

## Using Literature to Formulate a Theory of Evil

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### INTRODUCTION

Most of us do not take the time to analyze and reflect about ethical behavior. We are too busy following a schedule, watching television, talking on the telephone, keeping an eye on children, cleaning the house, shopping, etc. Most human beings go through their entire life without reflecting on ethics. They hear a preacher in a church or a spokesperson on television, and they accept or reject his or her ideas without deeply thinking about them. They drift along like a cork floating in a stream. With this in mind, I have developed a unit that has students exploring evil by studying theories and literature that explain evil and utilizing their new knowledge, reasoning, and creativity to formulate their own definitive theory of evil and depicting that theory in a story.

This endeavor will be interesting and fun for students. Evil is fascinating. The most popular movies among young people have vicious, mysterious villains. For example, high school students still relish *Silence of the Lambs* although it is several years old. In this unit, students will read literature about equally intriguing villains, and the students will explore their behavior, define their evil, uncover the causes of their nefarious behavior, and formulate solutions that could have prevented their evil behavior. In addition, the students will grapple with profound questions such as: What exactly is evil? Are actions that we normally consider evil, such as stealing and killing, evil in all situations? Do evil doers look repugnant and have a malicious demeanor? How can people who live caring lives with their family and friends, commit atrocities? Are human beings naturally evil or has the environment in some way made them evil? The questions about evil are endless and provide abundant material for illuminating discussions.

When students plunge into this unit, they will be coming to grips with morality, for in order to define evil and its causes, they will have to contemplate virtue as well. Students, of course, have beliefs about what behaviors are good and bad, but they have not synthesized these teachings under a comprehensive philosophy, nor have they seriously challenged their beliefs to see if indeed they are correct. This curriculum unit is going to force them to formulate a simple but comprehensive and reasonably sound theory of evil.

This endeavor will seriously help the students clarify the world around them. Usually when the students see a news report of an appalling crime, they have no means of dealing with it. They do not understand why it happened or how it could have happened. Their lack of understanding creates apprehension. Studying the various theories about evil will give the students tools to understand and cope with these crimes. Furthermore, they will gain insights into human behavior, human society, and condition of life. They will read of solutions and ways to handle crises, which will be helpful in their lives and give them the knowledge to make judgments and decisions about personal, societal, religious, and political issues.

While they are defining what is evil, the students are evaluating their lives. They will invariably ask troubling questions of themselves because one cannot apply standards to others without applying them to oneself. Some of their behaviors, which they have justified or never even evaluated, will come under their scrutiny and modifications may ensue. In addition, they will be better prepared for future experiences because they will have more knowledge of ethical theories to make better assessments and decisions.

As they work through this unit, the students will refine their reasoning abilities. They must analyze theories, scrutinize their validity, figure out the rationale behind them, and use logic, analogy, and application to verify and defend a theory or argue against one. Moreover, they will hear other people's views such as their partners and opponents, and they will have to reasonably defend their position or modify their theory according to overlooked information and faulty reasoning.

The searching and reasoning will, I believe, prove fulfilling for many of the students and will encourage them to thoughtfully explore other areas of life. At the present time, my students are only familiar with a handful of professional fields. When I question them about their future occupation, they typically say they want to be a nurse, lawyer, physical therapist, firefighter, police officer, or teacher. This unit will broaden the student's viewpoint because they will be exploring psychology, philosophy, genetics, sociology, anthropology, religion, and other fields. One of these areas may capture a student's attention and inspire him to pursue it. Moreover, the fascination of evil and putting together a theory that explains it will be so satisfying to some students they will feel a yearning to continue this type of work in a particular field.

