

## **Philosophical Discussions of Moral Concerns in a 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts Classroom**

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### **INTRODUCTION – IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM**

For the past several years I’ve encouraged my students to participate in a writing contest sponsored locally for seventh and eighth graders entitled “Do the Write Thing.” Each year I receive a packet which includes posters and a variety of helpful lesson plans focused on reducing violence. I also bring a number of books from the library into the classroom as well as journals or magazines I may have regarding topics such as peer pressure, gangs and bullies. In groups the students then read several different scenarios and discussed what happened, how the situation could have been avoided or redirected, and whether other novel ways existed of handling the problem. Yet this year, after all that exposure, the students didn’t really focus on what the prompt asked for – “What can you do to help reduce violence?”

Instead, for the most part, students wrote about episodes that occurred in their own lives which were examples of violence, but they did not include clearly identified consequences or suggestions about how the situation could have been handled differently. One student insisted that we have to have a fair share of violence in order to appreciate all the good in life. Even after we discussed the possibility of a violent act taking a child away – snuffing out the only opportunity for life that child had on this planet – the student would not compromise her final statement. Most of my students had no problem identifying violence, yet they couldn’t imagine how to reduce it. I began to see that I was failing them somehow.

Early in the school year I had assigned an essay on the topic, “A Time When I Did Something Wrong.” Many of the students wrote about stealing, and a number of them felt it was all right to steal, if you wanted something badly enough and you didn’t have the money to pay for it. It didn’t occur to them that ultimately society had to absorb the cost by paying higher prices to cover the store’s losses, but even this reasoning did not sway the students. The attitude seemed to be, “Let the people who have money pay for stuff.” Unfortunately, some of the significant adults in their lives felt much like the kids did. It’s true that we all do things now and then that are not ethical or moral, but the point is to learn from the misdeeds – not to repeat them.

My principal had suggested that teachers begin to discuss values and appropriate behavior during our advisory period. I checked out a book from our professional library entitled *Character Education*. Some of the traits and virtues included were caring, courage, flexibility, goal setting, integrity, positive attitude, and self-discipline. *Character Education* suggested books to use in discussions about the various virtues. There are also discussion and activity notes and related traits and curricular themes. Everything was spelled out, and therein lay the problem for me. I had tried this method. I wanted something that would get the student to learn from the inside out rather than from the outside in. But that wasn’t my only problem.

How could the students trust a teacher’s advice in ethics and morality when the headlines in newspapers daily screamed of corruption in the world of big business, the government, and other social institutions including schools? Even teachers have been involved in sexual and cheating scandals. Students are very aware of the unethical behavior of adults including many of their

heroes, such as highly-paid sports figures. In these times, students are less willing to consider us as idealized arbiters of ethical behavior than students were in the past.

Well, my standing in front of the classroom and “preaching” about morals and ethics wasn’t going to be the answer. The students would have to vigorously participate in moral and ethical discussions and debates in order to understand who they are and how they fit into their families, their neighborhood, and their world. To ask students to question and reflect on their experiences could add meaning to their lives and their education. And I can’t forget that I want my students to develop critical thinking skills as well as coping skills. Then the answer came – philosophy. After all, philosophy is reflective thinking which helps us decide what’s real and what’s not, what’s right and what’s wrong, and who defines our rules and regulations anyway.

I particularly liked the beginning of this definition of critical thinking: “We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis evaluation, and inference” (Pritchard 7). Sounds just like TAKS, doesn’t it? Philosophy addresses questions regarding the individual, community, and relationships. Philosophy takes logic to the next level. It provides people with a moral compass to help them cope with chaotic lives and difficult decisions. In the personal daily lives of many of my students and in the world, uncertainty and chaos often reign. Ethics seems to give way to more practical concerns. I often think about all the stress that my students feel every day of their lives. I work in a Title 1 school, and I know that many of my students live in extremely difficult conditions. I wondered how living with stress on a daily basis has affected the children, perhaps even hindering their ability to learn.

Scientists know that “the impact of severe stress can leave an indelible imprint on its [the brain’s] structure and function” (Teicher 1, 2). It makes me wonder how much the neural development of some of my students may have been altered over the years. “The hippocampus is thought to be important in the formation and retrieval of both verbal and emotional memories whereas the amygdala is concerned with creating the emotional content of memory, for example, feelings relating to fear conditioning and aggressive responses” (Teicher 2).

I thought of my students who had come to Houston from New Orleans. Suddenly I saw their behaviors from a different perspective. As I was cleaning up my room one day, I ran across a copy of *Discover* dated March 2003. The cover of the magazine showed a computer image, birds-eye-view of a brain. The question was, “Can the Brain Conquer Fear?” Then words were written on yellow arrows indicating a primitive brain on one side which senses danger, stirs up fright, and then reacts angrily. The other side was dubbed the modern, evolved brain which has to fight the primitive brain for control over emotions. I was hooked even though I hadn’t gotten past the cover.

The article was equally fascinating. The following quote helped me to understand the behaviors I witnessed in many of my students who had experienced hurricane Katrina:

Say you have a traumatic experience. The memory of that experience will pop into your brain the next day, whether you want it to or not. And when that memory pops into your brain, you’re going to have that whole autonomic response that you had originally. It’s going to come back again. So it’s not only that you remember that you were mugged, but you also get very emotionally excited about it when the memory happens. That emotional excitement triggers the memory enhancing cycle all over again, making the traumatic memory even stronger, like a spinning tire deepening the muck hole it’s stuck in with each jab on the accelerator. (Johnson 39)

As an English teacher I appreciated the simile because it created a clear picture in my mind. This particular crisis was easily identified, but I began to realize that many of my students have

experienced violence in various forms right in their own homes and communities. We as teachers see the results in our schools everyday: depression, aggression, impulsiveness, delinquency, hyperactivity and substance abuse. It's a tough world we live in. For some it's a lot tougher than others, and I began to feel that if we could have some honest, soul-searching, reflective type of discussion in class, students may begin to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world they live in. Perhaps they could learn some coping mechanisms that would be beneficial in dealing with the reality of life.

