**Marxist Critical Lens**

→ How does **money** matter/function in this exhibit?
→ How does a power system matter/function in this exhibit?

Named after Karl Marx but not promoting communism, this lens helps us examine how socioeconomic factors influence the characters, plot, setting, reader/viewer, author/maker, **time period**, or any other aspect of an exhibit.

From Dr. Patrick Hicks at Augustana College: Maybe talk about "economic geography" in addition to Marxist Theory? It’s good to remind students that geography isn’t just about physical space, but mental space as well. Where are the poor situated in these novels? Why? How are families units also financial units? If nations have borders, don't the rich and poor as well? We all know where the "the other side of the tracks" is but who decided where to put the tracks?

**What Marxist critics do:**
- Make a division between the “overt” (manifest or surface) and “covert” (latent or hidden) content of a literary work
- Relate the context of a work to the social-class status of the author
- Explain the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of the social period which “produced” it
- Relate the literary work to the social assumptions of the time in which it is “consumed” (or read, viewed...)
- Look for symbols that create or reveal an
  1. “individual versus exploitive system” theme
  2. “oppressive culture” theme
  3. “individual as dehumanized, mechanized, roboticized, zombiefied—only serving the larger cause; only producing for ‘greater good’” theme
- Evaluate the systems of, in, around, about, near the exhibit

**Questions Marxist Critics Ask:**
1. How do social classes interact with each other? Is there greed?
2. Do any characters climb the “social/economic ladder”? Why? How?
3. Is a system oppressive to its members? Does the system exploit its members?
4. Are there social tensions? Are the ruling classes happy? Are the lower classes miserable? Or, are the lower classes actually happier because they are not as oppressed by their upper/ruling class rigid rule system?
5. Are the lower/working classes exploited? Does capitalism have a conscience concerning its citizens who are helpless, hopeless, powerless?
6. Are characters given more/less freedom by their class?
7. Are any of the characters “suffocated” by their class rules, codes, & costs?
8. How do “uppers”/“winners” flaunt or exploit their wealth or power?

**Key Terms** in Marxist Literary Theory:
- base
- superstructure
- proletariat
- bourgeoisie
- class
- interpellation
- class mobility
- oppression
- ideology
- ideological state apparatus
- meritocracy
- money = power, influence, freedom, happiness, opportunity