

## A Unit of Virtue

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### INTRODUCTION

During his trial, Socrates, as recorded by Plato in *The Apology*, says, “A man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or bad.” This unit attempts to implement Socrates’ appeal by impelling students to intently examine two questions which deal with “doing right:” *What is virtue?* and *Why should we act virtuously?* These are very difficult questions, and I don’t expect students to formulate final answers, but I do expect them to try to answer them and, as a result, develop intellectually and begin an exploration of ethics that will foster and guide them for the rest of their lives.

When a person grapples with what is virtue and why he should act virtuously, he becomes self-directed. Instead of responding emotionally, he reflects and makes thoughtful decisions. Since he has a vision of what he wants to be, he strives to control himself and lead himself in that direction. Therefore, when my students and I struggle to define virtue and consider why we should act virtuously, we will examine our society, our relationships, and ourselves and hopefully, make alterations. Our greater awareness and self-control will make our lives more meaningful and fulfilling.

Since I plan to use this unit with high school seniors, it will be an auspicious step into the adult world. In a short time, the restraints of childhood will be released, and they will have more independence than they have ever had: some will be away at college, some will be at a military base, some will live in an apartment, and even those who stay at home will be less restrained than they have been before. Consequently, they can choose to either live according to their desires, or they can take control of their lives and make thoughtful decisions. This unit will encourage them to do the latter, for they will intensely examine philosophies of ethics and formulate an individual philosophy of ethics that applies to their lives.

Besides these personal objectives, this unit will cultivate many academic objectives. The students will read sophisticated literature and mature intellectually. As they critically judge literature, philosophical texts, and theories of justice, they will develop their ability to analyze, synthesize, and infer. They will apply abstract concepts to actual life. They will rationally duel with each other about ethical issues. When they write, they will learn to support their conclusions with reasons and evidence and create a rational argument. They will closely examine texts, extract what supports their case, and either summarize or quote. Consequently, they will learn how to use quotes, reference them, and interpret

them. They will embellish their writing with imagery and metaphors. They will cultivate their narrative voice and refine their writing style by using parallelism, sentence variation, and other tools of rhetoric. They will utilize the writing process by formulating notes and an outline, roughly composing a first draft, and revising it to a refined final draft.

In short, this unit will develop students ethically, intellectually, and scholastically.

## OVERVIEW

In this unit, I will present my students with literature: fiction and nonfiction, which grapples with two main questions: *What is virtuous behavior?* and *Why should we strive to act virtuously?* The first question entails the definition of justice: *Is virtue what the majority of people think? Is virtue what the Bible or other religious text declares? Is virtue what will benefit the most people?* The second question entails the justification of acting virtuously: *Why should we strive to act virtuously when it makes our life burdensome and, in some cases, dangerous? Would it not be better attain profit, power, and comfort at the expense of others? Since our lives span but a few years and we may die at any time, why not seek as much pleasure as we can, regardless of the pain we cause to others?* These are the types of questions that will be raised as we struggle to define and justify virtuous behavior.

To activate our study of virtue, we will read an excerpt from *Book II* of Plato's *Republic*, "The Ring of Gyges." In this story, a shepherd finds a ring that enables him to make become invisible. The shepherd, subsequently, uses the ring to seduce the queen, plot with her against the king, kill him, and secure the throne. This story raises important questions, such as: *Is it right to use power to gain more power and wealth? Should one do wrong, such as commit murder, if it brings him power? Should one do right if it restrains one from becoming powerful?* and *What exactly is good behavior?*

Following our discussion of these questions, I will direct the students to formulate a tentative theory about virtue. Their theory will answer the questions: *What is virtuous behavior?* and *Should one try to act virtuously?* The students will store their theory in a notebook, and periodically, as we proceed through our unit and examine various theories of virtue, they will revise their theory in light of what they have learned.