Some of the most difficult issues are those that students face in their own homes. Many of my students struggle with step-parents or step siblings. If what you hear on TV or read in the magazines is accurate, then there aren't too many marriages that are going to be successful, hence kids have to learn to accept and be accepted by virtual strangers who have no biological link. Being an English teacher allows me a look into students' home lives through the essays they write. Using a different perspective might help them understand and cope with the conflicts they encounter with newly acquired family.

According to S. Pinker, "The enormous pop-psychology literature on reconstituted families is dominated by one theme: coping with antagonism. Daly and Wilson found that step-parenthood is the strongest risk factor for child abuse ever identified" (434). Maybe there's something to those fairy tales where we've all encountered the wicked stepmother who wants to take Hansel and Gretel deep into the woods in order to be rid of them. Or the evil stepmother who wants to kill her beautiful little stepdaughter so that she can remain the most beautiful woman in the world. I've often told my students that folk tales were meant to teach morals and ethics, and that they weren't created just for children. Of course, there are some wonderful stepparents out there, and it would be interesting to identify the characteristics which make them kind and loving. According to Pinker, they would have to be very altruistic, indeed.

Students are affected by other people's stress levels, both at home and at school. As part of a book study, I read *Differentiated Instructional Strategies*, which quoted Deborah Rozman as having said that "the neural information the heart sends to the brain can either facilitate or inhibit cortical function, affecting perception, emotional response, learning and decision making" (Gregory and Chapman 3). The authors went on to say that one's heartbeat is perceivable by another who stands fairly near – three to four feet, and that the beat is picked up by the other's brain waves where it will be transmitted to neurons all over the body (3). It was obvious to me that students who are already dealing with a great deal of stress in their lives really needed a safe space in my classroom if we were going to explore difficult ethical issues. I don't have much influence over what goes on in their lives after school, but I can offer a classroom which can be their safe space.

The Nov. 14, 2005 issue of *Time Magazine* included an article entitled "How to Help Them Succeed." Eisenberg says, "Instilling confidence, encouraging some risk taking, being accepting of failure and expanding the areas in which children may be successful, both parents and teachers can reignite that innate desire to achieve" (59). Too many of my students had already shut down in elementary school, and they were just biding their time until they could legally drop out.

The article talks about an unorthodox approach referred to as "brainology." The message to the kids is that they are in control. Their intelligence is something that they are capable of influencing and forming. Prior to reading this article, I had decided that in summer school I would have the students "name their brain." That way they could interact with their brain, sort of give it a wake-up call, for example. Just that small move seemed to create some awareness and ownership in my students.

So my first goal is to create a classroom culture which embraces the whole learning community. I want the students to feel free to say what they think without fear of ridicule. I want

students to develop self-awareness, to be able to identify their feelings, and to be able to manage these feelings. I want students to develop social skills and feel empathy for others. In addition, I want students to generate questions of interest and then aggressively pursue possible answers. What is lying? What is a friend? What is love? What is my relationship to society? Is it good to be altruistic? Is it better to live a selfish life thinking only of one's own interests, or is it better to live a cooperative existence working with other in order to create a better society for all?

Recently a high school senior, whom I mentor, had to read *Brave New World*. She wanted to discuss the book, so I quickly read it and was truly amazed at Huxley's insight. Even in his Foreword I found words of wisdom. I particularly enjoyed this quote: "Chronic remorse, as all the moralists are agreed, is a most undesirable sentiment. If you have behaved badly, repent, make what amends you can, and address yourself to the task of behaving better next time" (Huxley vii). The problem is that many of my students don't perceive the "wrong" in their behavior. But let me get back to the problem at hand.

After having read *Brave New World*, this same senior spoke to me about her concerns. She wants to be a doctor focusing on research, but she is struggling with ethical considerations regarding human cloning and stem cell research which have often been in the news lately. These medical procedures go against her religious beliefs, and she is considering changing her mind about being a doctor. She fears that we are going in the direction that Huxley suggests.

I encouraged her to read an article in the January 2002 issue of *Scientific American* entitled "The First Human Cloned Embryo" (Cibelli et al.). Advanced Cell Technology assembled a board of outside ethicists to weigh the moral implications of cloning. These ethicists raised a number of moral as well as legal questions which will have to be answered before our society can decide on a course of action. I wanted this young woman to see that these questions are not easy for anyone to answer. Reading novels such as *Brave New World* helps students to raise ethical questions and generate serious discussions regarding cloning, genetic engineering, and stem cell research.

Here are some possible questions that might arise. Does a cloned individual have the same rights and legal protection as humans conceived in the more traditional manner? If so, how could we then create individuals who might be destroyed for medical reasons? Are we going to create a market for women to sell eggs much in the same way that some now sell their blood or even organs? What is the relationship between the cloned individual and the one who provided the cells? Will cloned babies also receive genetic alterations? Will we create cloned individual to become our modern slaves or have them go off to fight our wars? Students will most likely have many more questions as they read and think about the reality of cloning and genetic engineering.

My young friend's dilemma made me realize that there are a lot of things going on in this world that students might need to talk about in class. Yet these discussions won't happen unless students feel that they are not going to be ridiculed or berated for raising ethical questions of such a sensitive nature. This could only happen in a "safe" space.