As the students work through this unit, they will read, study, analyze, and write for the meaningful purpose of enlightening themselves and enlightening others. The students will not see this unit as just an academic exercise. They will realize that their work will be a discovery process that will have a direct impact on their lives and on the lives of others. After they finish, they will be less of a cork in a stream and more of a boat with a rudder, with their intellect and heart as the pilot.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will formulate a theory that defines evil, explains why people act nefariously, and enunciates what can be done to reduce evil.
2. Students will comprehend, analyze, summarize, and evaluate synopses of theories of evil.
3. Students will improve their capacity to reason by using logic, analogy, and dialectic argument.
4. Students will comprehend and analyze works of literature and synthesize their dissection to infer themes, especially those that concern evil.
5. Students will apply theories of evil, including their own, to works of literature and to a historic or recent event.
6. Students will write essays that are organized, elaborated, rational, and eloquent.
7. Students will use research methods to dig up information about a nefarious event and organize, analyze, synthesize it, and then properly and eloquently elaborate it so that

- it demonstrates their conclusion and their theory of evil.
8. Students will compose a fictional or nonfictional narrative about a nefarious incident that is descriptive, refined, and which demonstrates their theory of evil.

## **STRATEGIES**

In this unit, the students will formulate and revise a theory of evil. They will study and evaluate a variety of theories of evil (they are summarized below) by distinguished philosophers (Hobbes, Rousseau, and Plato), by an eminent psychologist (Sigmund Freud), by modern scholars (Fred C. Alford, Elaine Pagels, and Laurence Mordekhai Thomas), and by profound religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism). The students will read and analyze literature by some of the world's finest authors, such as Poe, Hawthorne, Douglas, Chekhov, and Shakespeare. The theme of evil will give the students a star to guide them. As they read these complex works, the unveiling of evil will be their focus, leading them to a greater comprehension, enjoyment, and appreciation of these works. The students will further digest the themes of these works and integrate them into their own conceptions of evil through writing. In essays, the students will strive to write unified and eloquent essays that will analyze a nefarious character using certain theories of evil and support their thesis using evidence from the text, reasoning, and analogy. In a multi-page paper, they will analyze a novel's themes of evil and support their thesis with conclusions that are substantiated with evidence from the novel. Then they will utilize research tools to examine a real life incident of evil, make a conclusion about it, support it with evidence and expert analysis, and then enumerate their findings in a unified, documented paper. After coming to a final conclusion about evil, the students compose a story, either fictional or biographical, about a nefarious incident which demonstrates their theory of evil. Finally, the students will see some of their writings contributing to a real life dialogue when they are published in a pamphlet and on the school web page.

## **SYNOPSIS OF THEORIES OF EVIL**

### **Freud's Theory of Evil**

A human being has two basic instincts. One is an instinct for life, Eros; its aim is to preserve the individual. Eros is responsible for creating civilization, "whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that, families, then races, peoples and nations into one great unity, the unity of mankind." Another basic instinct is the death instinct; its aim is to dissolve the individual and bring him "back to the primeval, inorganic state." The death instinct can come under the influence of Eros, which will divert the instinct of death "towards the external world" through "aggressiveness and destructiveness." The individual will destroy "some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying his own self. Conversely, any restriction of this aggressiveness directed outwards would be bound to increase self-destruction." Eros, the instinct for life, wishes omnipotence and control over nature. Therefore, when Eros

directs the instinct for death outwards, the ego experiences satisfaction because the aggression and destruction it has caused is fulfilling the wishes of Eros for omnipotence and control over nature. Human beings have tried controlling this tendency for aggression by developing civilization and religion, which, through their teaching and training, internalize a person's aggression by directing it towards the person's ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego and acts as the conscience or superego and makes the person feel guilty when he does evil and thereby curbs the aggressive desire.

*Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) 78-84

### **C. Fred Alford's Theory of Evil**

C. Fred Alford interviewed working people, convicts, and college students about evil. From these testimonies, he concluded that human beings dread being "human, vulnerable, alone in the universe, and doomed to die" (3). Those who do evil are trying to rid themselves of this dread by inflicting it on others. An evil doer hurts a victim so that the victim will feel the feeling of dread instead of himself. Often the victim is innocent and good because to the person who cannot deal with the dread feels that innocence and goodness in the self of others is an insult to his empty self (71). Moreover, the evil behavior makes the person feel powerful because, instead of being the passive victim of death, he is putting the dread on a prey. Thus, evil behavior becomes a misguided quest for power to overcome the dread of death. It fails miserably because it cannot eliminate the fear because the fear comes from within us. The proper way to cope with our dread is to learn to live with it by giving it symbolic form. "If we can learn to express our evil more abstractly, in stories and pictures, we shall be less likely to do it" (12).

