

English 101: Government, Society, and the Individual

The readings and essay assignments in this class generally speak to one of the following topics: the role of the individual in society; the role of government in the life of individuals; and the intersection of community, government and individuals. Readings from different historical periods are used: ancient Greece, nineteenth-century Russia, Europe during World War II, the civil rights movement in the United States, and contemporary American culture. Many of the readings stress that individual participation is essential for a functioning democracy. The readings discuss different forms that participation takes, with special attention paid to various types of civil disobedience (Socrates, Tolstoy, Martin Luther King, and others). Students read comparatively, and taken cumulatively the course readings help demonstrate that societies continuously struggle to define the relationship between government and individuals. Additionally, some of the readings touch upon the role that education and literature play in preparing individuals to participate in democracy.

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Overview of the Course

English 101 is a required course in which teachers assign several short essays, and students learn to write in different rhetorical modes. Most teachers assign several in-class essays, and to receive credit for the course the students must pass a departmental exit exam. Student essays should be written in response to literature—personal and argumentative essays, journalism, fiction, etc.

My approach to teaching English 101 differs from standard approaches to this course. Most English 101 anthologies are structured around the rhetorical modes, using contemporary writings to exemplify these modes. My English 101 course focuses on argument, as opposed to each individual mode; the readings I use are broader in historical scope, yet narrower in terms of their correspondence to the aforementioned theme of government, society, and the individual. I find the essays in standard composition readers to be occasionally suitable though generally uninteresting. I find that by teaching texts that I have selected, and which I feel personally connected to, I am able to become enthusiastic about teaching the materials. Ultimately, I think it is this enthusiasm that inspires student interest. Additionally, I think students appreciate the challenge that some of these texts provide. I find that with proper guidance they are able to understand, analyze and interpret the texts, and to relate them to contemporary life. I select texts that are rich and stimulating, and which provoke class discussion and debate. I feel that lively class discussion stimulates better papers. That is, students want to do better if they are being challenged in their reading and in their discussions.

I stress that the classroom, like a city or country, is also a community, and that for it to function properly individual students must participate. As we read about other communities, I remind students to pay attention to their own community (the classroom), and to make certain that they are doing their part (reading and writing and speaking during class discussion) to ensure its success.

Texts

The texts read in this course reflect the themes of justice; the role of the individual in society; the role of government in the life of individuals; and the intersection of community, government and individuals:

Civil Disobedience: A Wadsworth Casebook in Argument (Thomson/Wadsworth)

Course packet including copies of writings by George Orwell, Henry David Thoreau, Virginia Woolf, Martin Luther King, Franz Kafka, Flannery O'Connor, Leo Tolstoy, Søren Kierkegaard, Richard Wright, Peter Singer, and others

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to do the following:

- Understand and analyze college-level reading materials and write argumentative-based essays in response.
- Write argumentative essays using techniques of textual analysis, definition, personal narrative, and comparison and contrast.

- Develop a coherent, logical thesis with concrete, relevant, and cohesive support.
- Choose appropriate expository patterns or combinations of patterns to write effective, well-organized, fully developed multi-paragraph essays.
- Express complex ideas and arguments using clear, natural language.
- Write efficiently and coherently during timed in-class exams and exercises.
- Have a greater understanding of individual strengths and weaknesses in writing.
- Understand rhetorical patterns and the intricacies of argument.

Course Requirements

With each reading I have selected, I have included assignments, essay questions, notes, or discussion topics. Additionally, I have included a brief analysis of the problems and rewards posed by these texts. This should become clear as you read through the module.

Essays. You will write several short essays throughout the semester. Each essay must be double-spaced and in a reasonable-sized font. In some cases, you will be asked to write multiple drafts of essays.

Error logs. I want you to really understand your own strengths and weaknesses as a writer. To this end, when I return your papers you will spend a few minutes recording the types of errors you make in an error log. Set aside a special section in your notebook or binder for this log. It is very important that you take this seriously.

Portfolios. You are required to keep a portfolio of all your written work, including take-home papers and their revisions, in-class papers and their revisions, and all other quizzes, tests and assignments. The purpose of the portfolio is so that both you and I can have evidence of how your work has changed and grown. Keep your portfolio up to date and complete.

Proficiency exam. In addition to the assigned work, each student is expected to take and pass the departmental English exam. To prepare for the exam, you will have the opportunity to take several practice exams. Only students with a “C” or better grade-point average will qualify to take the proficiency exam.

Participation. This class will function as a community, where participation is required from each individual. To facilitate discussion, I will provide questions and issues to address for each reading. It is expected that you come to class prepared to discuss the texts and to participate as much as possible. Additionally, you will be asked to work in groups and to participate in critiques of student papers. Please take this seriously and treat your fellow students with kindness and respect. Be aware that 25 percent of your grade is from participation. This also includes attendance. If you do not come to class regularly, you will not be able to fulfill your participation requirements and you will fail the class.

Attendance and punctuality. Regular attendance is required and expected. Simply stated, if you do not come to class regularly, you will not pass the course. In the rare case that you are absent, you are required to contact me by phone or e-mail. It is absolutely necessary that you make it to class on time. Quizzes and graded assignments will be given at the beginning of classes to encourage your timeliness. To do them and receive credit, you need to be there.

Late papers. I will accept an essay no later than *one class* after the initial due date. If you hand in a late paper, *your grade will be lowered.*

Plagiarism. If you use another writer's work, ideas, or language, you must credit the source. If you are caught plagiarizing, you will fail the course. If you do plagiarize, I will be able to tell. Unfortunately, I have had students fail because of plagiarism. If you have any questions about whether or not you might be plagiarizing, or if you have any questions about how to give credit to your sources, you are welcome to ask.

Grading

Take-home essays, in-class exams, quizzes, and presentations account for 75 percent of a student's grade. Participation accounts for the other 25 percent of the grade.

Syllabus

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| Week 1 | Introductions; in-class readings; course schedule; read <i>New York Times</i> articles on the subject of reading: Andrew Solomon's "The Closing of the American Book"; Mark Edmundson's "The Risk of Reading"; read Richard Wright's "The Library Card" |
| Week 2 | ESSAY NO. 1 DUE: IN RESPONSE TO RICHARD WRIGHT; read Virginia Woolf's "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" |
| Week 3 | Computer lab class; ESSAY NO. 2 (IN-CLASS) ON WOOLF; Read George Orwell's "A Hanging"; Read Franz Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" and "The Problem of Our Laws" |
| Week 4 | Read "Is Torture Ever Justified?"; read Chanterelle Sung's book review of <i>Why Terrorism Works</i> , by Alan Dershowitz; BEGIN ESSAY NO. 3: TAKE A STAND ON THE USE OF TORTURE IN A TICKING-BOMB SCENARIO |
| Week 5 | ESSAY NO. 3 DUE; Read Bruno Bettelheim's "The Holocaust" |
| Week 6 | ESSAY NO. 4 (IN-CLASS): DEFINITION ESSAY ON BETTELHEIM; read Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (in textbook) |
| Week 7 | Read Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" (in textbook) |
| Week 8 | ESSAY NO. 5 DUE: MIDTERM ESSAY ON THOREAU OR MARTIN LUTHER KING |
| Week 9 | Read Tolstoy's "Nonviolence as a Life Principle" and "A Letter from Tolstoy to Gandhi" (in textbook) |

Week 10	Read excerpts from Plato's <i>Apology</i> ; read Plato's <i>Crito</i> (in textbook)
Week 11	Read entries from the Diary of Søren Kierkegaard; ESSAY NO. 6: IN RESPONSE TO PLATO
Week 12	Read from Orwell's <i>Down and Out in Paris and London</i>
Week 13	ESSAY NO. 7 (IN-CLASS): RESPONSE TO ORWELL
Week 14	EXIT EXAM; read Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge"
Week 15	Read Peter Singer's "The Singer Solution to World Poverty"
Week 16	ESSAY NO. 8; FINAL PAPER DUE

Week 1: Solomon, Edmundson, Wright

Texts

Andrew Solomon, "The Closing of the American Book," *New York Times*, Op-Ed section, July 10, 2004

Mark Edmundson, "The Risk of Reading," *New York Times*, Magazine section, August 1, 2004

Richard Wright, "The Library Card" (in course packet)

I like to begin the semester with these reading assignments because they focus on the importance of reading and offer several unique ideas about why we should read and what reading can offer. The Richard Wright essay, in particular, is an inspiration in the sense that he made a serious choice to change his life because of reading. Reading teaches him about what is possible in life, and it teaches him that he does not have to put up with the miseries of his life. Through reading, he learns that he has the right to be angry; he learns that he has the potential to change his life. The language of these readings should not cause any problems for the students.