## **SETTING THE STAGE**

My challenge was ensuring a safe learning space, developing a supportive learning community, and creating curricula from which all my students would benefit. I decided the best way was to make sure the students had a voice in developing this learning community. We needed rules, but not the usual classroom rules like "don't chew gum" or "put things back where you got them." Instead, these rules would help all students to feel comfortable in participating in a variety of class activities.

It is my intention to set the plan in motion as soon as school begins again in August. These rules, or trust agreements, have to be in place immediately. Students will work in groups to

generate statements that will ultimately become our “trust agreements.” The groups can write their statements on the board, and the class as a whole can modify, combine, or add to these statements until a consensus is reached. Then our new “trust agreements” can be printed and posted where students can easily refer to them making sure that they are honoring all the agreements (Gregory 4).

When I turned to the Internet, I found a wealth of information regarding philosophy and kids. I was ready to develop a curriculum that would build a community of inquirers, students who would draw their own conclusions and develop a greater understanding of themselves and the world they live in. I envisioned a highly interactive unit, but as I thought about it in greater detail, I began to see that I could incorporate philosophy into all my units—that this could be a thread I could easily weave into my whole curriculum. Since I’m also keen on helping students become more environmentally savvy, I figure we can look at ourselves, look at our communities, and look at the world. All things are connected.

### **TRIAL RUN**

While I was in the process of writing this paper, I decided to try a couple of lessons just to see how the students would react. When venturing into new territory, my students prefer that I model for them. So the initial lessons focused on whole class participation. I wrote this question on the board. “What is lying?” I didn’t have to worry about participation. As students came up with examples of damaging lies, little white lies, “necessary” lies, they wrote their answers on the board. In no time at all the board was covered with their thoughts. More discussion followed, and then I chose three students to read a short play I had found at the *Philosophy for Kids* website: <<http://philosophyforkids.com/startup.shtml>>. In the long run, this in turn encouraged the students to write their own plays. They got into their regular groups of four, and each group was responsible for choosing a scenario from the board and writing a short skit. These were presented to the class over the next few days.

Since we were still in the practice-for-the-TAKS-test mode, I went through the material and found stories that included characters who lied. After the students read the stories and completed their required TAKS task, lively discussions followed which eventually brought up the topic of cheating. Most of my students had heard on the news how high school and college students are using new technology such as cell phones to cheat on tests. We also discussed plagiarism which has gone to a new level with students simply down-loading entire research papers. Here are some issues the students struggled with: Is it ever okay to cheat? Is it all right as long as you don’t get caught? How does cheating hurt the student? How does cheating undermine the educational system? (I confess, I raised that last issue.) The discussion eventually raised an even more crucial question. Do I behave in a moral way only if I think someone may be watching or the chances of getting caught are high?

During one of our HTI sessions, Dr. Garson, the professor leading the seminar, introduced us to Lawrence Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development. The question is, “Why should I be moral?” According to Kohlberg, initially children behave morally in order to avoid punishment, stage one, and to obtain rewards, stage two. Stage three has to do with a child wanting the approval of others which is followed by stage four that deals specifically with obeying the law. Stages five and six pertain to adults wanting to live up to their social contract and finally living up to their own moral principles and values (Barger 1). I shared the first four stages of the theory with my students who agreed that the reasons given were probably correct.

Having carefully examined the acts of lying and cheating led the class into a discussion on stealing. These are the same students who had written the essay earlier in the year about a time they did something wrong. I could see that their perception of “stealing” had already changed. Students were remarkably open about their thoughts and opinions. They even revisited “Thank

You M'am," a story in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade literature book written by Langston Hughes, which students had read in the first month of the school year. This is the story of a young boy who tries to steal a woman's purse. He learns a great lesson from his would-be victim who treats him with kindness rather than anger and most likely leaves a lasting impression on the boy.

Students quickly made connections to other stories as well as personal experiences. They were choosing library books that focused on kids making bad choices and then having to suffer the consequences. After a couple of weeks of dealing with rather serious issues, I felt a change was due. So the following Monday morning I drew a rectangle on the board holding the words "total happiness." After some initial group discussions, students wrote about a time they felt totally happy. Their stories were read over the next several days, but I also decided to look for a story about happiness on <<http://philosophyforkids.com/stories/totalhappiness-beginning.shtml>>. I found a great story the students really identified with. Here's a quote. "If scratching a very itchy insect bite gives you so much pleasure that, at that moment, you don't want anything else, then you're totally happy, or are you?"

Well, my trial run was more successful than I had hoped. Students were engaged one hundred percent of the time. They were reading with a purpose, they were acting, role playing, and drawing, and their voices strengthened considerably in their writing endeavors, and we all know how important "voice" is in their 7<sup>th</sup> grade TAKS essay.

I agree with Shapiro that "action learning," that is interactive games and exercises, are the way to get students to think about morals and ethics from the "inside out" (Shapiro 7). This is what I had been seeking, not something that is presented to the student, but something students discover through introspection and interaction with their peers.

## **GETTING STARTED**

I believe in preparing students by introducing the vocabulary of a new subject. I remember when I learned to speak English how important it was for me to always be one step ahead by learning the vocabulary first. I think students need to know the following words and all related forms of the words in order to have meaningful conversations: philosophy, morality, ethics, ego, self, individual, community, altruism, and perceptions, to mention a few. I like to have my students defining words using a dictionary, finding synonyms and antonyms using a thesaurus, writing meaningful sentences, and finally illustrating the words. These defined illustrations are then displayed around the room so they can easily be referred to when needed.