*What Evil Means to Us* (1997)

### **Thomas Hobbes' Theory of Evil**

Everything human beings voluntarily do is for pleasure or self-preservation. Even an action such as donating to charity is done for self-pleasure, for a person who gives money to a beggar does so because it makes him feel pleased with himself. Since the world does not provide for every person's needs, there is competition for the limited supplies of material goods which causes conflict, cheating, stealing, killing, and various vices. This competition causes people to distrust one another, which in turn causes more conflict. Furthermore, those who obtain material goods or wealth are hostile to others so they can preserve their powerful reputation. Hobbes wrote, "All mankind [is in] a perpetual and restless desire for power... that [stops] only in death." The life of human beings is an unending "war against all," in which there can be no industry, commerce, or civilization, which makes the life of human beings "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The fear of death by attack, the desire to have an adequate living, and the hope to attain prosperity through one's labor is what drove human beings to create governments. Human beings who live in a specific territory make a social contract whereby they give a person or a group of people the authority to make and enforce laws. The best government is one that

has the great power of a leviathan, or sea monster so that people are too afraid to give in to their natural desires to attack, steal, lie, cheat, murder, and oppress. When a society is governed by a strong government that instills fear in its citizens, people will live in accord with one another.

*Leviathan*, Chapter XIII (1651)

### **Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Theory of Evil**

Human beings are naturally good, and self-preservation and compassion are their most basic traits. A human being uncorrupted by society will not hurt another human being unless his preservation is at risk. The trait of compassion is so imbedded in human beings, even violent, imprisoned criminals will feel sorry for a child if, from their cell, they see him attacked by a ferocious animal. Human beings are evil because their experiences with society have made them evil. In primeval times, human beings lived isolated and satisfied their needs from the abundance of nature; however, men and women began living together with their children, and these families began living next to other families. Living among other people and families gave birth to jealousy and envy because neighbors invariably compared their abilities and achievements with one another. These feelings gave rise to conflicts, crime, and distrust. The introduction of property worsened the situation. Men fought to protect property or to gain more property. The powerful men with property oppressed the weak ones without property so they could maintain and increase their wealth and power. Luxury and idleness increased the corruption because it increased envy in those who lack this opulence and gave a false feeling of superiority to those with opulence. Instead of being what she truly is, a human being saw herself as others saw her. The solution is to raise children so that their natural self will be realized instead of allowing them to be molded according to the values of society.

*What is the Origin of Inequality among Men, and Is It Authorized by Natural Law?*  
(1762)

### **The Fragile Theory of Evil**

In general, when human beings develop normally, they are disinclined to commit evil, but at the same time, they are not exceedingly virtuous. Human beings generally dislike committing evil, empathize with the suffering of others, and want to eliminate suffering, but they dislike making sacrifices for others, especially on behalf of strangers. In other words, human beings desire harmony and happiness for all but do not want to give up too much to attain it. They are not greatly altruistic, but they are not evil either. However, a myriad of forces and circumstances can either prevent their compassionate sensibilities from developing or deflect their compassion. Peer pressure, obedience to authority, loss and gain of respect, abusive experiences, and attaining power are some of the forces and circumstances that divert people from their modest virtuosity to depravity. A person may have lived his entire life without seriously mistreating anyone, but a taught obedience to authority may induce him to conduct medical experiments on prisoners. Another aspect

of the fragile-goodness of human beings is that human beings feel they do not need to be consistent. People may firmly believe a principle but feel no discomfort about violating it in another sphere. For example, Thomas Jefferson strongly believed that human beings were created equal and had the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, yet he owned slaves.