Edmundson's "The Risk of Reading"

Sample Essay

Topic: Write an essay (at least 1.5 pages), typed, double-spaced, and in a reasonable-sized font, in response to Mark Edmundson's "The Risk of Reading." Address the following:

1. What is Edmundson's thesis in his editorial?
2. What reasons does he give to support his thesis? How are his views different from the views of Andrew Solomon?

3. Speculate as to why Edmundson might say that reading is life's second chance. That is, how, in your opinion, can reading create new opportunities for people?
4. Conclude by taking a stand on Edmundson's essay. Do you agree or disagree with his findings?

The following is a sample essay that I have written. I give this essay to the students so they can use it as a model of what I expect from their writing assignments. In this essay, I use a simple writing style; I focus on clarity and use several concrete examples from the text to support my own thesis. I also paraphrase and quote from the text to show students how to use these techniques.

Sample Essay on Edmundson's "The Risk of Reading"

Mark Edmundson's "The Risk of Reading" was written in response to Andrew Solomon's "The Closing of the American Book." Both writers discuss the value of reading, but they have very different understandings of what that value is. Solomon states that "the crisis in reading is a crisis in national health and a crisis in national politics." In terms of health, he believes that a lack of reading can lead to depression and Alzheimer's disease. In terms of politics, he believes that reading is necessary to create an informed public who wants to participate in the privileges of democracy. Edmundson, on the other hand, takes a vastly different approach. He feels that Solomon's misses the point when he says that people should read in order to maintain democracy. On the contrary, he says, reading is much more powerful. Edmundson takes a much more personal approach. For reading, he says, is "life's grand second chance." In this essay, I will discuss what Edmundson means when he states that reading is "life's grand second chance." I will discuss how Edmundson supports this thesis and I will conclude by stating my own opinion about Edmundson's thesis.

"All of us grow up once," writes Edmundson. "We pass through a process of socialization. We learn about right and wrong and good and bad from our parents . . . teachers or religious guides. Yet for many people, the process of socialization doesn't quite work." What Edmundson means by this statement is that as children not all of us are instilled with the proper values. Some children are instilled either with corrupt values or no values at all, and for these people, reading gives them a "second chance." What does he mean by "second chance?" What he means is that certain writers enable us to understand the world in a completely different manner. Reading can change people, Edmundson believes. Reading has the power to give people access to thoughts, experiences and worldviews which they had never before considered.

To support his thesis, Edmundson discusses the great American poet Walt Whitman. He talk about how Whitman was merely a mediocre writer until he read the books of Ralph Waldo Emerson. "I was simmering," said Whitman, after reading Emerson, who "offered him a new image of authority." What Edmundson is implying is that Whitman would never have been a great writer had he not read Emerson. When he says that Emerson offered Whitman a new image of authority, and that Emerson "was for a while, Whitman's second father," what he is suggesting is that Emerson instilled in Whitman a whole new set of values. He is suggesting that these values influenced Whitman and led him to become a legendary writer.

Edmundson further supports his thesis by discussing what happened to him at the age of seventeen when he read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Edmundson grew up in Boston and in his high school "there was a low-key race war." And because of Malcolm X, Edmundson says, he was able to see his own life and this race war in a more complicated manner. He now felt sympathy for African Americans, and a greater understanding of the racism they experienced. The irony here is that Edmundson did not know this merely by talking to and observing his fellow African American students. It seems safe to imply that he never spoke to the African American students in his school. He needed to read a book by Malcolm X to understand the realities of racism.

I fully agree with Mark Edmundson's essay. Reading is powerful and dangerous, for it makes us see just how complicated the world is and how complicated people can be. For example, two of my favorite writers, Flannery O'Connor and Vladimir Nabokov, all have characters in their stories who commit evil actions, and yet these characters have something very likeable about them. One thing that great literature can show us is that even in the worst people there is something sympathetic. In this sense, literature can make us compassionate.

Wright's "The Library Card"

Notes and Study Questions for "The Library Card"

p. 631: The white man who helps him check books out asks him not to mention this to the other white men. What does he fear?

632: "You're not using these books," the librarian asks, "are you?" Why is she so worried? What is the fear in his using them?

633: Reading Mencken, Wright realizes: "This man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. What amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it." Why did this amaze him so much?

633–634: The next day: "I went to work, but the mood of the book would not die; it lingered, coloring everything I saw, heard, did. I now felt that I knew what the white men were feeling. Merely because I had read a book that had spoken of how they lived and thought, I identified myself with that book. I felt vaguely guilty. Would I, filled with bookish notions, act in a manner that would make the whites dislike me?"

634: After reading a novel, he says that he now understood more about his boss. "I felt closer to him, though still distant. I felt now that I knew him, that I could feel the very limits of his narrow life. And this had happened because I had read a novel about a mythical man called George F. Babbitt." What is it about fiction that can help us to better understand the real world?

634: "I gave myself over to each novel without reserve, without trying to criticize it; it was enough for me to see and feel something different. And for me, everything was something different. Reading was like a drug, a dope. The novels created moods in which I lived for

days. But I could not conquer my sense of guilt, my feeling that the white men around me knew that I was changing, that I had begun to regard them differently.”

634: At work, the white men questioned him: "Boy, what are you reading those books for . . . You'll addle your brains if you don't watch out."

634: "I read Dreiser's novels and they revived in me a vivid sense of my mother's suffering."

635: He tries to write: "I discovered that more than desire and feeling were necessary to write . . . Yet I still wondered how it was possible to know people sufficiently to write about them . . . To me, with my vast ignorance, my Jim Crow station in life, it seemed a task impossible of achievement. I now knew what being a Negro meant. I could endure the hunger; I had learned to live with hate. But to feel that there were feelings denied me, that the very breath of life itself was beyond my reach, that more than anything else hurt, wounded me. I had a new hunger."

635: "In buoying me up, reading also cast me down, made me see what was possible, what I had missed. I no longer *felt* the world about me was hostile, killing; I knew it. A million times I asked myself what I could do to save myself, and there were no answers. I seemed forever condemned, ringed by walls."

635: "I did not discuss my reading with Mr. Falk, who had lent me his library card; it would have meant talking about myself and that would have been too painful."

635: "I wanted to write but I did not even know the English language . . . I felt that I was getting a better sense of the language from novels than from studying grammar."

636: His landlady asked him what he's always reading: "I hope you know your own mind," she said.

636: Wright decides to go North . . . Evaluate his decision. What led him to leave the South? What role did reading play in this?

Essay Questions for "The Library Card"

Choose one of the topics below and write a two-page essay with a strong thesis and details to support your thesis.

1. In "The Library Card," Richard Wright implies that he does not know himself very well until he begins to read books. What specifically does Wright learn about himself through reading? What does he learn about his society and the world at large? What conclusions can be drawn about the effects that reading can have on an individual?
2. Write a two-page essay with a strong thesis and supporting details about what Wright discovers through reading. Consider some of the following questions:
 - Why African Americans were not allowed to check out books from libraries
 - The implications of denying people literature

- How learning about other people can help you learn about yourself
3. In “The Library Card,” we learn that Richard Wright decided to make many changes in his life after he was able to check out books from the library. Write a two-page essay with a strong thesis and supporting details about how Wright changes through reading books. Consider what Wright did and did not know before he began to read. Consider Wright’s statement on page 635 that after reading he “began to feel that there were feelings denied” to him. What might those feelings have been? What feelings does he begin to experience after reading books? What do these feelings ultimately lead him to do?