A story that confronts the issue raised in "The Ring of Gyges," namely, expediency versus virtue, is Chekhov's "The Bet." In this story, a character endures fifteen years of imprisonment to win a large sum of money, but while imprisoned, he discovers that bliss does not originate from wealth but from the spirit; consequently, he forsakes the money. The story does not explicitly reveal why he renounces the money; the students will have to make an inference. Then they must consider his decision: *Is spiritual development more important than money and a wealthy lifestyle?* Through the course of the story, the students will make inferences about what is going on within the prisoner's mind by

pondering the books he reads and the amount of time he reads them. Chekhov tells us that the prisoner spends an entire year reading the Gospels. *Why? What does that reveal about the prisoner's state of mind? Why would such a short and apparently simple text engage this man for a year?* The conclusion of the story will easily stimulate discussion: *Was this man crazy for renouncing the money? Does money bring happiness? Does acting virtuously bring happiness?* The story, in a figurative sense, brings up the issue of reward and virtue. We, like the prisoner, are imprisoned in this world, and many of us think that if we serve our time properly, we will be rewarded. So the question I will ask my students is: "Is a person righteous if he acts righteously in order to attain a reward?"

We will proceed with our exploration of ethics by examining: *What is virtuous behavior?* We will scrutinize Kant's definition, expressed in the Categorical Imperative, taken from section two of *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, "Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysic of Morals." Do not be alarmed. We will not delve into any of Kant's complex philosophical discourses. We will examine four readable examples of Kant's Categorical Imperative. The text is on the Internet, but unfortunately, it is not paginated. The passage I am using begins approximately at paragraph 40 of section two of the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. This passage begins with the Categorical Imperative: "There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law." Before we proceed further, the students and I will paraphrase and interpret this sentence. Then we will read and examine Kant's four examples.

Kant's first example is about a man considering suicide. Kant says he must ask himself should there be a universal law that states that we should end our life because living brings more evil than satisfaction. Kant says no. "A system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself." Since the diction of this sentence is awkward, I will lead the students in paraphrasing it, and then I will raise a contradictory point, namely, "Is it better to live if living brings intense suffering? Should a person be obligated to live if it is certain she will not recover and she will die a lingering, painful death?" Another point I will raise is: "Should we be obligated to act as if our action will become a universal law? In other words, if, God forbid, my mother is dying a painful, lingering death, I am concerned with her, not humankind. I want to alleviate her suffering, and I don't care if it leads to a precedent for all of humankind." A third point I will raise is: "If an action cannot be made a universal law does that necessarily mean it is immoral?" In other words, cannot an action in one situation be evil, but in another situation be virtuous? For example, if I were living in Germany during the early stages of World War II and had a chance to kill Hitler, should I obey the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," and allow him to kill millions, or should I violate the sixth commandment and kill him and prevent the deaths of millions?

Kant's second example deals with a man in need of money who is considering making a false promise to repay the money. Kant explains that making it a universal law to falsely promise something would create havoc. For a "promise itself would become impossible" for everyone would think that the promise is a lie or "vain pretense." The students and I will discuss this as we did the first example, namely by interpreting his point and then examining situations that sharply challenge it. For example, if someone needs to borrow money to pay for his mother's operation and knows with a great amount of certainty that he will not be able to repay such a large sum of money, should he lie about repaying the loan so he can save his mother's life or should he not borrow the money and let his mother die?" At this point I will ask the students, "What is the principal flaw with Kant's Categorical Imperative? How well does it apply to individual situations?"

Kant's third example involves living a life of idleness and enjoyment. Kant says this attitude cannot become a universal law because every human being "as a rational being necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him." Again we will discuss what Kant means, and then I will ask, "Is there any problem with this theory?" One point I will bring out is: "Is it not true that many people who strive to learn and who work diligently to be successful have more stress than those who are complacent, who live a slow, meaningless life? Don't idle, lazy people enjoy life more than ambitious, hard working people?"

Kant's fourth example considers egotism. Kant says selfish behavior cannot be justified because if selfishness becomes a universal law "many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires." After we discuss what he means, I will ask, "Is selfishness always bad? Doesn't our society rely on selfishness to produce prosperity for all? Because people are selfish, they work hard and buy products, which propel the economy. Don't people invent new things because they want to be rich? Don't people devise more efficient ways to produce things so they can make more money?" I will also apply the concept of selfishness to the justice system: "In order to have a just trial, a prosecutor and a defense attorney must do dialectic battle, not for the truth, but for their point of view, and from their argument, a jury can make a good judgment about the guilt of the defendant." Therefore, I will challenge the students to evaluate the idea that selfishness is always evil.