*Vessels of Evil*, Chapter 2. Laurence Mordekhai Thomas (1993)

### **Plato's Theory of Evil**

The psyche of a human being has three components. The first part is composed of sensual desires such as thirst, hunger, pleasure, and lust. The second part is the spirit or will. It can be described as initiative, the will to act, passion at doing something with one's whole heart, dedication, determination, and emotional power. It is exhibited in courage and anger. The third component is the intellect, which uses reason to obtain knowledge and guide the other two parts. When a person fails to develop his intellect or spirit, the sensual part of his soul will dominate his life. He will be a slave to sensual appetites and this will induce evil behavior. First, he may act nefariously in attempting to gain an object of his desire. Second, he may behave wickedly when he gets frustrated at not attaining the object of his desire. Third, he may act nefariously when he feels envy at someone having what he desires. Even attaining his desires does not bring him fulfillment because after enjoying the sweetness of the object, it becomes commonplace and something else is needed to create pleasure. The only way to subdue our enslavement to sensual appetites is for the intellect and the spirit to overpower the sensual part of our self. For example, if a person desires a gold chain that he sees around someone's neck but is able to reason that stealing that gold chain will not make give him more knowledge nor bring him fulfillment and if he has the strength of will to implement his realization, he will overcome his desire to steal the gold chain. Therefore, the best way a society can combat evil is by thoroughly cultivating its citizens' intellect and spirit. An education founded on reason develops the intellect. The spirit is refined through listening to music, whose harmony and rhythm soothe the passions, and through participating in physical exercise, which strengthens and disciplines the spirit so it can subdue our sensual appetites.

*The Republic*, Book IV (375 BCE)

### **The Buddhist and Hindu Theory of Evil**

Evil is caused by human beings' attempts to satisfy their selfish desires. A person's self craves pleasure, material objects, power, glory, security, and countless other desires. When she cannot obtain what she wants, she may cheat, steal, lie, and even kill. If someone tries to take away something she treasures she may deceive, fight, or kill. If someone has what she wants she will feel jealous and then try to take it away from him. Even attachment to her beliefs causes her to commit evil, for if someone disagrees with

her, she will persecute him. If she does not receive respect, she may strive to get it by using violence. The only way out of this vicious, selfish condition is to cease living for the self. In Buddhism, the self does not exist; it is an illusion. When we seek to identify the self within us, we fail to find anything. It is like examining a chariot and trying to pinpoint what part of it is truly the chariot. Is the wheel the chariot? Is the carriage the chariot? Is the axle the chariot? There is no one part of the chariot that is the chariot; in the same way, there is no one part of a human being or one substance within a human being that is the self. In Hinduism, the self is not our true self but an illusion covering our true self, which permeates the entire universe: what is within me is within everyone and everything. It is pure undifferentiated consciousness that is formless, spaceless, timeless, imperceivable, unthinkable, and inexpressible (Puligandla 221). We fail to see this all encompassing self because we are deluded by our empirical ego, that self that feels desires, wills, acts, thinks, and feels emotions. The empirical self makes us believe that we are individual beings but this is ignorance. In both religions, living for this false self causes evil because the false self has insatiable desires and people often commit evil in an attempt to satisfy this lustful self. One must live selflessly and perform one's duties with utmost concentration without attachment to the results of the actions. When a person does this, she will attain blissful harmony.

*Bhagavad-Gita*, Chapter II (200 BCE)

*The Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, Chapters IV and IX. Ramakrishna Puligandla (1975)