Week 2: Woolf

Text

Virginia Woolf, “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” available at http://www.ibiblio.org/sally/Thoughts_on_Peace.html. This was written in August 1940 for an American symposium on current matters concerning women.

Students do not have much trouble understanding this essay. I find it helpful to break the students up and have them address the questions I wrote for the study guide. I also find it helpful to discuss the difference in how men and women approach war and violence. The question of "ancient instincts" also proves fruitful, as does the final anecdote about the German soldier captured by the British. Also, I find it helpful to ask them to paraphrase or to actually rewrite in their own words different paragraphs from the essay.

Study Guide

Paragraph 2: "There is another way of fighting for freedom without fighting with arms; we can fight with the mind. We can make ideas that will help the young Englishman who is fighting up in the sky to defeat the enemy." What might these ideas be? From these lines, what conclusions can be drawn as to Woolf's feelings about why men go to war?

Paragraph 3: "Women have not a word to say in politics. There is no woman in the Cabinet; nor in any responsible post. All the idea makers who are in a position to make ideas effective are men." What do you think Woolf thinks would happen if there were more women in positions of power?

Paragraph 4: Writing during World War II, Woolf questions the official British government line that if the British army destroys Hitler, then the British people will be free. She writes: "Who is Hitler? What is he? Aggressiveness, tyranny, the insane love of power made manifest, they reply. Destroy that and you will be free." She does not explicitly state it here, but what do you think Woolf finds problematic about this analysis? That is, Woolf thinks that even if the British defeat Hitler they will still be not-free. What does she think will keep the British in a state of imprisonment? Read paragraph 5

Paragraph 5: Commenting on "painted women, dressed-up women," Woolf says, "they are slaves trying to enslave. If we could free ourselves from slavery, we should free men from tyranny. Hitlers are bred by slaves." What do you think she means by this statement? How are "Hitlers bred by slaves?" How would freeing women help to free men?

Paragraph 7: "The young airman up in the sky is driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers; he is driven by voices in himself—ancient instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition. Is he to be blamed for those instincts . . . We must help the young Englishmen to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations. We must create more honourable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun." In this passage, Woolf is saying that men have "ancient instincts" that make them want to go to war. Do you believe this is true? She also believes that these instincts need to be overcome so that men can free themselves from "their subconscious Hitlerism." What might this "liberating" process involve?

Paragraph 8: "If we are to compensate the young man for the loss of his glory and of his gun, we must give him access to the creative feelings. We must make happiness. We must free him from the machine. We must bring him out of his prison into the open air. But what is the use of freeing the young Englishman if the young German and the young Italian remain slaves?" What do you think Woolf means here by "creative feelings"? How do you think Woolf thinks men can acquire these feelings? How can society encourage the acquisition of these feelings?

Paragraph 9: Woolf ends the essay with an anecdote about a German soldier who is captured by his enemies. The enemies give him a cigarette and a cup of tea. Why does she end with this anecdote? How do you understand the final three lines of this paragraph?

Essay Topic

1. In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," Virginia Woolf says that young men are driven to war "by ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition." She says two important things here: (1) that men have instincts that lead them to fight, and (2) that these instincts are encouraged by society through "education and tradition." Do you agree that men are instinctually prone to violence and war? Do you think society encourages or discourages these instincts? Why or why not? How can society discourage these violent instincts? How can society foster more peaceful and "creative" instincts? Write an essay with a clear thesis and use examples to support your thesis.

Week 3: Orwell, Kafka

Texts

George Orwell, "A Hanging" (available on many websites)
Franz Kafka, "The Problem of Our Laws"

Franz Kafka, "A Letter to an Academy"

Orwell's "A Hanging"

Students find this essay a bit difficult to read, but certainly with guidance they do well with it. A contextual introduction is helpful; as is a discussion of the difficult vocabulary. I try to call attention to the richness of the description. I also focus on the moment in the text when the condemned man avoids the puddle; the dog; and the many ways that prisoners are silenced. This final point provokes interesting conversation.

A Hanging George Orwell

It was in Burma, a sodden morning of the rains. A sickly light, like yellow tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard. We were waiting outside the condemned cells, a row of sheds fronted with double bars, like small animal cages. Each cell measured about ten feet by ten and was quite bare within except for a plank bed and a pot of drinking water. In some of them brown silent men were squatting at the inner bars, with their blankets draped round them. These were the condemned men, due to be hanged within the next week or two.

One prisoner had been brought out of his cell. He was a Hindu, a puny wisp of a man, with a shaven head and vague liquid eyes. He had a thick, sprouting moustache, absurdly too big for his body, rather like the moustache of a comic man on the films. Six tall Indian warders were guarding him and getting him ready for the gallows. Two of them stood by with rifles and fixed bayonets, while the others handcuffed him, passed a chain through his handcuffs and fixed it to their belts, and lashed his arms tight to his sides. They crowded very close about him, with their hands always on him in a careful, caressing grip, as though all the while feeling him to make sure he was there. It was like men handling a fish which is still alive and may jump back into the water. But he stood quite unresisting, yielding his arms limply to the ropes, as though he hardly noticed what was happening.

Eight o'clock struck and a bugle call, desolately thin in the wet air, floated from the distant barracks. The superintendent of the jail, who was standing apart from the rest of us, moodily prodding the gravel with his stick, raised his head at the sound. He was an army doctor, with a grey toothbrush moustache and a gruff voice. "For God's sake hurry up, Francis," he said irritably. "The man ought to have been dead by this time. Aren't you ready yet?"

Francis, the head jailer, a fat Dravidian in a white drill suit and gold spectacles, waved his black hand. "Yes sir, yes sir," he bubbled. "All iss satisfactorily prepared. The hangman iss waiting. We shall proceed."

"Well, quick march, then. The prisoners can't get their breakfast till this job's over."

We set out for the gallows. Two warders marched on either side of the prisoner, with their rifles at the slope; two others marched close against him, gripping him by arm and shoulder, as though at once pushing and supporting him. The rest of us, magistrates and the like, followed behind. Suddenly, when we had gone ten yards, the procession stopped short without any order or warning. A dreadful thing had happened—a dog, come goodness knows whence, had appeared in the yard. It came bounding among us with a loud

volley of barks, and leapt round us wagging its whole body, wild with glee at finding so many human beings together.

It was a large woolly dog, half Airedale, half pariah. For a moment it pranced round us, and then, before anyone could stop it, it had made a dash for the prisoner, and jumping up tried to lick his face. Everyone stood aghast, too taken aback even to grab at the dog.

"Who let that bloody brute in here?" said the superintendent angrily.

"Catch it, someone!"

A warder, detached from the escort, charged clumsily after the dog, but it danced and gambolled just out of his reach, taking everything as part of the game. A young Eurasian jailer picked up a handful of gravel and tried to stone the dog away, but it dodged the stones and came after us again. Its yaps echoed from the jail walls. The prisoner, in the grasp of the two warders, looked on incuriously, as though this was another formality of the hanging. It was several minutes before someone managed to catch the dog. Then we put my handkerchief through its collar and moved off once more, with the dog still straining and whimpering.

It was about forty yards to the gallows. I watched the bare brown back of the prisoner marching in front of me. He walked clumsily with his bound arms, but quite steadily, with that bobbing gait of the Indian who never straightens his knees. At each step his muscles slid neatly into place, the lock of hair on his scalp danced up and down, his feet printed themselves on the wet gravel. And once, in spite of the men who gripped him by each shoulder, he stepped slightly aside to avoid a puddle on the path.