At the conclusion of our discussion of Kant's Categorical Imperative and his examples, I will solicit from the students an evaluation of Kant's Categorical Imperative and draw from them a flaw in his theory. I hope to hear comments indicating that Kant's Categorical Imperative does not apply to all situations; situations are distinct and applying one rule to all does not work.

Chekhov's "The Malefactor," strongly challenges Kant's Categorical Imperative by challenging the rule against stealing. "Thou shalt not steal," is a Categorical Imperative because a society needs trust and respect of property in order to function smoothly. In Chekhov's tale, a peasant is caught stealing a nut from a train track, and the magistrate, carrying out the law, sentences him to Siberia. The peasant tells the magistrate that he used the nut for a fishing sinker, a weight to lower the hook in the water. Details in the story show that the peasant is extremely poor and malnourished; clearly, he needed the nut to catch fish in order to feed his family and himself. The students will discuss if he were justified to steal the nut off of the railroad track. One can easily play the devil's advocate. If students claim stealing is wrong, I will reply, "It was only one little nut that probably only cost a penny back then. Taking one nut from a railroad track would not have caused any damage. Furthermore, what is worse? Stealing or letting one's family starve? Should he obey the law about stealing and let his family starve?" If students say that the peasant should not be punished, I will say, "If we allow him to steal, shouldn't we allow anyone else to steal? If others follow his example, the track would become loose, and there would be an accident. How would you feel if you owned a store, and a poor person stole from you, but the police said it was alright because he was poor and needed to feed his family?" I will challenge students to come up with a solution to this problem, namely satisfying the needs of the individual when it conflicts with the needs of the society.

Kant attempts to define virtue by describing the action; however, a person's actions can be deceiving. For example, if someone donates a large sum of money to charity, we will praise that person as a good man, but what if we discover that he accumulated his wealth by selling drugs? I will pose this question to my students and supplement it with an excerpt from Book II of *The Republic*, just after the "The Ring of Gyges." Adeimantus explains to Socrates that an unjust man lives more pleasurably and has more power, but an unjust man who has a reputation for virtue not only lives more pleasurably and is more powerful, he gains the reputation of being a good man and attains praise and honor from his community. His comments raise two questions: 1) *Can one successfully mislead people into believing one is righteous when one is actually unrighteous?* 2) *Does apparent goodness differ from actual goodness?* Adeimantus also wonders if an unjust man can avoid punishment after death by buying off the gods with sacrifices. After discussing these issues with the class, I will vividly illustrate Adeimantus' argument by showing two provoking scenes from *The Godfather* saga. In the first scene, Michael solemnly participates in his nephew's baptism as his godfather while his men, under his orders, kill a number of his enemies. I will ask my students, "Is Michael a good man for participating in the holy sacrament of baptism? The Catholic Church says we gain grace by participating in the sacraments. Did Michael receive grace? If not, how do we know when participating in a good action is good?" After this discussion, I will show a scene from *Godfather III* that depicts a bishop of the Catholic Church honoring Michael for his large donations. I will ask the class how does this scene demonstrate Adeimantus's point. Then I will ask, "Do Michael's large donations to the Catholic Church, the body of Christ, and his participation in holy rituals cancel out his bad actions?" Then I will take them further

by asking, “Who is better, a person who does no harm to anyone but does not help anyone, or a person who severely harms a number of people but generously helps a number of people?”

The problem raised by Adeimantus leads us to focus on a person’s disposition, which leads us to Book IV of *The Republic*. In this passage, Plato, through the mouth of Socrates, explains that our psyche is composed of reason, desires, and spirit, and when these three components work in harmony, each one “doing its own business,” we will not act cruelly, dishonestly, or dishonorably. In other words, just behavior is the behavior of a person who has inner harmony. After the students and I examine what Plato means and assess its validity, I will raise a counter point: “Is it not possible for one who is intelligent, reasonable, and calm to act unjustly?”