Next I wanted to examine how approaching literature from a philosophical perspective could enhance student learning. For example, Avi's short story in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade literature book – "What Do Fish Have to Do with Anything?" – can lead not only to interesting discussions, but could develop into a community project. The story is about the inhumane treatment of a homeless man, and how he is viewed as less-than-human by the parent. In the real world, students see homeless people all the time. While discussing this deplorable situation, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of students who were really empathetic. Many students truly wanted to figure out ways to help this unfortunate segment of our population.

Shortly after our discussion regarding the plight of the homeless, I found an ad in a magazine published by the union to which I belong. It simply read, "Help us blanket America with warmth!" The ad called for volunteers to create crocheted and knitted Afghans for people in need. I've always been a firm believer in the therapeutic benefits of making things with our hands. It wasn't long after that I found seven crochet needles in my deceased mother's sewing box. Maybe she was trying to tell me something. So, I plan on posting the ad in the classroom; this could be a project that students can pursue during advisory period or as part of an after-school activity.

After thinking of the various stories in the literature text book, I began to examine books that I have in the classroom, books which touch students personally and challenge them ethically. I immediately was drawn to Louis Lowry's books. *The Giver* is a story about a world that seems ideal initially. But what is the cost of a world without strife, poverty, inequality, divorce, and wars? The character of Jonas soon realizes that he prefers the freedom to choose rather than to lead a safe but mundane existence.

*The Messenger* tells the tale of a young boy, Matty, who has the ability to rid the world of fears, deceits, prejudice, and all the other destructive behavior humans exhibit. Rather than being the Messenger, his true name and calling is the Healer. Matty exhibits a truly altruistic nature. He saves the world, but has to lose his own life in exchange.

In *Gathering Blue*, Kira is an orphaned girl who has a physical defect. She lives in a society which shuns those who are flawed. Yet she has an incredible gift as well as true strength of character. How often do we overlook the talents and abilities of those in our community who may be physically or mentally challenged? It brought to mind the millions of individuals slaughtered by Hitler and the Nazis just because they were "different."

Every year, immediately following the TAKS, I introduce my students to the time of the Holocaust. Their young passions are stirred and their sense of justice surfaces rapidly. Even though the Holocaust was a time of unbelievable evil, there are many stories of people helping and hiding Jews from the Nazis. Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* tells of a Danish family who does just that. In fact, the Danes helped to save the lives of at least 7,000 Jews. Even the German Army Commander of occupied Denmark, General Von Hanneken, refused to use his soldiers to round up the Jews (Cusenza 19).

Several of my students read *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen for "Name that Book" Club. This is the story of a young girl being transported from the present to the past and personally experiencing the horrors of a concentration camp. There are a number of themes students can pursue: family, tradition, the importance of remembering. It is that importance that compels me, a German immigrant, to encourage my students to participate in an intense study of the Holocaust. We must preserve these memories; even now, just sixty years later, there are those who want to deny that the Holocaust took place.

*Night* by Elie Wiesel tells the story of a young boy who endured the horrors of a Nazi death camp. It is as powerful a story as *The Diary of Anne Frank*. These stories truthfully reveal the horrors of war; the racism and prejudice that were so integral to the Nazi regime. Questions students invariably ask are: How could something like this have happened? How could a person like Hitler become dictator of Germany? How can any human being be so horrible to another human being? How could so many people have been killed without somebody doing something? Why didn't the rest of the world catch on? Are all people capable of such inhuman behavior? Why do we still have racism and discrimination in the world today? Why do some groups want to wipe out entire races of people through genocide?

This past school year, some of the students saw the movie *Hotel Rwanda* which deals with the Hutu and Tutsi peoples in Burundi and Rwanda. Some had also seen the news about the people of Darfur, Sudan. Yet I don't want students to become cynical, so I feel it is necessary to counter the evil with good – stories of individuals or small groups of people who really made a difference. A couple of years ago I encouraged my students to write a letter to President Bush regarding environmental issues. Unfortunately, the letter we received from the White House did not address their concerns at all, instead focusing on the importance of staying in school.

I like to begin the study on the Holocaust with Pavel Friedman's poem "The Butterfly" which he wrote in Terezin concentration camp located in what was then Czechoslovakia (Volavkovd).

This young person and many other children wrote incredibly moving poems. Pavel understood the symbolism of the butterfly – freedom. No one who is free would choose to live in the ghetto. During the course of our studies, students also wrote poems as well as create a variety of butterflies which we mailed to the Holocaust Museum of Houston.

The museum’s goal is to collect 1.5 million butterflies representing the children who were murdered by the Nazi regime. If your students decide that they would like to participate in this lovely project, go to <[www.hmh.org](http://www.hmh.org)>, click on Butterfly Project, and follow the instructions.

Another wonderful book is Patricia Polacco’s *The Butterfly*. This is a picture book which is set in France during the Nazi occupation. The story relates the tale of a brave woman who hides a Jewish family in her basement and tries to help them escape. Her daughter Monique becomes good friends with Serine, the young Jewish girl, but eventually they have to part. For other stories about children who survived the Holocaust, click on <[www.wiesenthal.com/mot/children](http://www.wiesenthal.com/mot/children)>, and then go the Tolerance Museum.

Before I move on, I want to promote a video which I show yearly in preparation of the Holocaust Unit. The title is *The Island on Bird Street*. It is the story of an eleven-year old boy who is hiding out in the Warsaw Ghetto waiting for the return of his father. As a survival guide, Alex depends on the knowledge he’s acquired by reading his favorite book, *Robinson Crusoe*. The movie is based on a true survivor’s story, so it has a happy ending. Students can read about the real character on the Web; just go to “The Island on Bird Street” on *Wikipedia*: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Island\\_on\\_Bird\\_Street](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Island_on_Bird_Street) >.

