**ENGLISH 233X**
**Literature & Cognition**

Recent research in cognitive science has demonstrated that literary study exercises three cognitive faculties that are essential in everyday life. Any core literature course (ENGL 2332, 2333, 2334, 2335) can increase its interdisciplinary relevance by identifying and specifically exercising these faculties.

### 1. NARRATIVE LITERACY

The recognition that a narrative consists of selected and interpreted information.

**We think in narratives.**

“A script is a set of expectations about what will happen next in a well-understood situation. In a sense, many situations in life have the people who participate in them seemingly reading their roles in a kind of play.”

Roger Schank, (1990) *Tell Me a Story: Narrative and Intelligence*

**We communicate through narratives.**

But narratives are not reality.

**The Narrative Fallacy:** “the inability to look at sequences of facts without weaving an explanation into them. Explanations bind facts together. They make them all the more easily remembered; they help them make more sense. Where this propensity can go wrong is when it increases our impression of understanding.”

Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007)

*The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*

### 2. METAPHOR LITERACY

The recognition of the image schemata that structure our perception and cognition.

**We translate complex and abstract phenomena into tangible metaphors.**

- 1. Ideas are objects
- 2. Linguistic expressions are containers
- 3. Communication is sending

“Because the metaphorical concept is systematic, the language we use to talk about that aspect of the concept is systematic. ... The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept, a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor.”

Lakoff & Johnson (1980)

*Metaphors We Live By*

### 3. THEORY-OF-MIND

The understanding of what other minds perceive, how they interpret those perceptions, and how they are likely to respond.

**Other people don’t always think the way we think they think.**

“Having a Theory of Mind means being able to understand what another individual is thinking, to ascribe beliefs, desires, fears and hopes to someone else, and to believe that they really do experience those feelings as mental states.”


“Our contention is that literary fiction...uniquely engages the psychological processes needed to gain access to characters’ subjective experiences. ... Readers of literary fiction must draw on more flexible interpretive resources to infer the feelings and thoughts of characters. That is, they must engage Theory-of-Mind processes.”


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**How to develop it:**

- Identify information gaps. What is the narrator NOT telling us? What do we fill in and where does that information come from?
- Compare alternative narratives that tell the same story.
- Create alternative narratives using information included in the original text.

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**Social Network Analysis**

- **Sociogram:** a map of the social network represented in a text. Each character creates a node in the network and is connected to certain others by alliance, kinship, communication, feud, etc.

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**Molière, Tartuffe (1664)**

-Dorine knows that Orgon doesn’t know that Tartuffe is deceiving him, and he won’t believe anyone else’s warning, so she convinces Elmire to fool Tartuffe into believing that she wants him so that Orgon can catch Tartuffe in the act of seducing his wife.


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