The poem, “Richard Cory” by Edwin Arlington Robinson is a good example supporting or criticizing Plato’s point of view, depending on one’s interpretation. People admire Richard, for he is wealthy and powerful and seems to live a wonderful life; however, one day he suddenly kills himself. One could interpret his destruction as a result of inner disharmony. On the other hand, one could argue that Richard had inner harmony, for the poem states he carried himself in an “imperial way,” but that did not prevent him from destroying himself. The students will avidly debate these two interpretations.

Another work of literature that pertains to Plato’s theory of justice is, “This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen,” by Tadeusz Borowski, a former concentration camp prisoner. In this story, Borowski’s describes the Nazi guards as, “businesslike,” “dignified,” and “laughing jovially.” They have “warm smiles,” and they “stroll majestically.” These mass murderers feel no inner turmoil; they seem placid and content as if they are strolling through a garden as they send countless innocents to their deaths. How could men committing these heinous deeds feel no guilt or inner turmoil? Why did their intellect not realize that murdering Jews was horrendous? If racist or other emotions overcame their intellect, why did they seem so placid? Therefore, the students and I will discuss whether or not the harmony of intellect, desires, and spirit precludes a person from doing evil.

Like Plato, Hinduism and Christianity grapple with virtue through one’s attitude. Hinduism, as expressed in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, tells us that we should perform actions with detachment, with no concern for the fruits of the actions. The students will learn about Hindu philosophy by reading a portion of Chapter II of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, “The Yoga of Knowledge.” The students will discuss what “detached” means. Examples will be useful, especially examples in sports. For example, a good basketball player, plays a good game at all times regardless of the score. He plays hard if he is winning or losing. When he shoots the ball or plays defense, he is not worried about gaining glory or even winning the game. He wants to make the basket, or he wants to prevent the opponent from having a clear shot. Now the question the students will consider is: “Will being detached lead one

to act virtuously? In our discussion we will recall, “This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen.” The Nazi guards were detached; they were unmoved by the suffering they inflicted. We will also recall the character in Chekhov’s “The Bet;” he is presented as a hero because he was not attached to money.

To illustrate a detached man who is intent on acting virtuously, I will assign “The Story of Joseph and His Brothers,” from *Genesis*. Though this story is from a culture distinct from Hinduism, Joseph is a hero who displays detachment. He is unjustly enslaved and imprisoned, but his trials do not anger or depress him. He steadfastly does what is right. In the beginning of the story, though, Joseph reveals vanity. I will direct my student’s attention to his attitude towards his brothers and his revelations to his brothers of his dreams that portray him as a hero. Would it not have been better to conceal these dreams so that he would not seem grandiose? Moreover, how could he not have realized that revealing these dreams to his brothers would have made them envious and angry? However, Joseph endures his enslavement and imprisonment with detachment, doing his duty to the best of his ability, refusing to be seduced by his master’s wife and working in the prison with honor. His integrity and faithfulness bring him out of prison and raise him to the status of the second most powerful man in Egypt. Then, instead of using his power to procure revenge, he forgives his brothers and reconciles with them. I will remind the students of “The Ring of Gyges” and Adeimantus’ argument, namely, those who have the power to do injustice will be unjust. Joseph illustrates the opposite.

Joseph’s devotion to God will lead us to the Christian theme of love. I will use the Gospel of Luke, 10:25–37. A lawyer asks Jesus, “What is the most important commandment?” Jesus answers by telling him the parable “The Good Samaritan.” After discussing this parable, we will examine an excerpt from *The First Letter of John*, which explains why we should love. In Chapter 4, verses 7–16, the writer explains that “God is love,” and when we love, we become part of God. After discussing that idea, we will move to Martin Luther King’s speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” In his final speech, he discusses what a virtuous life is and analyzes “The Good Samaritan” in relation to the Civil Rights Movement. He points out that the good Samaritan does not ask, “What will happen to me if I stop to help this man?” Instead he asks, “What will happen to him if I do not stop to help him.” Then he applies this lesson to the Civil Rights Movement, saying we should not worry about what will happen to us if we help others; we should worry about what will happen to them if we do not stop to help them. The question I want my students to wrestle with is “Should we make sacrifices or take risks to help others?”

