

Confronting Evil in Life and Literature

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INTRODUCTION

This semester unit will provide eleventh and twelfth grade English students a safe forum to view, read, evaluate, discuss and write about some of the visual and auditory fictional and real evil images they encounter daily. Recent newsworthy events including ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and tragic untimely deaths at Columbine High in Colorado reinforce the need for intellectual discussion of psychological, philosophical and religious aspects of demonic behavior emitting from civilized beings. “There is no why here....What if the most important question about evil is not why people do it? What if the most important question is why the world is as it is in the first place, so that evil exists in it, so that there are people who take pleasure in destruction, people like you and me?....Good guys can kill you, blow off your legs” (Alford 120-21).

Focus One

Teenagers want answers to complicated questions. To say, “Evil just is....” (140) frustrates juniors and seniors and motivates them to debate and prove various reasons for heinous behavior in human beings. Questions from Alford’s “The Written Questionnaire” (161-62) seem appropriate unit initiators for students:

- Does evil exist? How do you know?
- What is your definition of evil?
- Why do you think there is evil in the world? Has there always been? Will there always be? Where does it come from?
- Have you ever experienced evil in your own life? How?
- Are some people evil? Have you ever done evil?
- What is the best or most powerful story you have ever read about evil? The best book? The best movie?
- What is the single most important thing about evil?

Once students begin to contemplate these questions, they will read the selected works with more awareness of why ordinary people engage in extraordinary evil. High school students perceive themselves as lovers, jocks, athletes, models, vegetarians, mechanics, computer specialists and intellectuals—not demons, maniacs, murderers or monsters. As Alford further explains, “We fail to respect evil when we mix judgment with explanation...Evil is human, the poisoned gift we pass among ourselves and down the generations” (141).

Perhaps studying the psychological make-up of fictional and real Grendel-like individuals will help to guard against “Evil communications corrupting good dispositions,” and prevent out youth from “The greatest penalty of evil doing—namely growing into the likeness of bad men” (128). A follow-up assignment will require students to keep dialectical journals and respond to various philosophers and writers ideas about evil.

Focus Two

Through library research, seminar discussions analysis of essays, articles and case studies and close readings of appropriate literary works, students will begin to individually define evil and decipher motivational tendencies of non-fictional and author-created characters. Guches states in *Sequel: A Handbook for the Critical Analysis of Literature* that serious readers need “At least a rudimentary understanding of Freud’s basic tenets to be at all perceptive about literature written during this century” (133). In order to effectively engage in the psychological analysis of characters such as Claudius, Chillingworth and Heathcliff, students will review Sigmund Freud’s assertions that:

- most human beings mental processes occur in the unconscious mind
- the psyche, which controls human actions, is organized into three zones: id, ego, and superego
- dreams are manifestations of the unconscious mind
- infantile behavior is basically erotic
- neurosis is closely related to creativity (135).

Also, as students read and discuss *Hamlet*, they will examine the assertion that, “according to Freudian theory, Hamlet’s antisocial behavior may be attributed to repressions, fixations, and complexes” (139). One assignment will ask students to find textual evidence supporting this classic psychological analysis of Hamlet. An additional unit assignment will require students to identify characters from *Hamlet* and *Things Fall Apart* that mirror Freud’s psychic zones: id, ego and superego.

Focus Three

Another aspect of the unit will require that students research and explore some aspects of Dr. Freeland’s handout, “Evil: A Map of the Terrain,” which suggests the kinds of evil: religious, natural, human and cosmic; types of explanations of evil: religious, philosophical, historical, anthropological and psychological; ways of addressing evil: deny, condemn, endorse, transform, accept, understand, forgive, embrace or be entertained by it; and exemplary cases of evil: people, types of people, situations, events, stories, pictures, places and things (See Appendix). Also, students will examine the unit’s core works and categorize the kinds and types of evil the characters exemplify. The map will also help

students interpret and analyze self-selected articles and cases of vengeful murderers as they compare and contrast the motives of real and fictional villains. Additionally, these activities will aid in helping students gradually formulate and clarify their personal definitions of evil.