If you have never specifically taught a unit on the Holocaust, I truly encourage you to do so. There is a plethora of literature that will help you get students engaged in this difficult but meaningful study. It is a powerful way to end the school year, and often students will continue to read books on the subject during their summer vacation.

## **LESSON PLANS**

**Lesson 1** (This will take several class periods.)

### ***Key Concept***

#### Altruism

The concern for the welfare of others – selflessness. The opposite of egoism or selfishness.

### ***Literature***

*The Legend of the Bluebonnet* retold and illustrated by Tomie dePaola

*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein

Note: I find that middle school children, for the most part, love illustrated books and often have not been exposed to children’s literature nearly enough in their earlier years. Actually, I used them in high school as well.

### ***Materials***

- Construction paper
- glue
- rulers
- scissors
- tissue paper
- coloring pencils
- crayons, markers
- drawing paper



- glitter
- stencils
- “odds-n-ends”  
(Even though I’m not an artsy-craftsy kind of person, I am a firm believer in artistic expression, so I keep my supply cart stocked.)
- A potted tree/seedling that can be planted on school property

### ***Objectives***

- Define altruism and identify altruistic characteristics.
- Compare/Contrast the main characters of the stories.
- Create a skit.
- Illustrate a main idea from either book; the main idea has to be stated.
- Improve listening skills (Objective on the Stanford 10 Test)

### ***Activities***

Double Duty Log (to be used with *The Giving Tree*)

Since the students don’t have a copy of the book, you might want to give them a handout with the facts/ideas in one column (Appendix I) allowing students to write their thoughts and reflections in the other column.

Write a skit about a tree who learns to say, “No,” in order not to be an enabler in a dysfunctional relationship. This should be done with a partner. Provide time for presentations. Props are encouraged.

Compare/Contrast the Giving Tree with She-Who-Is-Alone. My students are comfortable using the Venn Diagram. Because students don’t have a copy of the book, they will have to listen to *The Legend of the Bluebonnet* and take notes. I suggest the story is read all the way through (make sure you take time to show the pictures) and then read again giving students time to take notes. The information on *The Giving Tree* will be on the Double Duty Logs.

To write the essay students should use their notes and double duty log.

### ***Evaluation***

I use a kid-friendly TEA rubric to grade students’ written assignments. (Appendix III)

### ***Homework***

Journal Entry: Even though both characters were altruistic, choose the character with whom you most closely identify and explain why.

Journal Entry: What is your most valuable treasure and how you would feel if you had to suddenly part with it.

Journal Entry: What might be a situation that would cause you to give up your treasure? Have you ever been in situation where you had to give up something you really cared about? How did you handle that?

### ***Extra Credit***

- (1) Design a teepee illustrating the story of She-Who-Is-Alone. All teepees will be displayed in the classroom.
- (2) Illustrate a main idea from either story. State the main idea under the picture. These too will be displayed.

### ***Extension***

Plant a small tree somewhere on school property that the students can watch as it grows. Talk about the importance of the different parts of the tree, observe the pattern of the branches, and discuss the life-supporting duties of the leaves. Measure the height and keep a monthly log. This project could be coordinated with the science teacher.

### **Lesson 2**

#### ***Key Concepts***

Gossip: Rumors, and the power of words that can damage someone's reputation and taint a person's character.

Friendship: What is a true friend?

#### ***Literature***

*Mr. Peabody's Apples* by Madonna; art by Loren Long.

(Even if you don't like Madonna, this is a great story that really helps students to see the damage that is done by gossip/rumors.)

#### ***Materials***

- Different colors of butcher paper for posters/banners
- scissors
- rulers
- markers, etc.
- Apples

#### ***Objectives***

- Build awareness of the power of words.
- Examine feelings of empathy.
- Improve listening skills.
- Develop a survey and interview.
- Design posters/banners.
- Create a Power Point presentation.

#### ***Activities***

##### Character Analysis

Since students don't have a copy of the book, write the names of the main characters on the board. Students should fold a piece of paper into four equal parts one for each of the main characters: Mr. Peabody, Billy Little, Tommy Tittlebottom, Mr. Funkadeli. As the story is being read out loud by the teacher, students should take notes in the appropriate spaces. *For example: Mr. Peabody teaches history. He coaches baseball. He encourages the boys to have fun. He buys an apple every Saturday morning.* The description should be followed by an inference statement. *For example: Mr. Peabody is an altruistic person who gladly gives of his time to help kids; he is also a creature of habit.*

##### Group Discussion on the Harmful Effects of Gossip

Students may have had their own experiences with gossip. Groups may identify different types of gossip or different consequences.

### Designing Survey Questions

Each group should generate some questions that would be appropriate for a survey on gossip. Allow students to write their questions on the board. As a whole class choose the best question. The surveys need to be uniform in order to be meaningful. I suggest no more than six questions.

### Working in Pairs or Groups

Students create posters clearly denouncing gossip. Posters must be approved by the teacher before they can be displayed on the walls in the halls, in the restrooms or in the cafeteria.

### ***Homework***

Interviews should be done over two days time. Students should interview friends and family and report back to their group.

After reviewing the surveys and discussing the results, the group needs to arrive at some consensus statements which will be posted around the room. *Example: Gossip is very negative because it can really hurt someone or people who spread gossip are mean.*

Journal Entry: Reflection – “Has my perception of gossip changed since I’ve engaged in the various activities?” Be specific in your response; minimum of 250 words.

### ***Evaluation***

- Students can grade the posters using a rubric designed by the class.
- Teacher to grade the journal entry.