This question leads us to the Buddhist idea of anatta or non-self. The students will read “The Diamond Sutra,” which explains that a Bodhisattva, an enlightened one, realizes that he has no self, and he spends his life selflessly trying to guide others to Nirvana. Consequently, from the Buddhist perspective, there is nothing to risk when we endanger our lives by helping others. Before we discuss the idea of anatta, we will discuss what is the *self*—the experience of *I*. I’m sure this will be an interesting discussion because the

students will have to search within themselves and analyze who they are. Then we will question the existence of the self: *How do we know we have a self? If we have a self, where is it? Is there a location in the brain that is the headquarters of the self?*

The next question is particularly difficult: *What do the Buddhists mean by saying we are “No-Self?”* To prepare oneself for such a discussion, I recommend reading *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 97-113. Perhaps a good analogy would be a river. When we identify a river, is there actually a substance that is the *river*? It flows continuously. What it is at one moment is different than what it was at a previous moment and what it will be at a future moment. We can examine the river extensively and never find the substance *river*. We will find water, fish, rocks, and debris, but not *river*. Now the question is, if there is no self, who is experiencing? From my readings of Buddhism, this is not clearly explained, probably because the concept is beyond words. When asked about it, the Buddha remained silent. A teacher of this unit does not need to solve this riddle. The important matter is the Buddha asserted that we should live and act selflessly. The selfless experience is what is vital. It is like a basketball player shooting a basketball: if he thinks about shooting it, aiming the ball, he will miss the basket, but if he shoots selflessly, he will make the shot. We should not be self-conscious and selfish. We should *let go and be*.

After we have discussed no-self, we will discuss the affect the idea of no-self has on our attitude and behavior. In other words, how does this concept encourage virtuous behavior? To conclude this section of our unit, the students will write an essay that explains the concept of anatta and their view of it.

Another ingredient to our discussion will be the law. Does following the law make one a good person? We will begin this discussion by reading an excerpt from Plato’s *Crito* which records Socrates explaining that since a citizen has been living in a society, been educated there, earns a living there, and raises his family there, he has an obligation to follow its laws. If individuals choose the laws they want to obey, the society will collapse. *Is he right?* I will ask students to explain both sides of the question.

Then to obscure matters, we will read an excerpt from Chapter XVI of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck has been floating down the Mississippi River on a raft with Jim, a runaway slave and has become close friends with Jim. However, helping Jim escape slavery is illegal. Huck faces this conflict when he comes across some men looking for a runaway slave. According to the law, Huck should turn Jim over to them; however, turning Jim over to them would bring immeasurable misery to Jim. What should Huck do? Is it right to obey a law that causes suffering to others, especially those who are good friends? Should we obey a law that we consider wrong? Are there certain laws we should disobey?



We will clarify our thought in this matter by reading an excerpt from Martin Luther King’s “Letter from the Birmingham Jail—paragraphs 15-22. In this section, King explains that we have a responsibility to violate unjust laws, and then he explains how we can distinguish just and unjust laws. As we read this section we will discuss what he means. Then the students will write an essay that explains their point of view about violating laws—*Should certain laws be violated? Explain.*

That question will lead us to the Declaration of Independence. We will examine the opening paragraphs, in particular the status of every human being. I will ask the students to explain how the principles in the Declaration of Independence can be used to distinguish just and unjust laws. In other words, when a law violates equal treatment, could we not declare the law unjust? Then, if we decide a law is unjust, what should we do? —Continue to obey it while filing a lawsuit against it or should we purposely violate it? We will extend our discussion of the Declaration of Independence to include just behavior. I will ask the students, “Could we not use the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence to determine what is just and unjust behavior? Since everyone is created equal, can we not define virtue as treating everyone equally, no matter her status in society?” As our discussion develops, I will play devil’s advocate by declaring, “What if a person treats someone cruelly, but it turns out he treats everyone cruelly? Is that just?” I will also bring up the conflict between the rights of the individual versus the rights of the society: “If a nation is attacking our country, should a government have the power to draft young people in the army or does each person have the right of self-determination? Does someone have the right to join an organization that is determined to attack our country or does the government’s duty to protect its citizens override her right of association?” This discussion will bring us back to “The Malefactor” and the conflict between the rights of the individual and the rights of the society.