### **The Christian Theory of Evil**

Human beings have a tendency to do evil. They act vainly, cheat, lie, kill, destroy, and do other nefarious acts. This evil tendency is a result of our first ancestors' sin. God gave them free will and a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. These two people disobeyed God because they believed they would attain His power and glory. Their original sin has left residual effects on us, their descendants. When we are born, we possess this tendency to sin and we can only overcome it by asking God to help us. We do not have the capability to conquer our evil tendencies independently. To help us, God sent Jesus of Nazareth to teach us about God's way, to lead us to God, and to atone for our sins by dying on the cross. By believing in Jesus, following His teachings, and praying to Him, we obtain grace from God, which lifts us out of our depraved state and liberates us from original sin. When a Christian was "baptized into his (Jesus Christ's) death . . . (his) former self was crucified with him so that the self which belonged to sin was destroyed and freed from the slavery of sin . . . and he lives his life with God" (Romans 6:4-10). To keep our minds and spirit turned towards God, we have the Holy Spirit, which gives us more strength to be godly. Those who commit evil do not believe in Jesus, do not try to follow His teachings, and do not pray to Him. Consequently, they do not receive God's grace to overcome original sin. Instead, they live by and wallow in their evil nature. They mistakenly believe that satisfying their desires will bring them fulfillment, but these desires are insatiable. Furthermore, they

live for themselves, for their material success, for their goals, for their pleasures, instead of living according to God's will.

*The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, Chapter 5-7. (57-8)

"The Problem of Evil." Radoslav A. Tsanoff, in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, (1973) 164-165

### **Islamic View of Evil**

God created the entire universe, including each of us. We depend on God for life. Without God, we would be nothing. Therefore, we must each be servants of God. Evil results when a person serves himself instead of God. He does not try to follow God's teachings that are laid down in the *Koran*, the holy scriptures of Islam, and does not take into account his responsibilities as a member of society. He feels that he is important and does not seriously consider the overwhelming importance of God. He lives for his goals, for his possessions, for his pleasures, and for any of his multitudinous desires. Among some of the ways he attempts to satisfy his cravings are lying, cheating, abusing others, and even killing. He feels no constraint to maltreating his neighbors and no obligation to improve society. He lives for himself. No one else really counts in his mind. Although God is benevolent, he does not learn from God's benevolence and try to emulate it. To rectify this state, a person must realize that he is nothing compared to God. He came from a drop of sperm, and, when he lives for himself, he is ungrateful to God for his existence. He must make God the most important concern of his life and know that Muhammad is His Prophet. He must study the *Koran* and pray to God on his knees five times a day. He must give to the poor and help them improve their life. He must fast during Ramadan, the holy month of Islam when Muhammad received his initial revelation and made his historic migration from the city of Mecca to Medina. Finally, he must journey to Mecca, if he can, at least once in his life. When people follow these basic precepts, they will live a godly existence and evil acts will be rare.

*A History of God*, Chapter V. Karen Armstrong (1994)

*The World's Religions*, Chapter VI. Huston Smith (1991)

### **The Theory of Demonizing**

Throughout history, various groups of people have been convinced that only their conception of God was true, only their scriptures were godly, only their way of life was divine, and only their authorities knew God's words. When other people had divergent beliefs or were opposed to them, they considered these people enemies of God, children of Satan, or heathens. Everyone must obey their conception of God, their scriptures, and their authorities. People could not be faithful to God or their faith if they allowed others to believe in another religion or dogma. Therefore, as devoted servants of God, His scriptures, or His prophet, they must attack, persecute, and even kill those who did not believe in the "true" faith (Pagels xviii-xix). For example, the early Christian leader Irenaeus reviled another group of Christians known as Gnostics because they interpreted

the message of Jesus differently than the church in Rome. Iranaeus said these people were “filled with a Satanic spirit (Pagels 178). Members of religious groups often believe that if they did not attack opponents, the opponents would destroy God’s church, God’s society, or God’s righteous system. For example, European Christians attacked the Muslims in Palestine because they felt the “infidels” were desecrating the Holy Land. Even when persecuting others was against one’s religion, it was justified by portraying the opponents as subhuman or children of the devil because they refused to follow “the one true God. The Nazis labeled the Jews as children of Satan and subhuman because they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. Such a description made Nazis feel no guilt about killing the Jews. People need to feel they are godly without demonizing those who have different views or beliefs. Human life should be valued by every religion, and people, even those who disagree with one’s belief, should be treated with compassion (Pagels 184).