Focus Four

Guches adds that the significance of a work of art may well lie in its universality—its appeal to all peoples regardless of time or culture. He further suggests that critical readers should be able to identify a selection’s universal elements because the archetypal elements lead to a deeper understanding of a work’s value and enhances readers’ critical abilities by requiring them to probe the mythic origins of symbols, imagery, and situations that suggest recurrent human circumstances (143). As students, individually and in groups, research, choose, review and analyze news stories, court cases, movies and other media, they will become poignantly aware of how frequently real life incidents mirror fictional horror stories. As they interact with guest writers and psychologists, students will understand the thought processes of real and fictional evildoers. Hence, as the unit progresses, students will dissect core works, write psychological and archetypal analysis papers and produce research based projects that will further clarify their concepts of evil.

Objectives:

Students will:

- *explore and analyze the idea of evil in specified works
- *connect literature to historical contexts, current events, and their own experiences
- *interpret the possible influences of the historical context on a literary work
- *understand literary forms and terms
- *evaluate text through critical analysis
- *read varied sources such as diaries, journals, textbooks, maps, newspapers, letters, speeches, memoranda, electronic texts, and other media
- *read American, British, and other world literature, including classic and contemporary works
- *compile written ideas and representations into reports, summaries, or other formats and draw conclusion
- *compile information from primary and secondary sources using available technology to examine the theme of evil in literature and real life
- *formulate questions, refine topics, and clarify ideas about evil
- *discover, record, review and learn how the writers address evil in their works

STRATEGY: KEY WORKS AND RATIONALE

Each grouping of literary selections represents some common thread that connects the works.

Genesis/Beowulf/Prologue to the Canterbury Tales/Pardoner's Tale

The first group (*Genesis/Beowulf/Prologue to the Canterbury Tales/Pardoner's Tale*) deals with the corruption of man and takes us from the classical period of literature to the Medieval Age. In *Genesis* the fall of man occurs along with the inherent conflict between the brothers, Cain and Abel. Cain, the seed of the fallen man and woman, is referenced in *Beowulf* as being the predecessor of Grendel, the monster, who, according to the narrator, has been terrorizing the land for twelve long years. In the section of the epic entitled "The Coming of Grendel," Grendel is referred to as "that demon" who was "spawned in that slime, conceived by a pair of those monsters born of Cain, murderous creatures banished by God, punished forever for the crime of Abel's death." Several other descriptions depict Grendel as one having a "lust for evil" and a "greed for power." Grendel who seems to represent evil is set in opposition to Beowulf who represents good.

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales introduces the reader to a host of characters from Medieval England. Chaucer takes care to introduce a cross-section of citizens who are on a journey to visit the shrine of Thomas à Beckett. Among these are those who are less admirable, corrupt, and greedy religious persons who take advantage of the innocent or behave in immoral ways. David Williams, author of *The Canterbury Tales: A Literary Pilgrimage*, says, "To the medieval thinker (and Chaucer, of course, was one of them) human experience is an intellectual and moral journey toward the source of being called God." That theme is further explored in "The Pardoner's Tale" in which the pardoner launches into a sermon using as his text: "Radix malorum est cupiditas," or "Greed is the root of all evil." Students will explore the theme of good versus evil in these works as well as the question of what motivates a character and/or person to commit evil deeds and take advantage of others.

Hamlet/Things Fall Apart

The second literary grouping depicts two protagonists whose "time is out of joint." These are closely intertwined tragedies, the personal tragedies of Okonkwo and young Hamlet and the public tragedies of the eclipse of their cultures by the invasion of other persons as well as countries. The two are fused at the end when the death of both protagonists is shown to be part of a greater fracturing. The line that "things fall apart; the center cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" from W. B. Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming," aptly illustrates the confusion and evil that exist in both worlds and reflects the internal turmoil that both men experience.

Wuthering Heights/Scarlet Letter

The third grouping of literary works focuses on two characters who seek revenge because they feel they have been unjustly mistreated by others. Both Heathcliff and Chillingworth are extremely complex, enigmatic, and often unpredictable, driven men who seem to function according to some inner dictum. Their obsessive love for a woman and hatred and vengeance for other characters cloud all logical reasoning and results in destructive and manipulative behavior. Readers tend to sympathize with both characters because, in a sense, both men are victims of uncontrollable circumstances.

Medea/Beloved

The fourth literary grouping explores a world “.....polluted by eruptions of humanly created evil....which cares nothing for humans who care nothing for one another....resulting in deliberately created deaths” (Alford 29). Though produced in separate social contexts, two disillusioned mothers, Medea and Sethe, resort to infanticide, an extraordinary evil action. Aristotle states that “tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of actions - of life, of happiness and unhappiness.” Tragedy cannot subsist without action. *Medea*, set in classical Greece, and *Beloved*, set in the antebellum South, show persons neither eminently virtuous or just, nor yet involved in misfortune by deliberate vice or villainy, but by some error of human frailty.

ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments may be used with works at the teacher’s discretion. Please feel free to make modifications as needed.

Assignment - *Genesis, Beowulf, Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* and “The Pardoner’s Tale”

Media Literacy - Locate news articles about corruption in religion. Consider such persons as Jimmy Swaggart, Jimmy Baker, and Leonard Lyons. Write an abstract of the news article and discuss the evil that you find associated with these individuals.

Assignment - *Hamlet* and *Things Fall Apart*

Part I: Listen to the speaker who is a writer and take notes as he/she discusses the development of characters with evil tendencies.

Part II: Identify characters from the two works that mirror Freud’s psychic zones: id, ego, and superego. For the example of how to complete this activity, go to www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/post/achebe/things.html.

Assignment - *Wuthering Heights* and *The Scarlet Letter*

Part I: Listen to the psychologist/psychiatrist who is invited by the teacher as he/she discusses the causes and effects of dysfunctional or abnormal violent behavior. (Note: Most school districts employ psychologists and/or psychiatrists to work with students experiencing personal problems. In our district these individuals have readily volunteered to speak to our classes.) Take thorough notes and ask questions that will help you to analyze three case studies dealing with the theme of revenge. Again note possible motivations and any recurrent actions that are prevalent among the individuals involved.

Assignment - *Medea* and *Beloved*

Media Literacy - Research similar stories in the media dealing with mothers or fathers who have killed their children such as Susan Smith, Darly Routier, etc. Analyze what motivated these persons to take these actions and the effects on their families and on them.

Assignment - Analyze Evil

Project: In groups of four to six students, find examples of evil in music, art, dance, literature and other mediums. In a well-developed, documented essay, analyze the treatment and impact of evil in our society today. Each member of the group is responsible for an individually written essay along with the group assignment. Each group should concentrate on a particular time period in history such as the Medieval Period or the Sixties and bring examples of each art form to class to use in the group's presentation. In addition, the group should prepare a typed handout with pertinent information for each student in the class.

Assignment - Test Alford's Theory of Evil

Using notes about evil from Alford and other philosophers, find textual evidence from the assigned literary work that would support that statement. Then write commentary explaining how the textual evidence supports the quote. Below are examples of a quote from Alford and textual evidence from *Beloved*.

Evil is pleasure in hurting and lack of remorse. (21)

“One thing she did do. She picked me up and carried me behind the smoke-house. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, ‘This is your ma’am. This,’ and she pointed, ‘I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can’t tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.’” (76)

“Hung. By the time they cut her down nobody could tell whether she had a circle and a cross or not, least of all me and I did look.” (76)

Evil is an experience of dread. Doing evil is an attempt to evacuate this experience by inflicting it on others, making them feel dreadful by hurting them (3).

“...straight into a pool of red and undulating light that locked in where he stood.” (10)

Dread is not the whole of evil, possibly not even the most important part, but it is its ground: the dread of being human, vulnerable, alone in the universe, and doomed to die (3).

“It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open.” (139)

Kant defined “radical” evil as destruction of the grounds of moral action (143). This can be on a scale, from the everyday to the magnitude of the Holocaust (24).

“Sixty Million and more” (the dedication)

Evil is not a mental illness. It is both a psychological and a moral problem. (14-15).

“It’s not evil, just sad.” (10)

“Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don’t study war no more. Lay all the mess down. Sword and shield.” (105)

“Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another.” (116)

Evil is created and maintained in a discourse about it. It is a discourse worth continuing, for without evil the world becomes meaningless and inexplicable, out of balance.

“See how he liked it; see what happened when you overbeat creatures God had given you the responsibility of -- the trouble it was, and the loss ... you just can’t mishandle creatures and expect success.” (185)

“It was not a story to pass on.” (336, 337)

“This is not a story to pass on.” (337)

“**The Holocaust** was done. It did not just happen. It happened in our world we were born under the horizon of its history. To live, to be human, is above all to be a victim: a victim of circumstances, a victim of fate. A victim of life.”

“It’s gonna hurt, now” said Amy. “Anything dead coming back to life hurts.”(43)

“Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don’t know her name?” (360)

“There is a type in the world; it’s not human justice; a **wrong** was done and the wrong doer is punished.” It’s more akin to natural law. For every action there is an opposite reaction (134).

