are committed to?**