

Understanding Perspectives - *Song of Solomon* Example Lesson

While this lesson is specifically designed for teaching Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* to high school juniors, it can be applied to any text or film in which one of the characters acts in a way that is fundamentally what outsiders might condone as immoral without understanding the character's reasons for his actions. This is also an example where you can make connections to contemporary issues or views of the Middle East with a text that is not necessarily about the Middle East. Adaptations for middle school are listed below. This is also designed for a 90 min block.

Concept:

Understanding how an one's beliefs and values affect his rationalization for his actions and leads to differences between individuals belonging to different knowledge communities.

Common Core Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#) Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10](#) Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Goal:

Students will be able to understand the decisions of those vastly different from them in terms of beliefs, culture, socio-economic status, or experiences.

Objectives:

- Relate understanding of differing perspective to how conflict and characterization is developed in the novel.
- Connect understanding how individuals rationalize their actions to groups of people they associate with or see in the media, as well as their own beliefs and decisions.
- Develop speaking and listening skills, working collaboratively to negotiate meaning and problem solve when having differing opinions.

Materials Needed:

- RSA's animated speech entitled "The Truth About Dishonesty" by Dan Ariely, found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBmJay_qdNc
- Video projector (or just speakers if none available to listen to lecture)
- Handout on Understanding Perspectives
- Butcher paper or white board
- Markers or dry erase markers
- Colored masking tape for floor

Anticipatory Set:

- Students will have read Chapters 6-8 previous to class, in which Guitar (one of the main characters) explains his membership in the Seven Days, a group of seven African American men who seek to keep the ratio of Whites and Blacks even by committing the same lethal

crime a White man does on African Americans to White individuals not connected to the original crime.

- When students enter the classroom, ask them to reflect their feelings about Guitar in their journals and why they feel this way for about five to ten minutes.
- Have students share their ideas with their partners and see how similar they are for a few minutes.
- Ask students to report out their views to the class and record them on the board.

Procedures:

- Tell students that they will be coming back to their ideas later, but first they get to watch an interesting video by Dan Ariely. Ask them to write down their thoughts and feelings about what he says in their journals as they watch. They should record anything that interests them. (**note:** the handout listed in the materials sheet was created for students with processing issues to keep track of the lesson sequence. If you use this, they would only fill out the first section until further instructed).
- Play the film for them, which is approximately 13 min in length.
- Break the students into groups of 4-5. Either give them the handout or the questions about the film on an index card. Ask them to discuss the questions and have someone record their ideas. You will most likely have to define the difference between the definition of *ethical* and *moral* before they complete this task 10 min.
 - Ethics = the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc. It defines how things are according to the rules defined by external social institutions and vary depending on the context.
 - Morals = the principles or habits with respect to right and wrong conduct. It defines how things should work according to an individual's ideals and principles defined by an internal system of beliefs and is generally consistent.
- Discuss the groups' feelings. Have students give you examples where ethics should be seen based on our intentions and those with results. Try to take the example and look at it from the opposite view in front of them to challenge them to defend their view. For example, when they would say that scientists intend to help people by using radiation therapy back in the 1950s, I would respond that it led to millions of deaths in forty years later which meant that the result was not up to our community's ethical code. This will probably take 10 min.
- Tell students that you will be changing gears. Ask them what are the Seven Days trying to achieve and why. Then ask them if they agree with ethically and/or morally and why? Keep tabs of their answers on the board in a T-chart with *Ethics* and *Morals* as the title.
- Ask students to list what they know about the members' social, political and economic circumstances in the novel in their journals. Then ask them why this group might be appealing to them. Since they are socially, politically, and economically disenfranchised, this group would enable them to feel some sense of control of their lives.
- Use a walking discussion model. Prior to class, place a piece of colored masking tape on the floor so it divides it into two sections. Tell students to go to the right if they agree with the statements to come and the left if they do not. Do not allow students to stand in the middle undecided. They may change sides if someone sways them the other way, but they have to take a clear stance.
- Ask students if we can consider the Seven Days a gang. Then have one student from the yes side justify why with textual support, followed by the response from the no side. Continue this back and forth volley throwing in more things to consider along the way. The idea is to get everyone speaking, so I usually say that once a student has said something, he needs to sit on the floor until everyone has spoken. Bring up the fact that most gang members join because they want protection, to feel a sense of belonging, and to assert their power since they feel they have one in the generally minority, poor, urban communities they reside in.
- Then ask students if we can consider the Seven Days a racist organization. Follow the same procedure from the previous step. Bring up the fact that racist organizations target a particular group based solely on their race because they feel these people are a threat to the rest of us.

- Ask them finally if they feel that the group is a terrorist cell. Follow the same procedures. You will have to define terrorism for them (*the systematic use of terror, often violent, especially as a means of coercion.*) Ask them if they are acting as the IRA did in Northern Ireland or even the Taliban. Remind students that individuals join terrorist groups to protect their beliefs from being changed and tend to come from poorer backgrounds where they feel they have no say in their lives.
- Have students return to their seats. Ask them how each of these types of groups would classify themselves and why. You are trying to get them to see that they all are trying to seek change and protection, much like Guitar.
- Have students then look at the notes on the board you took at the beginning of class. Ask them to take a second to reflect in their journals as to what they think about Guitar now after this class discussion. Have them report out their ideas to class.

Independent Practice:

- Assign students the following question to write a paragraph or page response to: *What can we understand about the novel and humanity by looking at these issues from a differing perspective?*

Adaptation:

- Use provided handout for students with auditory processing issues.
- This same lesson can be used for middle schoolers, the novel or literary work just needs to be at the appropriate reading level.

Extension:

- Have students do more research on these groups and present their findings to the class. Or, have students use research to create a program or pamphlet for helping their community members understand the problems and issues that drive these group members to join these groups with suggested solutions to help solve the root of the problem.
- Have students create a graphic organizer of all the characters in the novel's perceptions of a certain event or topic. For example, how do they feel about Ruth's relationship with her father and what causes them to have this view.

Connections to Other Subjects:

- Social Studies - use in conjunction with lessons on the Civil Rights, Native American, and Suffrage/Women's Rights movements, or use in conjunction with lessons on terrorism and prejudice in any area of the world.
- Science - use in conjunction with lesson on different theories, such as the atomic structure.
- IB Theory of Knowledge - use in conjunction with lessons on ethics and what makes something ethical the result or intent or in conjunction with a lesson on emotion and its connection to logic/reason.