



Analyzing Tragic Heroes to Increase Awareness of Multiple Perspectives

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English Literature Grades 9-12

Keywords: catharsis, tragedy, tragic hero, tragic flaw, *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini, characterization, perspective, mind map, journal, tribal learning, neuroscience, Aristotle, soliloquy, adolescent brain development, point of view

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: In this unit, I will use translations of Aristotle's *Poetics* and research from pedagogical experts to theorize that students are more likely to experience a heightened sense of self-awareness if they are able to identify a cathartic change within a fictional character. Students participating in this unit will engage in a wide variety of activities to analyze character development and perspective, and they will consider how these two factors can evoke a cathartic moment. This unit will use *The Kite Runner* as a primary text, but can also be applied to many other texts with a "tragic hero," including *Night* and *Things Fall Apart*. Students will have opportunities to turn the analytical lens inward when they create a personal mind map. This unit requires considerable introspection on the part of the students, so Louis Cozolino's concept of "tribal learning" will be applied, through classroom activities, so that students feel safe and supported. Furthermore, this unit asks students to incorporate perspectives from the novel, the class, and one another as a means for answering open-ended questions in a profound manner.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 120 students.

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Stephanie Misko

Introduction to the Seminar

My interest was sparked in this particular seminar, “Supernatural Figures in Theater, Film, and the Brain,” when the seminar leader, Dr. Mark Pizzato, made the clear connection between the stage in theater and the “stage” in a classroom. Think about it: there is an audience (students), characters (the version of oneself that is presented to an audience), actors (the Real urges that drive human survival), a storyline (the lesson plan), a director (the teacher) and countless other aspects like lighting of the classroom (including the atmosphere outside that day).

One might ask, why in the world would that be relevant to a high school classroom? Upon conducting further research, I found that this has been true for millennia. Societies consistently use the theater as a space where extreme fears and moral questions of the time could be raised and hashed out. Pizzato explains that once verbal language was possible for humans, the theater became a place where a group of actors could work “together to solve survival problems.”¹ The stage then is a place for exploring the deepest questions from the inner theater of the brain and arguments of the outer theater of society; it is also the place to learn most intimately about the factors that influence characters, actors, story and scene.

As an English teacher, this is precisely the classroom that I want to create: a classroom of collective survival, deep thinking, limitless creativity, and most importantly, a place to “work together to solve” the most relevant “survival” questions of our time.

Demographics: The School, The Kids, The Class

My home school where the following unit will be taught lies at the northernmost corner of a city school district, Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. Whereas most of the schools in our district serve an urban population, my school serves a largely suburban and rural population of students. We teach and learn in a new building with all of the state-of-the-art facilities that one can find in a public school. We have multiple community groups that donate resources and money to support student groups and educational initiatives. To put it frankly, I teach a population of students whose guardians provide them with their basic needs and support. They do not want for much and cutting edge technology is the centerpiece of my students’ education.

What I notice about my students, though, is that while they may have access to all of the resources that a public school can offer, they are still no different than students at any

other public school. After all, they are kids. They struggle to feel accepted; they are emotional; they are angry with their parents; and they really just do not want to be in school some days. And really and truly, our students will get into fights and use drugs, despite every reason not to make poor decisions.

With that being said, the largest challenge that I face with my students is the excessive pressure to achieve. Parents (and students and the school) expect these students to take the most difficult classes and earn A's on every reporting period. The average honors student here will also be a member of a sport's team and volunteer or work outside of school. As a teacher, this also creates great stress as students will sign up for classes that they are not prepared for and then not complete the work due to time constraints or a lack of ability. In this climate of perfection, students are set up to feel like failures if they do not attain these unrealistic expectations. This is something that teachers have been grappling with now, and we are still looking for a solution. Parents are encouraged to allow their children to take fewer AP or Honors classes and statistics are shared that prove that doing so will not jeopardize the child's future.