This unit can go on and on. I hope, in the mind of my students, it does go on and on. For, if they argue these issues throughout their lives, they will steadily become more and more enlightened about how to live and how their society should be governed, and as their enlightenment broadens, their fulfillment will deepen.

## **COMPOSITION ACTIVITIES**

### **Journals**

My students routinely write weekly journals on certain topics and topics of their choice, but as they progress through this unit, they will keep a “Journal of Ethics” where they will record their thoughts about virtue, the issues brought up in class, and the philosophical and literary works they have read. In the end, they will write a paper detailing the development of their thinking about virtue. Then we will have a discussion about the evolution of their thinking of virtue and how this unit affected their outlook.

## **STRATEGIES**

### **Theory Composition**

Students will learn the process of creating a theory by composing one about virtue. They will create a tentative theory, a hypothesis, and test it by presenting it to the class where it will face a barrage of criticism. The students will revise their hypothesis when flaws are exposed or when their thinking has been influenced by another theory. Consequently, throughout this unit, the students will continually revise their hypothesis, striving to formulate one that cannot be nullified.

As they work through this process, the students will learn how to criticize a theory and how to formulate one. As the students critically review the theories of their classmates and prominent thinkers, they will learn to criticize through reason and example, and they will develop these abilities by frequently using them. The students will learn that a valid moral theory will pertain to any experience and must be sound enough to withstand challenges. To formulate such a theory, one must test its validity by presenting it to a critical audience. When others point out a flaw, they will revise their theory. When an idea of a classmate or writer strikes them, they will utilize it in their theory. The analysis of the works of others, especially of the great thinkers, will open their minds to new ideas and show them the usefulness of others' theories in the formulation of their individual theory. Creativity entails, not coming up with an absolute original idea, but utilizing parts of other people's ideas and theories and incorporating them into a distinct theory.

### **Reading**

When we read the passages, stories, and poems, the students will highlight and make notations. To instruct them how to do this, we will orally read the first two or three works, and I will guide them in highlighting and making notations. As we do this, I will point out how the highlighted passages and notes provide a clear view of the meaning of the passage. Eventually, the students will independently read, highlight, and make notations. Sometimes I will instruct them to answer certain questions about the particular reading, questions that require summarizing and evaluation. Then we will discuss particular aspects of the reading, focusing especially on its point of view of virtue.

### **Writing Strategies**

A writing strategy I have used is interweaving my words in their writing. In general, my students write two types of essays. The first type is an answer to an essay question, and this essay essentially contains a topic sentence, various sentences that support the topic sentence, and a closing. The other type is a multi-paragraph essay that contains an introduction, thesis, a body of several paragraphs, and a closing paragraph. When the students are answering a question with an essay, I initially draw from them a topic

sentence and write it on the board. Then we make notes that support the topic sentence. I frequently introduce certain transition phrases, and as I walk around, I read what they have written and offer assistance. My students consider writing an arduous chore, like lifting a heavy load. My suggestions act as a lever, helping them complete the paragraph, providing them with a log of phrases that enhance their writing, and stimulating them to create eloquent diction. I have learned that writing instruction through lecture is ineffective; students, in general, do not pay attention to a lecture and a lecture is too distant from the activity of writing to have a significant impact. However, as the students write with my help, interweaving my phrasings with theirs, they mentally digest the structure of an essay and develop their ability to turn a phrase.