It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle, I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All the organs of his body were working—bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming—all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would still be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live. His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned—reasoned even about puddles. He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone—one mind less, one world less.

The gallows stood in a small yard, separate from the main grounds of the prison, and overgrown with tall prickly weeds. It was a brick erection like three sides of a shed, with planking on top, and above that two beams and a crossbar with the rope dangling. The hangman, a grey-haired convict in the white uniform of the prison, was waiting beside his machine. He greeted us with a servile crouch as we entered. At a word from Francis the two warders, gripping the prisoner more closely than ever, half led, half pushed him to the gallows and helped him clumsily up the ladder. Then the hangman climbed up and fixed the rope round the prisoner's neck.

We stood waiting, five yards away. The warders had formed in a rough circle round the gallows. And then, when the noose was fixed, the prisoner began crying out on his god. It was a high, reiterated cry of "Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!", not urgent and fearful like a prayer or a cry for help, but steady, rhythmical, almost like the tolling of a bell. The dog answered the sound with a whine. The hangman, still standing on the gallows, produced a small cotton bag like a flour bag and drew it down over the prisoner's face. But the sound, muffled by the cloth, still persisted, over and over again: "Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!"

The hangman climbed down and stood ready, holding the lever. Minutes seemed to pass. The steady, muffled crying from the prisoner went on and on, "Ram! Ram! Ram!" never faltering for an instant. The superintendent, his head on his chest, was slowly poking the ground with his stick; perhaps he was counting the cries, allowing the prisoner a fixed number—fifty, perhaps, or a hundred. Everyone had changed colour. The Indians had gone grey like bad coffee, and one or two of the bayonets were wavering. We looked at the lashed, hooded man on the drop, and listened to his cries—each cry another second of life; the same thought was in all our minds: oh, kill him quickly, get it over, stop that abominable noise!

Suddenly the superintendent made up his mind. Throwing up his head he made a swift motion with his stick. "Chalo!" he shouted almost fiercely.

There was a clanking noise, and then dead silence. The prisoner had vanished, and the rope was twisting on itself. I let go of the dog, and it galloped immediately to the back of the gallows; but when it got there it stopped short, barked, and then retreated into a corner of the yard, where it stood among the weeds, looking timorously out at us. We went round the gallows to inspect the prisoner's body. He was dangling with his toes pointed straight downwards, very slowly revolving, as dead as a stone.

The superintendent reached out with his stick and poked the bare body; it oscillated, slightly. "HE'S all right," said the superintendent. He backed out from under the gallows, and blew out a deep breath. The moody look had gone out of his face quite suddenly. He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Eight minutes past eight. Well, that's all for this morning, thank God."

The warders unfixed bayonets and marched away. The dog, sobered and conscious of having misbehaved itself, slipped after them. We walked out of the gallows yard, past the condemned cells with their waiting prisoners, into the big central yard of the prison. The convicts, under the command of warders armed with lathis, were already receiving their breakfast. They squatted in long rows, each man holding a tin pannikin, while two warders with buckets marched round ladling out rice; it seemed quite a homely, jolly scene, after the hanging. An enormous relief had come upon us now that the job was done. One felt an impulse to sing, to break into a run, to snigger. All at once everyone began chattering gaily.

The Eurasian boy walking beside me nodded towards the way we had come, with a knowing smile: "Do you know, sir, our friend (he meant the dead man), when he heard his appeal had been dismissed, he pissed on the floor of his cell. From fright.—Kindly take one of my cigarettes, sir. Do you not admire my new silver case, sir? From the boxwallah, two rupees eight annas. Classy European style."

Several people laughed—at what, nobody seemed certain.

Francis was walking by the superintendent, talking garrulously. "Well, sir, all hass passed off with the utmost satisfactoriness. It wass all finished—flick! like that. It iss not always so—oah, no! I have known cases where the doctor wass obliged to go beneath the gallows and pull the prisoner's legs to ensure decease. Most disagreeable!"

"Wriggling about, eh? That's bad," said the superintendent.

"Ach, sir, it iss worse when they become refractory! One man, I recall, clung to the bars of hiss cage when we went to take him out. You will scarcely credit, sir, that it took six warders to dislodge him, three pulling at each leg. We reasoned with him. "My dear fellow," we said, "think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!" But no, he would not listen! Ach, he wass very troublesome!"

I found that I was laughing quite loudly. Everyone was laughing. Even the superintendent grinned in a tolerant way. "You'd better all come out and have a drink," he said quite genially. "I've got a bottle of whisky in the car. We could do with it."

We went through the big double gates of the prison, into the road. "Pulling at his legs!" exclaimed a Burmese magistrate suddenly, and burst into a loud chuckling. We all began laughing again. At that moment Francis's anecdote seemed extraordinarily funny. We all had a drink together, native and European alike, quite amicably. The dead man was a hundred yards away.

Study Guide for "A Hanging"

Pretend you are teaching this essay to the class. Address the following:

1. This is an essay about a personal narrative, yet it raises many questions about the universal condition of humans. One question it raises is what it means "to destroy a healthy, conscious man." What *does* it mean to destroy a healthy, conscious man? What are some other questions the essay raises? Point to some passages in the text to support your claims.
2. Discuss the narrator and his group's attitude towards the condemned man. How is the condemned man described at the beginning? How is he described at the end? How does the narrator change throughout the course of the essay? Point to passages in the text to support your claims.
3. When the prisoner is about to be killed, he cries out. They attempt to silence him by putting a bag over his head. Why is it so important that he be silenced? Think both literally and figuratively.
4. After the condemned man dies, the narrator says that they "felt an impulse to sing, to break into a run, to snigger. All at once everyone began chattering gaily." Why did they feel the impulse to sing? What does it say about them? About their jobs? About the prisoners? About the worlds in which they live?
5. The narrator goes back in forth between discussing himself as "I" and discussing himself as a member of a group—"we." Does he spend more time focusing on himself or on the group? Speculate as to why he makes his choice.
6. Comment on the essay's style. How can you classify it stylistically?

Kafka's "The Problem of Our Laws"

Students find this story difficult to penetrate, but it is short enough that we can read it in detail in class and work through the difficulties. I like to get students to think about how laws are constructed, and I like students to think about the difference between laws and interpretations of laws. We discuss uncontroversial, useful laws (e.g., speed limits) and how they are interpreted; we also discuss more controversial laws (death penalty for certain homicide cases) and how they are interpreted. Along with "A Hanging," this story serves as a nice introduction to the next writing topic—torture.

Study Guide for "The Problem of Our Laws"

1. Who do you think the narrator is? What is his relationship to the nobles? What is his relationship to the laws?
2. What is the difference between laws and the interpretation of laws? Can you think of an example of a modern-day law that has many different interpretations?
3. What kind of a society does the narrator live in? What passages from the text lead you to come to your conclusions?
4. "The law is whatever the nobles do?" How do you understand this? Do you see any truth or validity to this statement if it is applied to modern times?
5. "We are more inclined to hate ourselves, because we have not yet shown ourselves worthy of being entrusted with laws." Why do you think the narrator says such a thing? Why should they hate themselves for not being entrusted with the laws?
6. "Any party that would repudiate not only all belief in the laws but the nobility as well, would have the whole people behind it; yet no such party can come into existence, for nobody would dare to repudiate the nobility." If you are not in a position of power, why is it so difficult to repudiate the nobility?

Kafka's "Report to an Academy"

Students enjoy this story, and find it to be humorous and easily understandable. I find it useful to discuss the different concepts of freedom that the ape discusses; I also like to discuss the issues it raises about human nature, violence and power, the animalistic nature of humans, etc. (Note: I prefer the Muir translation of this story in Kafka's *Collected Stories*; however, the translation below was available online.)

A Report to an Academy Franz Kafka

Honored members of the Academy!

You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape.