In this curriculum unit, I plan to work with students to come to a place of acceptance or at least a place to identify and express internal conflicts such as this. Adolescent brains are constantly at war between their very natural drives – to sleep, be with friends, to survive, to mate – and their supernatural drives – to succeed in school, be famous, be the best on the team. I hope that in recognizing aspects of the inner and outer theater, plus the ways these theaters impact thinking, they can come to a peaceful awareness of what they need. And maybe if I'm really lucky, my students will also begin to step outside of their own problems and practice the strategy of empathizing with others.

The following curriculum unit will be taught in an Honors English II classroom over the course of a semester. The primary goal of English II is to prepare students for the North Carolina state exam. This is a four-hour long reading comprehension exam that counts for 25% of a student's English II grade, and it is included on their college transcript. This test is yet another example of a stressor for my already stressed population of students.

Rationale: Catharsis in Theater

The three major works that I teach during English II are *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. These three novels are set in different places and in different times, but all three highlight certain moments of catharsis for tragically flawed main characters. For this reason, my unit can be applied to a class focusing on any three of these novels or similar novels as well. For this unit, I will use *The Kite Runner* as my main focus.

The definition of catharsis is in fact a tricky one. Aristotle first mentions the term in his *Poetics*, but he only mentions the term for a brief line in reference to the value of music in a tragedy; music can create catharsis by evoking emotions that the listener is otherwise prone to already. In the introduction to Malcolm Heath's translation of the *Poetics*, Heath concludes that Aristotle defined catharsis as a "pleasurable relief."² This would imply that catharsis is merely a way of lessening the latent emotions that build and intensify in an individual. Translator Malcolm Heath places this definition into Aristotle's context: "The natural inference is that the experience of tragic emotion is pleasurable in itself. This is a paradox, since fear and pity are forms of distress. But the paradox is one with which the Greeks were familiar."³ This is where it seems best to define catharsis as a form of alleviation from suffering by experiencing it at a distance through a character on stage, on screen or on the page. Students or viewers can then experience the personal response first privately through narrowly focused, analytical processing, which is a largely left brain function. Then, they can activate the right brain while experiencing the theatrical piece as a whole because they will need to view the issue from a different perspective.

Throughout time, catharsis has taken on other interpretations – likely because Aristotle's introduction was so brief and vague or because it has since been translated by many different philosophers. Even though Aristotle's reference is to a process that allows the viewer to "feel the right degree of emotions in the right circumstances,"⁴ his work has been subject to many translations. Some view catharsis as a purging of uncontrollable and troublesome emotions. Some interpret Aristotle's definition of catharsis to be an alleviation of an internal conflict⁵ but others consider it a ridding altogether of that internal conflict. Another example is Mark Pizzato's phrasing that theater exists to "clarify our pity and fear."⁶ With a simple change in the verb's translation, encouraged by some classical scholars, the purpose of catharsis changes completely. For the intentions of my unit, I will consider catharsis mostly as a purifying of emotions through an emotional awareness and a change in perspective. I will consider catharsis in the Aristotelian model: a necessary and human process in order to adequately confront and process emotional impulses from everyday life.

The three novels listed above use a tragic hero as a protagonist. To qualify a character as a tragic hero, he or she must be of noble birth or high social status, warned of potential danger, flawed enough to ignore warnings, and ultimately "purified" or "alleviated" of fatal flaws through a downfall. "Downfall" sometimes qualifies as death (think famous tragedies like *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*), but not all tragic heroes die in a literal sense. In *Things Fall Apart*, the tragic hero does in fact commit suicide once he realizes his own flaws. In *Night*, the protagonist symbolically "dies" in some form after he survives the Holocaust. The final sentence of the novel is "from the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me."⁷ This implies that the narrator views himself as a fallen man. In *The Kite Runner*, the protagonist endures a downfall during childhood, although this novel ends with a tragicomic twist, as he is able to redeem himself and find

happiness. All three characters undergo a transformation that falls into the realm of catharsis, for the hero and the reader.

From Where in the Brain Does Catharsis Derive?: Catharsis in the “Real World”

The Inner and Outer Theater

Students’ brains are developing just as all generations before them, but they have even more outer theater influences than ever. Our ubiquitous media and technology presence is creating an outer theater that is much more massive and influential than before. Of course, the outer theater and inner theater of the brain’s perceptions, memories, and fantasies are closely related; if the outer theater is changing then the inner theater of the child will be different as well. Students are constantly exposed to an outer theater of immediate feedback and universal communication. The inner theater, as a result, will evaluate morals and the self differently than in an environment that is less connected. This changing world is shaping adolescents’ neurological make up in order to “survive” in a media-centric world.