### ***Extension***

Listen to your elders when they say, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” Create a Power Point presentation on the incredible, edible, apple. Possible topics might include medical or nutritional benefits, history and legends, fun facts, and varieties.

Students should work in pairs or groups and will need computer lab time. Try <[www.vegparadise.com](http://www.vegparadise.com)> to help get started. You may want to coordinate this activity with the science teacher.

I like to read this book right before Thanksgiving when apples are priced right. I also splurge for caramel sauce. We sit around and watch power point presentations and munch on apples dipped in gooey caramel. Ah, life is good.

### **Lesson 3**

This is really a unit plan for the novel, *The Anthem* by Ayn Rand. Students who have read *The Giver* by Lois Lowry will have an easier time of understanding *The Anthem*. I just finished this book with a group of students in a summer book club, and several had made connections to the world created in *The Giver*.

It is important for both teacher and students to understand a little bit of history as well as Rand’s Objectivist Philosophy. In a nutshell here’s an overview of her ideas:

- Metaphysics: The universe exists – its law is the law of identity.
- Epistemology: Reason is man’s only path to knowledge.
- Ethics: Rational self interest; no one should sacrifice himself for others.
- Politics: Laissez-faire capitalism where economics is free of politics.  
Government exists to protect the individual’s inalienable rights.
- Esthetics: Art is recreation of reality.

Rand did not support many of the isms such as mysticism, altruism, collectivism, subjectivism. (“The Reader’s Guide to the Writings and Philosophy of Ayn Rand,” featured at the end of the Centennial Edition of *Anthem*.)

Using a fact sheet (Appendix II) have students build their own background so that they may realize that this story is in part a rejection of the communist regime in Russia. Perhaps the history teacher would like to be involved in this aspect. Computer Lab time suggested.

Students should also prepare a booklet perhaps 20 pages. Later they can design an interesting cover. As opposed to buying *Cliff’s Notes*, students are going to generate their own. They can record vocabulary words, write their journal entries, keep time lines, jot down powerful similes or any notes they deem important. This booklet will count as a grade.

The most difficult hurdle to overcome in reading this book is that the narrator and all the characters in the book may only speak in terms of a whole community – always using the pronoun “we.” ESL students will really have difficulty making this pronoun switch. So once the booklet is prepared, have students use the first page to write about themselves. Ask students to double space, and emphasize that it is important to use the personal pronouns, I, me, my, mine as often as possible. Students may read their “bio” sheet to their partners or groups. Then have students go back and change each I, me, my, and mine to we, our, and ours. I believe this will be a helpful activity to prepare students to read this novella.

I like to give my students a simplified version of Freud’s theory of personality. You may want to draw a seesaw on the board. On one side I put a cube representing the *superego*. In the cube I write what molds that superego: parents, church, school, police, any institute that tells as what we should and ought to do – authority. On the other end of the seesaw I draw a circle for the id. Then I write some of the characteristics of the *id*: immediate gratification, pleasure seeking, impulsive, sexual behavior, important survival skills. Then I draw a triangle under the line at the balancing point. This triangle I label *ego*. I also write the words, I and Self in the triangle. I believe this is the true self and that it is constantly trying to balance the other two entities. A good healthy ego has no trouble doing this, but students can quickly see that if one side or the other is overdeveloped, there will be problems.

**Key Concept**

Community/individuality, altruism/egoism, oppression/free will, perception/reality.

**Literature**

*Anthem* by Ayn Rand, The Centennial Edition. (7/8<sup>th</sup> Grade)

Note: I like to read aloud to my students, but I also found this book on tape at the Half-Price Book Store for \$5. I plan on using this tape initially to help students visualize the character of Equality 7-2521. Some chapters will be too long to cover in one session, and others will have to be combined. Perhaps the following chart will be useful.

Chapter	Pages	Chapter	Pages
1	1-37	7	68-77
2	38-51	8	78-80
3	52-54	9	81-87
4	55-58	10	88-93
5	59-62	11	94-97
6	63-67	12	98-105

### ***Materials***

The usual arts and crafts supplies, lots of butcher paper.  
Student can provide their own shoe boxes for creating a “Shadow Box.”

### ***Objectives***

- Identify purpose of text.
- Interpret literary terms.
- Analyze narrative text structure.
- Compare and contrast features of the text.
- Articulate and discuss themes.
- Write for personal expression as well as academic expression.
- Expand vocabulary.

### ***Themes***

- Friendship (Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818)
- Love (Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000)
- Loyalty (Quality 7-2521, Liberty 5-3000, International 4-8818)
- Oppression (Complete sensory/creative expression deprivation)
- The Individual versus Community (Strict social structure that kills the human spirit)
- Altruism versus Egoism (Putting others first; putting self first)
- Free Will (Does it really exist?)
- Gender Bias (Example: He chooses her name, he reads while she looks at herself in the mirror, he only speaks of having sons.)

### ***Activities***

In order to help students visualize the setting, initial activities are simple. Cartoon strips can illustrate the four stages of life in this futuristic place. (Home of the Infants, 0-5, Home of the Students, 5-15, Home of the Street Sweeper, 15-40, Home of the Useless, 40+) This can be a group project. Cartoon strips could also describe the mundane existence of daily life for the people of this futuristic society. Students would have to determine when Equality 7-2521 has to get up and how long the nightly speeches given by leaders last. The rest of the time is spelled out on pages 27 and 28.

In my classroom I often designate an entire bulletin board for “novel activities.” Students are familiar with a TV program which uses blue footprints to help kids discover clues. The question is, “How can you tell that this futuristic society is in fact extremely backwards?” Whenever students come across evidence, they are to cut out a blue footprint (using their own feet as patterns), write the evidence on the footprint and tape or staple them to a designated area. *Blues Clues* examples: This society has no electricity. They burn people at the stake.