Assignment - Kinds of Evil

Using the handout, “Evil: A Map of the Terrain,” find the types that apply to the assigned work that you are reading; provide textual evidence and commentary for each. Use the example below as a guide.

A Map of Evil Applied to Morrison’s *Beloved*

Kinds of Evil

Religious: Rebellion against divine laws (sin, heresy, apostasy).

Human: Human cruelty, law-breaking (war, slavery, genocide, murder).

Types of Explanations of Evil

Religious: Within a particular religious framework (sin, suffering).

- *sin: 1. The enslavement and brutal treatment of slaves in *Beloved*. The overseer, schoolteacher, brutally beat and rape the slaves at Sweethome.

The second commandment says to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

2. The killing of *Beloved* - Sethe decides that she does not want her children to be raised as slaves and treated inhumanely.

The fourth commandment says that one should not kill.

Philosophical: Vice, badness, wickedness, opposite of law and virtues (beatings, rape, murder, indentured servants).

Historical: Descriptions of major events or types of situations (American slavery).

Psychological: Social or individual accounts of why evil occurs in people (Baby Suggs' sermon that one must love him/herself).

Exemplary Cases of Evil

People (Schoolteacher)

Types of people (slave-owners, slave-batterers, slave-abusers)

Situations (personal, social) (slavery, suicide, murder)

Events (Middle Passage and Slavery in America)

Stories (*Beloved*)

Pictures (*Black Book* and *Middle Passage*)

Places, things (Sweet Home, 124 Blue Stone, *Beloved*)

Assignment: Seminar on Evil

Students will conduct a seminar based on assigned reading, using the following guidelines. The teacher will prepare the seminar question(s).

The seminar method allows for reading closely, thinking and listening carefully, speaking meaningfully and to the point, making connections among ideas. Participants are asked to apply the knowledge that they have learned and to share this knowledge with others who have studied the same selection(s). The moderator (teacher) will introduce the subject, present the discussion question, monitor the students' progress, keep the topic on track, and sum up the findings at the conclusion of the discussion.

ORGANIZATION

1. The seminar will take place over a period of two consecutive class periods.
2. The class will be divided into two groups. On the first day, one group will listen and observe the other. On the second day, those who have been participants will observe the other group. Each observer will be assigned to monitor the comments of one participant and to document the observation on a prescribed written form.
3. Participants will introduce themselves at the beginning of the discussion.
4. A copy of the discussion question will be provided for both participants and observers.

5. Absence from seminar participation and observation cannot be made up.

PARTICIPANTS

1. Bring reading/study/preparation notes, text of seminar selection(s). Plan to quote both from critical information and from primary text.
2. Read the question carefully. Keep it before you for easy and frequent reference during the discussion. Take a few minutes and think about the question and how you might respond. Remember, silence is acceptable. Take time to organize your thoughts.
3. Feel free to take quick notes during the discussion.
4. Avoid making glib remarks to cover a lack of adequate preparation for the seminar. They may lead away from relevant issues or to a concentration on an irrelevant point.
5. Turn in all notes at the end of your discussion.
6. During the course of the dialogue, participants are expected to
 - Think before you speak and speak to the point.
 - Listen with care to the development of the discussion.
 - Actively participate in the discussion.
 - Use textual evidence and ask other speakers to do the same.
 - Be able to provide support for every assertion you make.
 - Avoid repetition of ideas.
 - Keep the conversation on track and when it is not, attempt to lead the group back to the issue at hand.
 - Avoid interrupting when another student is speaking. (Rather than interrupt, make a quick written note.)
 - Disagree and offer a counter view when appropriate.

EVALUATION

The participant's work will be judged according to:

- Quality of remarks (documented, supported, relevant).
- Frequency of remarks.
- Variety of remarks.
- Attentiveness to issues.
- Attentiveness to proceedings.
- Use of critical information; use of textual evidence.

The observer's log will be judged according to:

- Clarity, thoroughness of comments.

Resources for Students

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1958.

This novel, with its title drawn from W. B. Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming," explores the destruction of the indigenous Nigerian culture by British colonization at the turn of the century. It concerns Okonkwo, a village leader, whose inflexible adherence to tradition cannot withstand the influence of white missionaries.

Bronze, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. New York: Doubleday and Son, 1972.

The owner of Wuthering Heights brings home a waif whom he adopts and calls Heathcliff; this arouses a fierce resentment of his own son Handel, and it is only with the daughter Catherine that Heathcliff has a human relationship and falls in love. He is mistreated by Handel and spends the rest of his life exacting revenge.