The Right and Left Hemisphere

To further understand how the brain is impacted by outer theater changes, one must also be aware of the two hemispheres of the brain – the left hemisphere and right hemisphere. The left side of the brain is largely responsible for logic and analysis; information is delivered to the brain and the left cortex makes clear, linear and very focused decisions. In contrast, the right cortex is responsible for intuition, emotions, and creativity.⁸ Right brain functions include identifying and understanding figurative thinking, complex associations, and paradoxical relationships. Certain people are considered to be either inclined toward using more of the left brain or the right brain, but most people vacillate between the two, especially depending on age or sex. For instance, until children reach post-adolescence, the brain shifts between right- and left-cortical growth spurts.⁹ These also reflect shifts in activity between left and right hemispheres that could occur later in life. Growth spurts in each hemisphere become less extreme as the brain matures, but when dealing with a room of teenagers, it is more likely that those extreme shifts are occurring because the prefrontal cortex is still not fully developed. It is important to consider as well how these functions might be affected by a highly technological world, especially a teenage brain that is still undeveloped. It is also important to identify the ways in which our brains are using both hemispheres to develop the inner theater. This eventually leads to a cathartic moment.

What does this have to do with Catharsis?

When aiming to attain a state of catharsis, one must be aware of one’s neurologically makeup as well; catharsis requires one to first identify the emotional impulses and to be

aware of the origins of these emotions. This is where the understanding of the left and right brain and the inner and outer theater is important. In order to process the world, one must be able to use the law and language-driven side of the brain (the left) and the complex and holistic side of the brain (the right) to glean an accurate understanding of the world and oneself. Both hemispheres are essential. Through neuroscience students can become aware of how their feelings and decisions are driven by inner theatre elements. Then, the individual can respond more appropriately in order to keep flawed emotional impulses under control. With that said, my students are not taking a class in neuroscience, but in English. I will focus on students gaining a greater awareness of what impacts their decision-making and feelings, without the complex jargon.

Novels to Use When Teaching Catharsis

Aristotle also asserts that catharsis becomes most effective when the play focuses on a family disaster, possibly because this is a theater in which we all participate.¹⁰ All of the novels listed above, such as *The Kite Runner*, *Night*, and *Things Fall Apart*, are tragedies that revolve around family dynamics. For the purpose of this unit, I will be using *The Kite Runner* as the exemplar, but any of the three novels can be used to achieve the same goal. This is a novel that explores the many conflicts that abound in familial male relationships. The main character, Amir, feels neglected by his father, so he is constantly vying for his attention (one might even argue that this parallels the Oedipus story in some ways). Amir is then resentful to his best friend and unofficial brother Hassan because he believes that his father favors Hassan. Students will read this play because of its potential for cathartic reactions. In order to create the “theatre” experience, we will practice improvising and then writing and performing a soliloquy based on the novel.

Creating a Safe Learning Environment for the Cathartic Moment

Evoking catharsis, especially when done in a public setting like a classroom, can only really be successful in an intentionally safe and interpersonal classroom. Psychologist Louis Cozolino defines “tribal learning” as a classroom that allows for personal discovery in a social atmosphere. Not only does this type of classroom allow for personal discovery, but it actually promotes students’ content understanding as well.

Cozolino explains, “The more the environment of a classroom parallels the interpersonal, emotional, and motivational components of our tribal past, the more our primitive instincts will activate the biochemistry of learning.”¹¹ A strong interpersonal connection is present when students work intentionally and effectively together, with students willing to admit confusions to one another. A strong emotional connection exists when bullying and shaming is treated with zero tolerance. With these previous two connections fulfilled, the motivational component follows. Only with constant dedication to these norms can a tribal classroom thrive.