*The Origin of Satan.* Elaine Pagels (1995)

*Vessels of Evil*, Chapter 6. Lawrence Mordekhai Thomas (1993)

### **The Judaic Theory of Evil**

Human beings are barbaric. If left to their own devices, they will be at each other throats and a society will be in turmoil. Therefore, human beings need moral constraints so that they will be free to function in a society and so a society will function harmoniously. The Jewish formulation of those restraints is contained in the Torah, the book of the Law, which contains 613 commandments that regulate human behavior. At the heart of the Torah are the Ten Commandments, and four of the Ten Commandments deal with regulating people’s behavior towards their neighbor. They are minimum standards that make collective life possible. Concerning force, people may argue and fight, but killing is prohibited because it causes more killing which tears apart a community. Concerning sex, a person can flirt and even be promiscuous, but a married person must not have sexual relations outside the marriage because it rouses passions the community cannot tolerate. As for gaining possessions, a person may amass as large amount of wealth as he wants and be shrewd and cunning, but he may not steal because it causes animosities that become unforgivable. Finally a person may dissemble and equivocate but when he appears before a judge, he must tell the truth, so that justice may be administered fairly. These laws are like stop lights which tell motorists when to stop so that traffic can flow smoothly and safely. Those who do evil do not respect the Torah nor try to live by the Torah. These people must be strongly punished, even cast out, so that the Torah will be respected. When violators of the Torah are not severely punished and the Torah ceases to be respected, evil reigns throughout the society.

*The World’s Religions*, 286-288. Huston Smith (1991)

### **ACTIVITY SCHEDULE**

Much of the work of this unit will involve group work. Using groups of three works well

because it diminishes malingering by group members and it provides the students with an adequate amount of perspectives to deliberate and clarify. Therefore, before beginning the unit, the teacher should arrange the students in groups of three.

This unit also entails discussion. The teacher leads discussion, but the teacher does not express his or her view or tries to impose an answer on the students. The teacher should present other points of view, bring up provocative examples, and question rationale in order to induce the students to thoughtfully search for conclusions about evil. The teacher should use discussion to improve the students' capacity to reason, analyze, and evaluate. In addition, the teacher wants the students to formulate their own theory of evil so they will have a personal theory to serve as a guide through life. If a teacher imposes a theory on the students, the theory will only be a theory a student to learn for a test.

The time frame of this unit is approximately a semester.

### **Activity 1: Formulating a Theory of Evil**

Before students read any literature, they, using their own thoughts and what they have come to believe from their experiences, will formulate a theory that explains what is evil, why people act nefariously, and how evil behavior can be diminished. They will compose this theory working in groups. Afterwards, the groups will present their theory to the class, and the teacher will lead the class in discussing the theories' validity.

### **Activity 2: Revision of the Theories**

After all the theories are presented and discussed, the student groups will consider the comments of their peers about their theory along with the insightful points of their classmates' theories and revise their theory.

### **Activity 3: The Study of Philosophical and Religious Theories of Evil**

The student groups will read one of the synopses of evil that was displayed in the previous section and prepare a written summary, critique, and verbal presentation. The student group's presentation must contain a concise statement of the essence of the theory, which they will write on the chalk board, a verbal elaboration that clarifies the theory, and a question and answer period when the rest of the class will ask for clarification, point out fallacies, and express agreement. The other students will note down the crux of the theory on index cards and note other pertinent information. After the conclusion of the presentations, the students will organize the index cards, grouping the theories according to similar attributes. Then they will create a precise outline of all the theories of evil.

To reinforce the learning of these theories, the students will take an oral test. The

teacher will write the names of each theory of evil on slips of paper and place them in a hat. Each student will draw from the hat and explain to the class that particular theory of evil. Since the students do not know which theory they will pick, they will have to study all of them. Furthermore, listening to students explain the theories will strengthen everyone's understanding of the theories.

#### **Activity 4: Second Revision of Theory**

After studying all the theories of evil, the student groups will revise their own theory of evil.