Start a “Wall of Transgressions” which can be added to each time a student identifies a particular sin committed by any of the characters. For example, hang a large piece of butcher paper. Students can make it look like a brick wall. Then the transgressions are written or typed on a paper strip and glued on that wall. This will be an on-going activity. Example: “It is a sin to write.” This is the very first sentence of the text. (Speaking of displays, be sure and also have a vocabulary display.)

Students can also illustrate the characters, draw a map of the town and surrounding area, or identify and illustrate main ideas. Shadow boxes are particularly fun and interesting. Just cut a hole about the size of a silver dollar in the top of a shoe box at one end. Light enters there. Then cut a hole about the size of a quarter in the opposite side of the box on the end. That will be the

peep hole. You can also make more holes and use tissue paper to diffuse the light as well as cutting slits in the sides so you can slide popsicle sticks with characters attached back and forth inside the box. What's inside the box is the student's choice, but it should depict a scene from the novel. The tunnel setting could be really cool. As soon as I began my model, I got hooked; it's magical.

Students should pair up if they choose to write skits. Scenes that seem conducive to short skits are: Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818 discover the tunnel and discuss their course of action; Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 have their first spoken encounter. Liberty 5-3000 finds Equality 7-2521 in the Unchartered Forest. Students will probably find other parts to dramatize and present to the class.

### ***Daily Prompts***

To be recorded in student-made booklets. I've noted pages that are applicable for teacher's benefit.

1. Why is Equality 7-2521 happy to be given the job of street sweeper when he really wanted to be sent to the Home of the Scholars? (26)
2. How does Equality 7-2521 compare to International 4-8818? Use a Venn diagram to help organize thoughts. (29-34)
3. Why does Equality 7-2521 feel peace in the tunnel? (37)
4. What is the job of the Council of Eugenics? (41)
5. It is forbidden to be unhappy. What evidence is there to prove that people are in fact, not happy? (45-47)
6. What secrets might the Unchartered Forest hold? (48-49)
7. Predict what this "unspeakable word" might be. Why do you think so?
8. What is so significant about the scene where Liberty 5-3000 gives Equality 7-2521 a drink of water? (57-58)
9. On page 61 what new question occurs to Equality 7-2521 as he is examining his individuality?
10. Cause/Effect: How did Equality 7-2521 end up in the Palace of Corrective Detention? (Chapter VI, 63)
11. In your own words, describe what happened when Equality 7-2521 brought his "treasure" to the Council of Scholars. (Chapter VII, 68-77)
12. According to Similarity 5-0306 what is the purpose of man's existence? ( 74)
13. Once Equality 7-2521 was in the Unchartered Forest, he decided that he didn't care about anything anymore. He was tired, and then he had a thought that caused him terrible pain. What was that thought? (p 77)
14. Describe the house that Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 found in the Unchartered Forest. Specifically why did they find this house so amazing and unusual? (Chapter X, 88-93)  
Suggestion: The house described in the story reminded me of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. For pictures go to <[www.paconserve.org](http://www.paconserve.org)>
15. As Equality 7-2125 goes out to kill a goat for food, Liberty 5-3000 seems to be caught up in a different world. What has she discovered? What does the author imply about women in general? (92)
16. Which pronoun did Equality 7-2521 discover in the books that made him declare the pronoun "we" as a monster? (94-97)

17. Speculate - Why doesn't Liberty 5-3000 read the books herself? (We don't know if girls were taught to read since we only know about his upbringing.)
  18. At the end of the story, Equality 7-2521 understood the message the Sainte of the pyre, the man who had been burned at the stake, had tried to convey to him on page fifty? What was that message? (99)
  19. What were some of the first words or phrases spoken by Equality 7-2521 after he discovered the personal pronouns I, me, my and mine? (94-95)
  20. What does Liberty 5-3000 say when she is first told of the word? How is that different from Equality 7-2421's use of the word? (98)
  21. What is the meaning of the phrase, "centuries of chains and lashes will not kill the spirit of man nor the sense of truth within him?" (98)
  22. Opinion. How do you think Equality 7-2521 is going to contact his friends, International 4-8818 who helped to keep his secret, Fraternity 2-5503 who cries for no reason, and Solidarity 9-6347 who calls for help in the night? (101)
  23. Extended Answer. (Students may want to familiarize themselves with the Greek myth explaining why Prometheus was punished for eternity.) Why did Equality 7-2521 choose the name of Prometheus for himself? Has Equality 7-2521 become too egoistic? (pp 98-99) Can you think of others who tried to bring "the light" to the people and were hurt as a result? (Possible answers may include Jesus, Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.)
  24. Extended Answer. How did you feel about the name Equality 7-2521 chose for Liberty 5-3000? Do you feel it was right for him to choose her name? If you were in her position would you want to choose your own name? Explain your answer. (98, 99)
  25. Extended Answer and possible Historical Reflection: Students might look at the similarities between Martin Luther King's "I have a dream..." speech, which was written many years later, with the last paragraph on p. 101. Another possible comparison may be Lincoln's Gettysburg Address with the last paragraph on page 103.
  26. Extended Answer: Liberty 5-3000 says, "We wish to be damned with you rather than blessed with all our brothers." Emilio Zapata once said, "I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emilio\\_Zapata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emilio_Zapata)) What do these two quotes have in common?
- Suggestion: Students could also write summaries for that day's reading in their personal booklets.

***Students May Choose from the Following:***

Essay 1

Throughout the book, references are made to "names." What is the importance of a person's name? What does your name say about you and your family? How are names used in this story? Think of other instances where numbers replace a person's name? Write an essay entitled, "What's in a Name?"