I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire. It is now nearly five years since I was an ape, a short space of time, perhaps, according to the calendar, but an infinitely long time to gallop through at full speed, as I have done, more or less accompanied by excellent mentors, good advice, applause, and orchestral music, and yet essentially alone, since all my escorts, to keep the image, kept well off the course. I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth. In fact, to give up being stubborn was the supreme commandment I laid upon myself; free ape as I was, I submitted myself to that yoke. In

revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. I could have returned at first, had human beings allowed it, through an archway as wide as the span of heaven over the earth, but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank behind me; I felt more comfortable in the world of men and fitted it better; the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels; and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my willpower sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through. To put it plainly, much as I like expressing myself in images, to put it plainly: your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike.

But to a lesser extent I can perhaps meet your demand, and indeed I do so with the greatest pleasure. The first thing I learned was to give a handshake; a handshake betokens frankness; well, today now that I stand at the very peak of my career, I hope to add frankness in words to the frankness of that first handshake. What I have to tell the Academy will contribute nothing essentially new, and will fall far behind what you have asked of me and what with the best will in the world I cannot communicate—nonetheless, it should indicate the line an erstwhile ape has had to follow in entering and establishing himself in the world of men. Yet I could not risk putting into words even such insignificant information as I am going to give you if I were not quite sure of myself and if my position on all the great variety stages of the civilized world had not become quite unassailable.

I belong to the Gold Coast. For the story of my capture I must depend on the evidence of others. A hunting expedition sent out by the firm of Hagenbeck—by the way, I have drunk many a bottle of good red wine since then with the leader of that expedition—had taken up its position in the bushes by the shore when I came down for a drink at evening among a troop of apes. They shot at us; I was the only one that was hit; I was hit in two places.

Once in the cheek; a slight wound; but it left a large, naked, red scar which earned me the name of Red Peter, a horrible name, utterly inappropriate, which only some ape could have thought of, as if the only difference between me and the performing ape Peter, who died not so long ago and had some small local reputation, were the red mark on my cheek. This by the way.

The second shot hit me below the hip. It was a severe wound, it is the cause of my limping a little to this day. I read an article recently by one of the ten thousand windbags who vent themselves concerning me in the newspapers, saying: my ape nature is not yet quite under control; the proof being that when visitors come to see me, I have a predilection for taking down my trousers to show them where the shot went in. The hand which wrote that should have its fingers shot away one by one. As for me, I can take my trousers down before anyone if I like; you would find nothing but a well-groomed fur and the scar made—let me be particular in the choice of a word for this particular purpose, to avoid misunderstanding—the scar made by a wanton shot. Everything is open and aboveboard; there is nothing to conceal; when the plain truth is in question, great minds discard the niceties of refinement. But if the writer of the article were to take down his trousers before a visitor, that would be quite another story, and I will let it stand to his credit that he does not do it. In return, let him leave me alone with his delicacy!

After these two shots I came to myself—and this is where my own memories gradually begin—between decks in the Hagenbeck steamer, inside a cage. It was not a four-sided

barred cage; it was only a three-sided cage nailed to a locker; the locker made the fourth side of it. The whole construction was too low for me to stand up in and too narrow to sit down in. So I had to squat with my knees bent and trembling all the time, and also, since probably for a time I wished to see no one, and to stay in the dark, my face was turned toward the locker while the bars of the cage cut into my flesh behind. Such a method of confining wild beasts is supposed to have its advantages during the first days of captivity, and out of my own experiences I cannot deny that from the human point of view this is really the case.

But that did not occur to me then. For the first time in my life I could see no way out; at least no direct way out; directly in front of me was the locker, board fitted close to board. True, there was a gap running right through the boards which I greeted with the blissful howl of ignorance when I first discovered it, but the hole was not even wide enough to stick one's tail through and not all the strength of an ape could enlarge it.

I am supposed to have made uncommonly little noise, as I was later informed, from which the conclusion was drawn that I would either soon die or if I managed to survive the first critical period would be very amenable to training. I did survive this period. Hopelessly sobbing, painfully hunting for fleas, apathetically licking a coconut, beating my skull against the locker, sticking out my tongue at anyone who came near me—that was how I filled in time at first in my new life. But over and above it all only the one feeling: no way out. Of course what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape life, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated.

Until then I had had so many ways out of everything, and now I had none. I was pinned down. Had I been nailed down, my right to free movement would not have been lessened. Why so? Scratch your flesh raw between your toes, but you won't find the answer. Press yourself against the bar behind you till it nearly cuts you in two, you won't find the answer. I had no way out but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live. All the time facing that locker—I should certainly have perished. Yet as far as Hagenbeck was concerned, the place for apes was in front of a locker—well then, I had to stop being an ape. A fine, clear train of thought, which I must have constructed somehow with my belly, since apes think with their bellies.

I fear that perhaps you do not quite understand what I mean by "way out." I use the expression in its fullest and most popular sense—I deliberately do not use the word "freedom." I do not mean the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides. As an ape, perhaps, I knew that, and I have met men who yearn for it. But for my part I desired such freedom neither then nor now. In passing: may I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding disillusionment can be also sublime. In variety theaters I have often watched, before my turn came on, a couple of acrobats performing on trapezes high in the roof. They swung themselves, they rocked to and fro, they sprang into the air, they floated into each other's arms, one hung by the hair from the teeth of the other. "And that too is human freedom," I thought, "self-controlled movement." What a mockery of holy Mother Nature! Were the apes to see such a spectacle, no theater walls could stand the shock of their laughter.

No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! Only not to stay motionless with raised arms, crushed against a wooden wall.

Today I can see it clearly; without the most profound inward calm I could never have found my way out. And indeed perhaps I owe all that I have become to the calm that settled

within me after my first few days in the ship. And again for that calmness it was the ship's crew I had to thank.

They were good creatures, in spite of everything. I find it still pleasant to remember the sound of their heavy footfalls which used to echo through my half-dreaming head. They had a habit of doing everything as slowly as possible. If one of them wanted to rub his eyes, he lifted a hand as if it were a drooping weight. Their jests were coarse, but hearty. Their laughter had always a gruff bark in it that sounded dangerous but meant nothing. They always had something in their mouths to spit out and did not care where they spat it. They always grumbled that they got fleas from me; yet they were not seriously angry about it, they knew that my fur fostered fleas, and that fleas jump; it was a simple matter of fact to them. When they were off duty some of them often used to sit down in a semicircle around me; they hardly spoke but only grunted to each other; smoked their pipes, stretched out on lockers; smacked their knees as soon as I made one slightest movement; and now and then one of them would take a stick and tickle me where I liked being tickled. If I were to be invited today to take a cruise on that ship I should certainly refuse the invitation, but just as certainly the memories I could recall between its decks would not all be hateful.

The calmness I acquired among these people kept me above all from trying to escape. As I look back now, it seems to me I must have had at least an inkling that I had to find a way out or die, but that my way out could not be reached through flight. I cannot tell now whether escape was possible, but I believe it must have been; for an ape it must always be possible. With my teeth as they are today I have to be careful even in simply cracking nuts, but at that time I could certainly have managed by degrees to bite through the lock of my cage. I did not do it. What good would it have done me? As soon as I had poked out my head I should have been caught again and put in a worse cage; or I might have slipped among the other animals without being noticed, among the pythons, say, who were opposite me, and so breathed out my life in their embrace; or supposing I had actually succeeded in sneaking out as far as the deck and leaping overboard I should have rocked for a little on the deep sea and then been drowned. Desperate remedies. I did not think it out in this human way, but under the influence of my surroundings I acted as if I had thought it out.

I did not think things out; but I observed everything quietly. I watched these men go to and fro, always the same faces, the same movements, often it seemed to me there was only the same man. So this man or these men walked about unimpeded. A lofty goal faintly dawned before me. No one promised me that if I became like them the bars of my cage would be taken away. Such promises for apparently impossible contingencies are not given. But if one achieves the impossible, the promises appear later retrospectively precisely where one had looked in vain for them before. Now, these men in themselves had no great attraction for me. Had I been devoted to the aforementioned idea of freedom, I should certainly have preferred the deep sea to the way out that suggested itself in the heavy faces of these men. At any rate, I watched them for a long time before I even thought of such things, indeed, it was only the mass weight of my observations that impelled me in the right direction.