Euripides. *Medea*. New York. Random House, 1978.

This play is a classical tragedy in which Medea, the daughter of the king of Colchis, possessor the Golden Fleece, helped Jason, her husband, to steal it. Jason abandons her for Glauce, and in revenge Medea destroys her own two children.

Good News Bible. New York: American Bible Society, 1976. *Genesis*, Chapters 1-4.

(Note: Any version of the Bible may be used.)

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *Scarlet Letter*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962.

Set in Puritan America, Hester Prynne is pregnant for someone other than her husband and is punished and treated as an outcast.

Ketch, William and et al., eds. *Beowulf*. In *Adventures in English Literature*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, Incorporated, 1989.

This epic poem deals with key events in the life of a sixth century warrior, Beowulf, from Geatland who first kills the monster Grendel who has been terrorizing the Danes for 12 long years, then slays Grendel's mother, and a fiery dragon.

Ketch, William and et al., eds. Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* and "The Pardoner's Tale" by Geoffrey Chaucer. In *Adventures in English Literature*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, Incorporated, 1989.

The General Prologue details the journey 31 pilgrims who represent a cross-section of Medieval society and are bound for the shrine of Thomas a Bucket at Canterbury. "The Pardoner's Tale" theme is 'covetousness is the root of all evil' but the maxim is graphically illustrated in his tale of the three 'writers' who set out to kill Death who has killed one of their companions. They meet a mysterious man on their quest, who directs them to a spot where they might find Death, but when they arrive they simply

find a pile of gold. As a result of their plotting to cheat each other out of their shares of the gold, all three are killed.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Penguin Books, USA Incorporated, 1987.

Beloved is the story of Sethe, a slave, who decides to kill her children rather than see them returned to a brutal life of slavery. She only succeeds in killing the baby named Beloved and is haunted by her for years before Paul D, a former Sweethome slave, who has strong feelings for Sethe returns and attempts to rid the home of the ghost.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Hamlet is a tragedy in which Claudius, young Hamlet's uncle, murders his brother, King Hamlet, to be crowned king and to marry his brother's wife. The ghost tells young Hamlet to seek revenge so that his soul may rest. Hamlet is somewhat hesitant to take action but eventually does.

Resources for Teachers

Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery video series. PBS by WGBH Boston 1998. Part I: The Terrible Transformation, Part II: Revolution, Part III: Brotherly Love, Part IV: Judgment Day. AFRA-104. 90 minutes each.

This series takes viewers on a journey through the birth of America - from Jamestown in 1607 to the start of the Civil War in 1861 - and shows the dramatic impact of the struggle over slavery and freedom in shaping the country.

Alford, C. Fred. *What Evil Means to Us*. Cornell University Press, 1997.

The writer explores the nature, causes, and effects of evil as he prompts the readers to develop their own definitions of evil as they journey with him through several in-depth analyses.

Amistad video. Dream Works. THX Digitally Mastered VHS 83655. Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA. 1998. 2:32 (time for viewing).

This video details the story of Cinque and other Africans who had been captured by the Spanish and taken on a voyage to be sold in Cuba but rebel and take over the ship.

Andrews, William L. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

This work is an important collection of seven key documents and criticism concerning Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* which the editors consider to be the best critical studies available. In addition, other historical documents relating to the incident fictionalized in *Beloved* - the slave mother Margaret Garner's murder of her child to save her from slavery are included. It concludes with a "Conversation" among three Morrison scholars about the meaning and impact of *Beloved*.

Easterling, P.E. “*The Infanticide in Euripides’ Medea,*” YCS 25 (1977) 177-91.

This article gives an interesting perspective on the motives of Medea’s murdering her children and may be used to stimulate students’ critical thinking and dialogue.

Eisenstat, Marilyn. *Hamlet*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

This text is excellent for students, for it provides them with an approach that aims both to help and to challenge them. Included are opportunities for students to explore ideas or personal experiences similar to those they will read about. Short scene summaries are given at the beginning of each scene which assist students and help them understand plot developments. In addition, journal entries and critical thinking questions are included.

Guches, Richard. *Sequel: A Handbook for the Critical Analysis of Literature*. Palo Alto, CA: T.H. Peek Publishers, 1991.

This works offer many practical activities and assignments to help students analyze, discuss, and respond to literary selections.

Harris, Middleton and et al. *The Black Book*. New York: Random House, 1974.