I further try to develop their ability to write by working on their diction. On the board, I demonstrate parallelism by revising one of their sentences, and then I elicit them to do the same to other sentences. We also do an exercise whereby they compose metaphors. I show them a metaphor used in a particular work of literature and instruct them to compose one that expresses a comparable meaning. This exercise becomes fun for them, for they enjoy the challenge of creating a colorful metaphor and enunciating it to the class. Often, when a student creates and then recites a striking metaphor, he, taking immense pride in his work, swaggers in his seat and vigorously receives accolades, which encourages others to come up with an arresting metaphor. As we write essays, I encourage them to use metaphors, emphasizing that it makes their writing, more descriptive and eloquent. I introduce them to websites that list famous quotes by subject, and encourage them to use quotes in their writing, especially in the introduction and closing.

The improved diction is utilized in the second draft. I challenge my students to improve their first draft with images, metaphors, parallelism, and quotes. As I walk around, I educe ways to improve certain sentences and praise examples of creative diction. I try to come up with eloquent ways to restate one of their sentences so that they realize that a writer strives to create elegant writing. I compare revising a draft to painting a picture: we are adding color and details that make it prettier.

## LESSON PLANS

### Book II of Plato's *Republic*, "The Ring of Gyges"

#### *Student Objectives*

Comprehend, analyze, interpret, and synthesize literature. Judge the validity of a philosophical idea and use reasoning to substantiate. Compose a theory of virtue and substantiate it dialectically.

#### *Activities*

Discuss what is virtue or good behavior and whether or not a person should try to act virtuously. The teacher leads the students in oral reading, highlighting, notating, and discussing "The Ring of Gyges:" *Was it wrong to use the ring that way? If one has power, should one use it to become successful? Is it wrong to become successful by hurting and killing others?* The students will formulate a tentative theory of virtue—*What is good behavior? Should we strive to act virtuously?* The students will share their theories and discuss them—bring up objections.

### The Bet

#### *Student Objectives*

Comprehend, analyze, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate literature. Write an essay that states a conclusion, supports it by summarizing, quoting, and analyzing, and closes by restating the conclusion.

#### *Activities*

The teacher leads students in orally reading, analyzing, highlighting, making notations, and discussing "The Bet." Essay: The teacher leads students in marking highlighted details that relate to why the young lawyer renounces the money; the students draw a conclusion from those details. The teacher leads students in formatting the essay:

#### *Short Essay Format*

*Introduction and Thesis Sentence: State the title of the story and author of the story, summarize the circumstances, and tell what the young lawyer does at the end and why.*

*Body: Summarize and quote details that support your thesis (why he renounces the money)*

*Closing: Eloquently restate your thesis.*

Since this is the first essay of the unit, I will solicit the beginning of a topic sentence from the class and write it on the board. It will be something like: *In Chekhov's "The Bet" a young lawyer bets a banker two million rubles that . . .* Using this sentence, the students will proceed to write the short essay, paraphrasing, quoting, or summarizing the highlighted sections. At the beginning of the next class the students will revise it, and I will encourage them to refine the wording and elaborate more.

## **The Declaration of Independence**

### ***Student Objectives***

Comprehend, analyze, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate nonfiction. Write an essay that summarizes a work's thesis by paraphrasing and quoting, evaluates its validity by using rational argumentation, and closes by eloquently accentuating the writer's conclusion.

### ***Activities***

As the students silently read the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence, they will highlight the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the document's view of the status of human beings?
2. What is the purpose of governments?
3. What determines the duration of a government?

The teacher leads discussion about these questions and other aspects of these two paragraphs such as, the meaning of "self-evident," "all men are created equal," and "inalienable," the question of slavery and women, and the power of a government to rule. Then we will discuss what this documents states about just and unjust conduct.

### ***Assignment***

Using our discussion, the students will write an essay that assesses the ethical point of view of the Declaration of Independence. Using the chalkboard, the teacher and the students will devise the essay format:

#### ***Introduction***

*Introduce the Declaration of Independence*

*States its view about ethical conduct*

*State your view of its view*

#### ***Summarize the ethical view of the Declaration of Independence***

*Quote*

*Paraphrase*

*State a problem with its view.*

*Explain what you mean and use examples.*

*State your overall view of its view.*

*Elaborate your view, using rational argumentation and examples.*

*Close by eloquently accentuating your point of view of the Declaration of*

*Independence's view of just behavior.*

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