#### **Activity 5: "The Tell-Tale Heart"**

The class will read "Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe. The students, working with group members, will write an essay that explains how the theory they studied and their own theory elucidate the behavior of the killer of this story. The students should be instructed about an introduction which presents the gist of the story, a body that elaborates each theory's interpretation of the character and evaluates its validity, and a closing which makes a conclusion about this character's evil qualities. Students will read some of the essays, and the teacher will lead students in discussing whether these theories adequately explain the conduct of the main character.

Further discussion will examine the symbolic meaning of the victim's eye, the cunning behavior of the killer, the symbolism of midnight, the terrors the narrator experienced in the past, the sound of the beating heart, the behavior of the police officers, the sound of the dead man's heart, and the killer's confession. Besides the theme pertaining to the nature of evil that will be examined in the students' essays and subsequent discussion, the teacher should lead discussion about the story's view of the conscience and the criminal's feeling about disclosing his crime.

#### **Activity 6: "The Culprit"**

The students will read "The Culprit" by Anton Chekhov, and, individually, they will write an essay taking a position about the morality of the main character —*Is Denis Grigoryev evil?* Of course, the essay must have an introduction which states the case and the student's position, a body that elaborates reasons and uses the story's text for support, and a closing which accentuates the student's point of view. Some students will read their essays to the class, and the teacher will lead discussion about them. The teacher should stimulate debate among the students about whether the act was evil or innocent and oblige the students to formulate principles that make an action evil.

The teacher will lead more discussion about the magistrate's attitude, the magistrate's sentence, and the theories of evil that would explain the behavior of the main character and the magistrate.

### Activity 7: “The Battle with Mr. Covey”

Class reads “The Battle with Mr. Covey” by Frederick Douglas. Individually, the students will write an essay that takes a position on the way Douglas handled evil. Some students will read their essays to the class, and teacher will lead discussion about them. Then the teacher will lead discussion about how some of the theories of evil explain Mr. Covey’s conduct.

### Activity 8: *The Scarlet Letter*

The students read *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and write a reading log that focuses on the novel’s presentation of evil. The teacher will elicit responses from the student’s logs to stimulate discussion. Of particular significance are Hester’s adultery, Dimmesdale’s concealment of his sin, Chillingworth’s revenge, the Puritan’s treatment of Hester, and the Puritan belief about nature being evil.

In addition, the students will write short essays about important aspects of the *The Scarlet Letter*. Before students do these essays, the teacher should review the structure and qualities of a good essay, such as topic sentences, elaboration, supporting details from text, quoting, closing, etc.

#### ***Short Essay Assignments for The Scarlet Letter***

1. (After Chapter 2) Did the author present Hester, as a tramp or as a majestic woman? Explain how he did this?
2. (After Chapter 4) If you were the head of the church in this town at this time, what would you do with Hester?
3. (After Chapter 5) Explain Hester’s decision to remain in this town in an essay with a *dramatic shift*—explain a situation in a way that makes the reader expect a certain outcome, but, with a transition word or phrase, explain an unexpected reaction and why it occurred.
4. (After Chapter 7) Describe Pearl.
5. (After Chapter 8) Note down at least five details of evidence which indicate who the father of Pearl is. Then, in an essay, explain who the father of Pearl is and support your conclusion with the evidence.
6. (Chapters 9–11) Two types of irony refer to the opposite of what is said or done and an occurrence that is strangely or mysteriously appropriate. Listed below are the specific types of irony of each category with examples from the novel.
  - A. Opposite
    - i. What is said is the opposite of what was expected.  
*Dimmesdale declares himself a vile sinner, but the Puritans adore him more.*
    - ii. What happens is the opposite of what was intended.  
*The Puritans ask Chillingworth to treat Dimmesdale, not knowing he will be torturing him.*
    - iii. A person does something for the opposite reason that he expresses.