(Some pages with references to names are 29, 41, 56, 98, 99)

Essay 2

"Look at me when I'm talking to you. Look me right in the eye..." Why? Because eyes speak volumes. In the story, there are numerous references made to eyes. Write an essay entitled, "Windows to the Soul."

(Some pages which refer to eyes are 30, 43, 44, 46, 50, 51, 94)

### Essay 3

Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 both leave the town and enter the Unchartered Forest but under different circumstances. In your opinion, who exhibited the most courage and skill? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

### Essay 4

Think about these words from page 104. “And the day will come when I shall break all the chains of the earth, and raze the cities of the enslaved, and my home will become the capital of a world...” Do you think that Equality 7-2521 has become too egoistic? Do you feel that he has equated himself with god? Support your answers with evidence from the text.

### Essay 5

Compare/Contrast Possibilities: Equality 7-2521 with International 4-8818; Equality 7-2521 with Union 5-3992; Equality 7-2521 with Liberty 5-3000. Have students use a Venn diagram to organize their thoughts. Then follow essay format.

Note: Students should choose one essay and write approximately 250+ words. Allow students to read each other’s work. As students are reading the novel, answering questions, and working on projects, please make sure there is plenty of time for students to discuss the book. I don’t know about you, but when I read a good book I look for someone who has also read it so we engage in lively conversation.

### ***Evaluation***

The notebook should be graded quickly on a daily or every-other day basis. Essays can be graded by students especially if they’ve already been trained using a kid-friendly writing rubric that reflects the TEA TAKS rubric. (I usually introduce students to the rubric in September; APPENDIX III.) Skits and projects should be graded according to a rubric designed by teacher and students. There are so many grade possibilities, you might want to forego a multiple choice test. By the time the unit is done, the students will thoroughly understand this text.

### ***Extension***

- Research Paper (Free Will)
- How does advertising and propaganda influence our choices?
- Genetics versus Environment (Nature vs. Nurture)
- Do violent video games and violent music influence kids?
- How will genetic engineering and cloning affect the concept of free will?

### **CONCLUSION**

There are multiple wars being fought at this very moment. The world is heating up not just politically but environmentally as well. Socially humans are at terrible odds fighting one another in the name of various religions. Genocide is not a thing of the past; prejudice and racism are evident everywhere. Our young people are going to inherit a world of chaos. What can we do to help prepare them to deal with such monumental problems? They will need to grow into confident and level-headed adults who have a keen understanding of themselves and others.

I’ve always felt that the classroom should be a place where students can safely explore their feelings and actions. It’s a place to practice for the real world. I believe incorporating a study of ethics and morality in today’s curriculum will allow students to develop a stronger sense of self in order to realize their potential. Approaching problems from a philosophical perspective will help them to be empathetic, altruistic, and willing to endure personal sacrifices. I believe these qualities will be essential to help shape a better future for themselves and others.



I used to think that philosophy was something that theologians, scientists, and professors grappled with, but now I believe that it needs to be an integral part of everyone's life or else we are going to continue to make the same fatal mistakes in the future that we've made in the past. As Huxley suggested, we all need to address ourselves to the task of behaving better next time.

Facts/Ideas	Thoughts/Feelings
Once there was a tree and she loved a little boy	
First he gathers her leaves	
He would climb the trunk	
Swing from her branches	
Eat the apples	
Play hide and seek	
Sleep in her shade	
The boy loves the tree	
He carves his initials in the tree	
Boy grows older and finds a girlfriend	
He carves her initials in the tree	
Boy doesn't hang out with the tree and the tree is often alone	
Soon boy wants money Tree says sell my apples	
Boy wants to build a house Tree says use my branches	
Boy wants a boat Tree says use my trunk	
Boy stays gone a long time and the tree is alone	
Boy comes back at the end of his life and the tree feels happy	

**APPENDIX II: Fact Sheet on Ayn Rand and Related Subject Matter**

1. What was Ayn Rand's birth name? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where was Ayn Rand born? \_\_\_\_\_
3. When was Ayn Rand born? \_\_\_\_\_
4. When did Ayn Rand die? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How old was Rand when she began writing screenplays and novels? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Which philosopher influenced Rank the most? \_\_\_\_\_
7. When did Rand come to the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
8. When did Rand marry Frank O'Connor? \_\_\_\_\_
9. When did Rand become a naturalized citizen of the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_
10. When did Rand write *Anthem*? \_\_\_\_\_

Define the following:

11. Oppression \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Communism \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Bolshevism \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Joseph Stalin \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX III: Writing Rubric**

<b>TAKS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>FOCUS</b>	What are you talking about?	I thought I knew what you were talking about, but I got lost.	I know exactly what you are talking about.	I felt like you really helped me to understand your composition.
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Why are you repeating yourself?	Sometimes you lost me or I got bored.	You never lost me, even though you repeated a little.	Your ideas flowed so well, I felt like I had seen your pre-writing.
<b>IDEAS</b>	Can't you give me an example?	Your ideas sound like a grocery list. I can't really picture them.	Some, but not all details are so clear I think I could draw them.	Your examples were so detailed, I could easily see them in my mind.
<b>VOICE*</b>	Who are you?	I thought I saw you, but then you disappeared.	I could see you most of the time.	I feel like I know you.
<b>CONVENTION</b>	You really need to use periods and watch your spelling.	Sometimes your spelling and punctuation make you hard to understand.	I only saw a few mistakes.	You write well constructed sentences with very few mistakes.

\*Voice can't really be heard in a compare/contrast essay, so skip it.

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