It was so easy to imitate these people. I learned to spit in the very first days. We used to spit in each other's faces; the only difference was that I licked my face clean afterwards and they did not. I could soon smoke a pipe like an old hand; and if I also pressed my thumb into the bowl of the pipe, a roar of appreciation went up between decks; only it took me a very long time to understand the difference between a full pipe and an empty one.

My worst trouble came from the schnapps bottle. The smell of it revolted me; I forced myself to it as best I could; but it took weeks for me to master my repulsion. This inward

conflict, strangely enough, was taken more seriously by the crew than anything else about me. I cannot distinguish the men from each other in my recollection, but there was one of them who came again and again, alone or with friends, by day, by night, at all kinds of hours; he would post himself before me with the bottle and give me instructions. He could not understand me, he wanted to solve the enigma of my being. He would slowly uncork the bottle and then look at me to see if I had followed him; I admit that I always watched him with wildly eager, too eager attention; such a student of humankind no human teacher ever found on earth. After the bottle was uncorked he lifted it to his mouth; I followed it with my eyes right up to his jaws; he would nod, pleased with me, and set the bottle to his lips; I, enchanted with my gradual enlightenment, squealed and scratched myself comprehensively wherever scratching was called for; he rejoiced, tilted the bottle, and took a drink; I, impatient and desperate to emulate him, befouled myself in my cage, which again gave him great satisfaction; and then, holding the bottle at arm's length and bringing it up with a swing, he would empty it at one draught, leaning back at an exaggerated angle for my better instruction. I, exhausted by too much effort, could follow him no farther and hung limply to the bars, while he ended his theoretical exposition by rubbing his belly and grinning.

After theory came practice. Was I not already quite exhausted by my theoretical instruction? Indeed I was; utterly exhausted. That was part of my destiny. And yet I would take hold of the proffered bottle as well as I was able; uncork it, trembling; this successful action would gradually inspire me with new energy; I would lift the bottle, already following my original model almost exactly; put it to my lips and—and then throw it down in disgust, utter disgust, although it was empty and filled only with the smell of the spirit, throw it down on the floor in disgust. To the sorrow of my teacher, to the greater sorrow of myself; neither of us being really comforted by the fact that I did not forget, even though I had thrown away the bottle, to rub my belly most admirably and to grin.

Far too often my lesson ended in that way. And to the credit of my teacher, he was not angry; sometimes indeed he would hold his burning pipe against my fur, until it began to smolder in some place I could not easily reach, but then he would himself extinguish it with his own kind, enormous hand; he was not angry with me, he perceived that we were both fighting on the same side against the nature of apes and that I had the more difficult task.

What a triumph it was then both for him and for me, when one evening before a large circle of spectators—perhaps there was a celebration of some kind, a gramophone was playing, an officer was circulating among the crew—when on this evening, just as no one was looking, I took hold of a schnapps bottle that had been carelessly left standing before my cage, uncorked it in the best style, while the company began to watch me with mounting attention, set it to my lips without hesitation, with no grimace, like a professional drinker, with rolling eyes and full throat, actually and truly drank it empty; then threw the bottle away, not this time in despair but as an artistic performer; forgot, indeed, to rub my belly; but instead of that, because I could not help it, because my senses were reeling, called a brief and unmistakable "Hallo!" breaking into human speech, and with this outburst broke into the human community, and felt its echo: "Listen, he's talking!" like a caress over the whole of my sweat-drenched body.

I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason. And even that triumph of mine did not achieve much. I lost my human voice again at once; it did not come back for months; my aversion for the schnapps bottle returned again with even greater force. But the line I was to follow had in any case been decided, once for all.

When I was handed over to my first trainer in Hamburg I soon realized that there were two alternatives before me: the Zoological Gardens or the variety stage. I did not hesitate. I said to myself: do your utmost to get onto the variety stage; the Zoological Gardens means only a new cage; once there, you are done for.

And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. One stands over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest opposition. My ape nature fled out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher was almost himself turned into an ape by it, had soon to give up teaching and was taken away to a mental hospital. Fortunately he was soon let out again.

But I used up many teachers, indeed, several teachers at once. As I became more confident of my abilities, as the public took an interest in my progress and my future began to look bright, I engaged teachers for myself, established them in five communicating rooms, and took lessons from them all at once by dint of leaping from one room to the other.

That progress of mine! How the rays of knowledge penetrated from all sides into my awakening brain! I do not deny it: I found it exhilarating. But I must also confess: I did not overestimate it, not even then, much less now. With an effort which up till now has never been repeated I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something insofar as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. There is an excellent idiom: to fight one's way through the thick of things; that is what I have done, I have fought through the thick of things. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice.

As I look back over my development and survey what I have achieved so far, I do not complain, but I am not complacent either. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window: if a visitor arrives, I receive him with propriety. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. Nearly every evening I give a performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. On the whole, at any rate, I have achieved what I set out to achieve. But do not tell me that it was not worth the trouble. In any case, I am not appealing for any man's verdict, I am only imparting knowledge, I am only making a report. To you also, honored Members of the Academy, I have only made a report.

Study Questions for "A Report to an Academy"

1. "May I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom" (p. 253). What do you think is meant by this quote?
2. "Of course what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape life, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated" (p. 253). Why can he only misrepresent what he felt in his old ape life? What can you say about the narrator's memory and his attitude towards memory? How, in general, would you classify the narrator's tone?

3. Explain the process by which the narrator came to be human.

Quiz for “A Report to an Academy”

1. What is the distinction Red Peter makes between “freedom” and a “way out”?
2. How does Red Peter become human?
3. “All too often human beings are deceived by freedom,” says Red Peter. Why does he say this? What do you take this quote to mean?

Week 4: “Is Torture Ever Justified,” Sung

Texts

"Is Torture Ever Justified?" *The Economist*, January 9, 2003, available at economist.com
Chanterelle Sung, book review of *Why Terrorism Works*, by Alan Dershowitz, excerpts
available at [http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/lawreviews/meta-
elements/journals/bctwj/23_1/05_TXT.htm](http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/lawreviews/meta-elements/journals/bctwj/23_1/05_TXT.htm)

“Is Torture Ever Justified?”

Paraphrasing Exercise

1. In your own words, summarize in one or two sentences what the author is attempting to establish in the first few paragraphs.
2. Paraphrase the important points in the first two paragraphs. Begin by saying something like: "The author believes . . ."
3. Starting in the second section, summarize, in your own words, the main point or thesis of each paragraph.
4. What is the article responding to? What is the article’s central thesis, and is there anywhere it is stated directly?
5. Paraphrase the most important points in the second section of the article.
6. Summarize, in your own words, the central point of the concluding paragraph.
7. Assume you are writing a critical essay in response to this article. Which lines are important enough to use as direct quotations?

Sung’s Book Review of *Why Terrorism Works*

With this book review, I find it helpful to focus on the writer’s approach to creating a thesis and an introduction. This review is also a good example of argument because she takes one side of the issue while respectfully addressing the opposing side. I break the students up into groups and have them find the arguments for and against torture.

Week 5: Bettelheim

Text

Bruno Bettelheim, "The Holocaust" (in course packet)

In-Class Writing Assignment

Select one of the two topics below and write a multi-paragraph essay with an introduction and a conclusion.

- A. According to Bettelheim, why is it problematic to use the word "holocaust" to define the mass murders of World War II? Why was this term used? What might be some better terms (instead of holocaust)? What resistance might those terms meet?
- B. "To call these most wretched victims of a murderous delusion, of destructive drives run rampant, martyrs or a burnt offering is a distortion invented for our comfort, small as it may be." What do you think Bettelheim means by saying this term is a distortion? What is the reality behind this distortion? Why is that reality masked?