This book is a compilation of newspaper articles, old family photos, trading cards, advertisements, letters, handbills, dreambooks, and posters which chronicle many events of Africans and their descendants in this country. Morrison was editing this book when she came across the story of Margaret Garner.

“An Interview with Toni Morrison” video. Journal Graphics. Charlie Rose Show #1009. February 17, 1994. 60 minutes.

This video begins with Toni Morrison’s Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 Acceptance Speech. Charlie Rose engages Morrison about the development of her characters, setting, and plot.

Lindfors, Bernth, ed. *Teaching Things Fall Apart*. New York: Modern Language Association, 1991.

This book contains a wide selection of pedagogical approaches to the novel, with a specially commissioned article by Achebe himself, who initially disclaimed the right to be included as he had never taught the novel.

Nicholson, Lewis, ed. *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.

This work offers various critical essays analyzing themes and providing critical analysis of the epic.

Ogilvy, J.D. and D.C. Baker. *Reading Beowulf*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983.

This text presents strategies that assist teachers in providing various approaches to the teaching of the epic.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Origin of Satan*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Pagels attempts to show the difference between good and evil by professing “the worst evil of all is to say that neither good nor evil is anything in itself, but that they are only matters of human opinion” (122).

“Profile of a Writer: Toni Morrison” video. RM Arts. Home Vision. 1987 LWT. (800) 826-3456.

Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison has firmly established herself as one of the nation’s finest novelists. In this thought-provoking program, Morrison discusses slavery and its appalling legacy with an approach that is at once warm, generous, intelligent, and knowledgeable. The author elaborates on the challenges of dealing with such painful material and of writing about ordinary people whose experiences seem monumentally larger than life.

Thomas, Lawrence. *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

The author compares the evils of these distinct institutions, American slavery and the Jewish Holocaust, to see how these evil experiences influence the futures of the people affected.

Wren, Robert M. *Achebe’s World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1980.

Wren’s text, with a chapter entitled “The ‘Pacification’ of Umuofia: *Things Fall Apart*,” provides anthropological and historical context for Achebe’s fiction.

Wolff, Robert Paul. *About Philosophy*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995.

In this work, the author addresses philosophical problems, theories, and personalities and presents philosophy as an activity with which sensible, intelligent people would want to engage. He attempts to help the readers to understand why philosophers said it, why they felt compelled to think about their moral, scientific, religious, or logical problems as they did.

<http://web.uvic.ca/grs/bowman/Medea.html>

This website offers a plethora of teacher and student resources including study questions, assignments, summaries of acts, and projects that will enrich this Greek drama experience.

APPENDIX

Evil: A Map of the Terrain

Dr. Cynthia Freeland

Kinds of Evil (What is evil? How is it defined?)

Religious: Rebellion against divine laws (sin, heresy, apostasy).

Natural: Something unnatural, abominable (cancer, earthquakes, leprosy).

Human: Human cruelty, law-breaking (war, slavery, genocide, murder).

Cosmic: A distortion or mistake on the level of the universe (Zoroastrianism? Black holes? The Bomb? Horror in stories by Poe, King, Hawthorne, Barker, Hoffmann?)

Types of Explanations of Evil

Religious: Within a particular religious framework (sin, *himsa*, suffering).

Philosophical: Vice, badness, wickedness, opposite of law and virtues.

Historical: Descriptions of major events or types of situations.

Anthropological: Comparative studies of how cultures define it.

Psychological: Social or individual accounts of why evil occurs in people.

Ways of Addressing Evil

Deny it.

Condemn it.

Combat it.

Endorse it (transvalue it and redefine it as good).

Transform it (turn it toward good).

Accept it (tragedy, cynicism, hopelessness).

Be vanquished by it.

Understand it (empathize, sympathize, be seduced by it).

Forgive it.

Enjoy it.

Exemplary Cases of Evil

People (Hitler, Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll, Dracula, etc.).

Types of People (slave-owners, Nazis, Inquisitors, colonialists, wife-batterers, child abusers).

Situations (personal, social) (slavery, genocide, murder, racism, hate crimes).

Events (The Holocaust, the Lisbon earthquake, the Exxon Valdez disaster, American slavery).

Stories (*The Heart of Darkness*, *Paradise Lost*, *Frankenstein*, *Faust*, etc.)

Pictures (paintings by Goya, Bosch, etc.).

Places, things (spooky dark forests, rugged mountains, things with “auras,” etc.).

(Used with permission from Dr. Cynthia Freeland, a professor of philosophy at the University of Houston.)