

An Introduction to Psychoanalytic Criticism

Sigmund Freud is the author of the structural model of personality. In this theory, Freud explains that each person's personality is formed of three parts: the **Ego**, the **Superego** and the **Id**. Psychoanalysis is the process of using what we know about these three parts of someone's personality to analyze the ways that person behaves.

Literary critics sometimes analyze the actions of literary characters using the three personality structures that Freud identified. As critics explore the ego, superego, and id of characters in a work, they focus on the ways that these parts of the characters' personalities influence the work as a whole. This process is called psychoanalytic criticism.

In the next activity, you will use Freud's theory to analyze the characters in *The Cat In The Hat* by Dr. Seuss. To help prepare you for this activity, read the following explanations for id, ego, and superego.

Id

The id is the part of the personality that contains our primitive impulses—such as thirst, anger, hunger—and the desire for instant gratification or release. According to Freud, we are born with our id. The id is an important part of our personality because as newborns, it allows us to get our basic needs met. Freud believed that the id is based on our pleasure principle. The id wants whatever feels good at the time, with no consideration for the other circumstances of the situation. The id is sometimes represented by a devil sitting on someone's shoulder. As this devil sits there, he tells the ego to base behavior on how the action will influence the self, specifically how it will bring the self pleasure.

Superego

The superego is the part of the personality that represents the conscience, the moral part of us. The superego develops due to the moral and ethical restraints placed on us by our caregivers. It dictates our belief of right and wrong. The superego is sometimes represented by an angel sitting on someone's shoulder, telling the ego to base behavior on how the action will influence society.

Ego

The ego is the part of the personality that maintains a balance between our impulses (our id) and our conscience (our superego). The ego is based on the reality principle. The ego understands that other people have needs and desires and that sometimes being impulsive or selfish can hurt us in the end. It is the ego's job to meet the needs of the id, while taking into consideration the reality of the situation. The ego works, in other words, to balance the id and superego. The ego is represented by a person, with a devil (the id) on one shoulder and an angel (the superego) on the other.