Week 6: King

Text

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

I have the students read the entire letter; and then for an in-class writing assignment I use the following excerpt:

Excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
Martin Luther King, Jr.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dark of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society . . . then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. *One may now ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all"*

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority . . . Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and awful. Paul Tillich said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong.

Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or powerful majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.

Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?

Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the

conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire . . . In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's antireligious laws . . .

Writing Topics

Choose one of the two questions below and write an essay with a thesis and supporting details to support your thesis.

1. According to Martin Luther King Jr., under what conditions should a person disobey a law? Did his act of civil disobedience meet these requirements? Why or why not? Furthermore, how do you understand some of his distinctions between "just" and "unjust" laws? Give some examples of when you think it might be acceptable to engage in an act of civil disobedience that breaks the law.
2. "One who breaks an unjust law," writes Martin Luther King Jr., "must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty." Why do you think he makes this statement? And do you think this statement should be applicable for all acts of civil disobedience? What risks are involved in openly breaking the law? And how can one decide whether or not it is worth this risk? Discuss Martin Luther King's case and other acts of rebellion to support your thesis.

Week 7: Thoreau

Text

Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (in *Wadsworth* textbook)

As with the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," I assign students the entire "Civil Disobedience" essay, but really we focus on just a few passages. They do have trouble with this essay, and I teach it in small doses. Asking them to paraphrase and rewrite passages and paragraphs is helpful.

The textbook (*Civil Disobedience: A Wadsworth Casebook in Argument*) has some good study questions. A few of these are given below, and I have added some more:

1. In the first paragraph, Thoreau writes: "That government is best which governs least"; and "That government is best which governs not at all." Evaluate and compare these two statements. What is the difference between the two positions?

- What does he mean by each position? Why do you think Thoreau wants government not to govern?
2. Thoreau's essay raises the question of what an individual should do when faced with a government or government policy they do not agree with? What does Thoreau do? Why does he do this? Was he justified in doing what he did?
 3. From the textbook: What is Paley's argument, and how does Thoreau refute it (paragraph 9)?
 4. From the textbook: What is Thoreau's argument for not paying his poll taxes? Why does he pay his highway taxes?
 5. From the textbook: Thoreau gives us three choices in dealing with unjust laws. We can obey them. We can try to change them while continuing to obey them. We can break the laws right now. Are these really the only options citizens have when faced with an unjust law?

Week 9: Tolstoy

Texts

- Leo Tolstoy, "Nonviolence as a Life Principle" (from *Wadsworth* textbook)
Leo Tolstoy, "A Letter from Tolstoy to Gandhi" (from *Wadsworth* textbook)

These essays work pretty well in class. To be inclusive, I stress that while Tolstoy is talking specifically about Christianity, we can assume for the sake of argument that he means any person who is a devotee of a religion that promotes peace. I was surprised by the amount of students who agreed with Tolstoy. In one class, it was about 50/50. Still, I asked the students who agreed to find the flaws in his argument; I asked the students who disagreed to try to argue the other side. Again, asking students to paraphrase individual paragraphs works well. I also had success with randomly assigning students to make arguments for or against Tolstoy—regardless of their personal beliefs.

Study Questions for "Nonviolence as a Life Principle"

1. "You write to me that people seem quite unable to understand that to serve the government is incompatible with Christianity." At this point in the writing, we have not yet heard any of Tolstoy's arguments, but from your own judgments, what might be some possible reasons why service to government is incompatible with Christianity? What implications is he making about what it means to be a Christian? What implications is he making about the nature of government?
2. "A time will come when men will understand the incompatibility with Christianity, first of war service, and then of service to government in general." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why not?

3. Who do you think Tolstoy is addressing? And why is this person worthy of his admiration?
4. “A Christian must not be a soldier—i.e., a murderer—and must not be the servant of an institution maintained by violence and murder is so certain, so clear and irrefutable.” Do you agree with Tolstoy’s claim that this statement does not need discussion or proof?
5. Why might Tolstoy say that a Christian should not be a soldier? Why in Tolstoy’s mind should a Christian not participate in the army? According to Tolstoy and Thoreau (whom he mentions), what other types of behavior are incompatible with Christianity?
6. What point is Tolstoy trying to make through his analogy with vegetarianism? Is it a good analogy? Why or why not?
7. “But the Christian support of government will be destroyed . . . those who do violence will cease to find support for their authority in the sanctity of Christianity. Those who employ violence will be simply violators, and nothing else. And when that is so—when they can no longer cloak themselves with pseudo-Christianity—then the end of all violence will be near.” What do you think Tolstoy means by pseudo-Christianity?

Writing Topics for “Nonviolence as a Life Principle”

Choose one of the following topics and write an essay with an introductory paragraph containing a clearly stated thesis and details to support your thesis. (*Note:* It may be helpful to keep in mind that Tolstoy believed he was living under a corrupt government. It may also be helpful to keep in mind that Tolstoy disagreed with the Church, though he continued to follow the teachings of Christ.)

1. “A Christian must not be a soldier—i.e., a murderer—and must not be the servant of an institution maintained by violence and murder is so certain, so clear and irrefutable.” Do you agree with Tolstoy’s claim that this statement does not need discussion or proof? Do you agree with Tolstoy’s belief that a Christian should not be a soldier? Why in Tolstoy’s mind should a Christian not participate in the army? According to Tolstoy and Thoreau (whom he mentions), what other types of behavior are incompatible with Christianity?
2. Does Tolstoy have a good point when he says that a Christian should not be a soldier, or is he simply nuts? Either defend or argue against Tolstoy’s position on nonviolence and Christianity.

Week 10: Plato

Texts

Plato, *Apology* (excerpts in *Wadsworth* textbook)

Plato, *Crito* (excerpts in *Wadsworth* textbook)

Again, small doses keep students from getting lost {and bored} with these dialogues. I talk a bit about Socrates' rhetorical approach. I spend more time focusing on small bits of text and getting them to think and write about the larger ideas.

Notes on Crito

Crito: "One must also pay attention to the opinion of the majority . . . The majority can inflict not the least but pretty well the greatest evils if one is slandered among them."

Socrates: Majority can do neither the greatest good nor the greatest evil . . .

Crito offers money and friends to Socrates.

Crito: "Socrates, I do not think that what you are doing is right, to give up your life when you can save it, and to hasten your fate as your enemies would hasten it, and indeed have hastened it in their wish to destroy you. Moreover, I think you are betraying your sons by going away and leaving them, when you could bring them up and educate them."

Socrates: "Do you not think it is a sound statement that one must not value all the opinions of men, but some and not others, nor the opinions of all men, but those of some and not of others?"

Socrates convinces Crito that we should follow the opinions of only one man and not the many.

Trainer . . . we harm ourselves by not listening to wisdom . . . Think not of majority, but of those who understand justice . . .

Socrates: "The most important thing is not life, but the good life."

Majority easily put men to death . . .

Socrates convinces Crito that we should never do wrong willingly, and that if one is unjustly injured he should not injure in return.

Socrates convinces that one should keep agreements/contracts.

If one is injured it is wrong to inflict injury on others . . .

"If, as we were planning to run away from here . . . the laws and the state came and confronted us and asked: 'Tell me Socrates, what are you intending to do? Do you not by this action attempt to destroy us, do you think it possible for a city not to be destroyed if the verdicts of its courts have no force but are nullified and set at naught by private individuals?' What shall we answer to this? Shall we say 'the city wronged me and its decision was not right?'"

City/country to be honored more than your parents . . .

Crito agrees.

Socrates offers “city as parent” analogy.

Socrates: “You must either persuade [the laws] or obey its orders, and endure in silence whatever it instructs you to endure, whether blows or bonds, and if it leads you into war to be wounded or killed, you must obey . . . It is impious to bring violence to bear against your mother or father, it is much more so to use it against your country.”