*Chillingworth claims to give Dimmesdale medicine, but he is actually giving him poison*

- iv. What is said is the opposite of what was meant.  
*Chillingworth expresses great alarm at Dimmesdale's deteriorating health and wants to cure him.*  
*Chillingworth refers to Dimmesdale as a "saintly man" and a "pious man."*
- v. *What is believed is the opposite of what is true.*  
*The Puritans believe Dimmesdale's sickness is the result of his earnest devotion to God and his congregation.*

**B. Appropriate in a Strange or Mysterious Way**

- i. What a person says about another person is true about himself.  
*Dimmesdale says that some men do not reveal their sins because if they become known as sinners, they will lose respect and be unable to carry out their duties to God.*
- ii What occurred is fitting but how it occurred is mysterious.  
*Dimmesdale has an A on his chest.*
- iii. What is said or believed has a truthful meaning that the speaker did not intend.  
*Pearl says that the devil has a hold of Dimmesdale.*

The students will explain situations in this chapter that are ironic (the answers are written here in italics) and place a number after them indicating what type of irony they are. Then they must explain at least five of these ironic episodes in an essay.

- 7. What effect does guilt have on Dimmesdale?
- 8. Should Hester and Dimmesdale run off and live together as husband and wife?

**Activity 9: Analysis of Evil in *The Scarlet Letter* in a Paper**

The students will write a paper about the evil behavior in *The Scarlet Letter*. They must use at least two theories of evil that they studied and their own theory to analyze the evil conduct. The teacher should give an overview of the structure of the paper and emphasize that the students need to elaborate details from the novel that support their conclusions.

### **Activity 10: Research Paper on an Evil Event and *Othello***

The students will research a nefarious event and write a unified paper that analyzes it. They will explain the event by using some of the theories of evil that they have studied and their own theory. All conclusions must be supported with facts, accounts by witnesses, and testimony of experts.

I have found that students need substantial assistance while they work on a research paper. Otherwise, many will wait until a few days before the due date to begin, some will copy straight from a book, and others will turn in something that is inarticulate. Therefore, I have scheduled half of each class period—I am speaking of a 1½-hour class—for work on the research paper. During that time the teacher will explain various parts of the paper, such as note cards, organizing note cards, writing an introduction, and he will give assistance to students and assess their progress. This project takes about six weeks to complete.

During the second half of the class, the students will watch a film version of *Othello* and read along with the script. The teacher will pause at appropriate places and lead discussion about pertinent points of the drama, especially the nature of evil. If the class is not responsive, the teacher can have the students write down responses about particular segments that they will turn in later. The teacher will solicit some responses and use them to spur discussion.

### **Activity 11: Composing a Narrative about Evil**

The students will compose a fictional or biographical story about an experience of evil. The theme of the story must be the student's theory of evil. Some students will read their story to the class, and the others students will discuss the stories' theme of evil. The teacher should inform students who are writing about actual experiences to use different names because their story will be published on the Internet and using actual names may cause legal difficulties.

### **Activity 12: Final Revision of Their Theory of Evil**

Each group will formulate a final draft of its theory of evil—what evil is, what causes evil, and what should be done to reduce evil—and present it to the entire class, which will discuss them.

### **Activity 13: Compiling a Class Pamphlet**

The class puts together a pamphlet that contains its theory of evil, their papers about a nefarious event, and their stories about evil.

## Activity 14: Publishing the Pamphlet on School's Web Site

In the computer lab, with the assistance of the computer lab teacher, selected students will scan the pages of their pamphlet onto a floppy disk. Selected students will review the documents on the floppy disk and revise any portions that did not accurately scan. Other selected students, with the assistance of the computer lab teacher, will access the Internet, log onto the school's web page, create a file for the pamphlet, and download the documents from the floppy disk onto the web page.

### TEACHER'S ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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New York: Barnes & Nobles Books, 1995.  
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Explanation of various theories of evil.

## **RESOURCE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Chekhov, Anton. "The Culprit." in *The Portable Chekhov*. New York: Viking Press, 1968.

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Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.

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Directed by Oliver Parker.

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### **CLASSROOM MATERIALS**

1. The synopses of the theories of evil that are included in this unit
2. Literature listed in Resource Bibliography
3. Index cards
4. VCR and monitor
5. Computer lab with Internet access
6. School web site