Socrates: “One who disobeys does wrong in three ways, first because he disobeys his parents, also those who brought him up, and because, in spite of his agreement, he neither obeys us nor, if we do something wrong, does he try to persuade us to do better . . . They might well say: ‘Socrates, we have convincing proofs that we and the city were congenial to you. You would not have dwelt here if the city had not been exceedingly pleasing to you . . . Now, however, you plan to destroy us, and act like the meanest type of slave by trying to run away, contrary to your undertakings and your agreement to live as a citizen under us.’”

Socrates worries he’ll put his friends in danger if he goes into exile, disenfranchisement, loss of property, etc. . . . He also worries that he’ll arrive in a new city as an enemy of the government, a destroyer of laws. He also worries that by fleeing he only “strengthens the convictions of the jury” who sentenced him.

Socrates: Does not value life over goodness . . .

Study Questions for Crito

1. Why does Socrates not flee? What are the arguments he makes for not breaking the law?
2. Under what circumstances would it be acceptable for Socrates to break the law?
3. According to Socrates, in what sense are you harming others if you break the law?

Essay Topic for Crito

Consider the following passage from Plato’s *Crito*:

Socrates: “You must either persuade [the laws] or obey its orders, and endure in silence whatever it instructs you to endure, whether blows or bonds, and if it leads you into war to be wounded or killed, you must obey . . . It is impious to bring violence to bear against your mother or father, it is much more so to use it against your country.”

1. Socrates believes that an ethical citizen should either (a) attempt to persuade the government that it is wrong, or (b) silently obey the government and not complain.

Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not? In your opinion, are there any situations in which an individual should disobey the law?

Week 11: Kierkegaard

Text

Entries from the Diary of Søren Kierkegaard: Entries 126, 127, 128, 129 133, 134, 136, 139, 151, 157

Many of these diary entries are in direct response to Plato's *Crito* and *Apology*, so it works well to teach them with Plato. I put the students in groups and have them discuss the individual entries and then present their findings to the class. The entries look harder than they actually are. The students don't do too poorly with them.

It helps to give the students a bit of context. Tell them about Kierkegaard's polemics against Christendom of his time. Try to get them to define for themselves what it means to be a true Christian, or a truly spiritual person, and then discuss why Kierkegaard had such a problem with the so-called Christians of his age.

I also find it helpful to talk about Kierkegaard's (and Socrates') use of indirect communication to make their points.

Below are some of the shorter entries from the Diary of Søren Kierkegaard.

Entries from the Diary of Søren Kierkegaard

127: The Individual—The Crowd—for God

The great thing about Socrates was that even when he was accused and faced the People's Assembly, his eyes did not see the crowd, but only the individual.

Spiritual superiority only sees the individual. But alas, ordinarily we human beings are sensual and, therefore, as soon as it is a gathering, the impression changes—we see something abstract, the crowd, and we become different.

But in the eyes of God, the infinite spirit, all the millions that have lived and now live do not make a crowd. He only sees the individual.

128: Majority—Minority

Truth always rests with the minority, and the minority is always stronger than the majority, because the minority is generally formed by those who really have an opinion, while the strength of a majority is illusory, formed by the gangs who have no opinion—and who, therefore, in the next instant (when it is evident that the minority is the stronger) assume *its* opinion, which then becomes that of the majority, i.e., becomes nonsense by having the whole train on its side, while Truth again reverts to a new minority.

In regard to truth, this troublesome monster, the majority, the public, etc., fares in the same way as we say of someone who is traveling to regain his health: he is always one station behind.

129: The Individual—Numbers

Nobody wants to be this strenuous thing: an individual; it demands an effort. But everywhere services are readily offered through the phony substitute: a few! Let us get together and be a gathering, then we can probably manage. Therein lies mankind's deepest demoralization.

134: Quite Ironical!

There is nothing everyone is so afraid of as of being told how vastly much he is capable of. You are capable of—do you want to know?—you are capable of living in poverty; you are capable of standing almost any kind of maltreatment, abuse, etc. But you do not wish to know about it, isn't that so? You would be furious with him who told you, and only call that person your friend who bolsters you in saying: "No, this I cannot bear, this is beyond my strength, etc.

136:

It is quite true what Philosophy says: that Life must be understood backwards. But that makes one forget the other saying: that it must be lived—forwards. The more one ponders this, the more it comes to mean that life in the temporal existence never becomes quite intelligible, precisely because at no moment can I find complete quiet to take the backward-looking position.

151:

... Heroism means to be great in what every individual could be great in.

157:

... Socrates could not prove that the soul was immortal. He merely said: This matter occupies me so much that I will order my life as though immortality were a fact—should it prove to be wrong, *eh bien*, then I won't regret my choice; for this is the only matter I am concerned about.

Week 12: Orwell

Text

George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 14, 20, 21, 22, 31.
(The entire book can be downloaded from several different websites.)

I have isolated a sample of important chapters from *Down and Out in Paris and London*. One initially surprising discovery was how little sympathy the students had for beggars. Be prepared for that. In terms of the writing, I try to focus on the colorfulness of Orwell's writing; and then I draw specific attention to chapters 22 and 31; in these two chapters he is more analytical and philosophical and raises several questions to discuss.

In-Class Essay Assignment

The following excerpt is from chapter 31 of *Down and Out in Paris and London*:

It is worth saying something about the social position of beggars, for when one has consorted with them, and found that they are ordinary human beings, one cannot help being struck by the curious attitude that society takes towards them. People seem to feel that there is some essential difference between beggars and ordinary “working” men. They are a race apart—outcasts, like criminals and prostitutes . . . Yet if one looks closely one sees that there is no *essential* difference between a beggar’s livelihood and that of numberless respectable people. Beggars do not work, it is said; but, then, what is *work*? A navy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless, of course—but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless. And as a social type a beggar compares well with scores of others. He is honest compared with the sellers of most patent medicines, high-minded compared with a Sunday newspaper proprietor, amiable compared with a hire-purchase tout—in short, a parasite, but a fairly harmless parasite. He seldom extracts more than a bare living from the community, and, what should justify him according to our ethical ideas, he pays for it over and over in suffering. I do not think there is anything about a beggar that sets him in a different class from other people, or gives most modern men the right to despise him.

Then the question arises, Why are beggars despised?—for they are despised, universally. I believe it is for the simple reason that they fail to earn a decent living. In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that it shall be profitable . . . Money has become the grand test of virtue. By this test beggars fail, and for this they are despised. If one could earn even ten pounds a week at begging, it would become a respectable profession immediately . . .

Choose one of the following topics and write a well-developed essay in response:

1. According to Orwell, why are beggars despised? Do you agree with his analysis? Why or why not?
2. What is an ethical response to beggars and homelessness? Should government and individual citizens assist beggars? Why or why not? If you answer positively, what form should this assistance take? If you answered negatively, propose an alternative solution.

Week 14: O’Connor

Text

Flannery O’Connor, “Everything That Rises Must Converge” (in course packet)

Students like this story. They don’t have much of a problem understanding the story, and they have quite a bit to say about it. I have never asked them to write about it.

Study Questions

1. What is the conflict between Julian and his mother? What kind of character is Julian? What kind of character is his mother?
2. The story raises the question of how difficult it is to love someone who holds views you find repulsive. Was there anything that Julian could have done to convince his mother to change his mind? Similarly, did you find anything to like about Julian's mother?
3. How do you understand his mother's collapse at the end of the story? Why do you think she collapses? Why can she no longer go forward?
4. What is the significance of the name Godhigh? How does Julian's attitude towards his ancestors and toward the Godhigh family home reflect the central conflict of the story?
5. Choose one moment in the story that you think is particularly strange or interesting and be prepared to discuss it with the class. How does that particular moment help explain the story as a whole?

Week 15: Singer

Text

Peter Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" (in course packet)

Final Essay

1. What is Peter Singer's solution to world poverty? Do you think it is a good one? Do you find the analogy of Bob and his car to be convincing? Why or why not? What types of objections will be raised to Singer's solution?