Truly though, my research shows that Cozolino's concept of "tribal learning" is not new. The ancient Greeks, specifically, practiced this form of moral exploration in the theater. As stated in the introduction, theater was once used as a way to answer or question moral dilemmas of the time. For example, in Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Unbound*, the title character is punished for his pity on mankind and disobeying Zeus's orders. Prometheus, whose name means forethought, delivers fire and other cultural gifts to men when that is forbidden; his punishment is to be chained to a rock with a bird pecking at his liver eternally (because as a god he cannot die).¹² Despite the mythic or sometimes absurd story lines, theater was often used as a way to warn the viewer of potential downfalls. While some believe that it is impossible to relate to Oedipus' internal conflict about marrying his own mother, the story line of this play is in fact universally relatable. Do we not all long to return to the safety and pleasures of childhood with an ideal mother? In ancient tribes these were the exact stories that society would use to release anxieties and fears about individual problems. The reader or viewer is then able to place personal concerns into a potentially ridiculous plot line for a fictional character and experience catharsis (in the sense that catharsis purifies one's awareness of emotions.) So in some ways, "tribal learning" was the model of the theater, and catharsis was the moment of learning for the audience.

Realistically, it is very challenging to convince students to "buy in" completely when a teacher demands that they suddenly expose insecurities and conflicts. But this can partially be combatted through the use of fictional storylines. Displacing personal conflicts into a made-up character releases some pressure from students. But furthermore, it is important to develop a tribal classroom in the sense that students feel protected and appreciated. Cozolino recommends that this culture be developed from the regular process of "modeling, daily activities, and ritual practices that involve all of the senses, the body, and our emotions. The tribal teacher uses movement, emotions, activities, and group projects to activate our natural learning instincts."¹³ With consistent practice of these strategies, students will feel more comfortable in the classroom and be more willing to share personal discoveries, through catharsis or otherwise.

Furthermore, students need to develop a thorough self-awareness in order to identify catharsis in characters and potentially experience catharsis oneself. As previously cited from Pizzato's book, it is important to identify neurological processes as either predominantly right hemisphere or left hemisphere so that we might heighten our awareness. He further clarifies that these brain functions might be separate, but not mutually exclusive – it is imperative that both sides of the brain push and pull on one another.¹⁴ Betty Edwards writes about this as a thinking process in humans:

When the puzzle resists solution and dead ends block further progress, a sense of unease, anxiety, and frustration sets in. Thinking loses structure...refuse to yield to logical analysis...the problem at this point is 'handed over,' so to speak, to the [right hemisphere]...with information gathered during the [left brain hemisphere

process]. [It] attempts to form coherent patterns even though part of the puzzle may be missing, trying to see the whole picture, trying to ‘fill in,’ the blank spaces, trying to form a visually logical structure with all parts in the ‘right relationship’ to each other and to the whole.¹⁵

The process of moving between left and right hemispheres of thinking – moving between organized analyses to “big picture” thinking – sounds frustrating to most people. I will use mind maps to allow students to practice moving between left and right hemisphere functions. Later, they will create a soliloquy based on the mind maps that they have created; in this process they will not always have evidence in order to make direct inferences, but instead they will have to “fill in” the unknown pieces of a character and his or her motivation. Making such complex and intuitive conclusions requires the students to then rely more on the right side of the brain.

Goals of this Unit

Despite the fact that teenagers’ brains have not fully developed, it is my goal to help them “practice” the mature feeling of empathy. Frontal lobes, left and right, allow the reader to have a sense of distance and critical awareness. If students can practice using these frontal lobes through books and movies, this cognitive function may develop more quickly. My goal is that through reading tragedies, they can learn from tragic heroes at a distance. This will hopefully encourage students to better understand the complex character who is driven by both inner and outer theater influences. By encouraging empathy for fictional characters, students will be more likely to apply empathy in reality. Furthermore, students will be more likely to undergo deeply critical self-examination. Kylene Beers defends fiction adamantly in her popular pedagogical text, *Notice and Note*, when she cites contemporary research that shows with increased exposure to fiction, students have increased emotional growth.¹⁶ This is not necessarily a concrete argument that empathy can be a learned art, but it is research that implies that through sound teaching, students can be *more likely* to exhibit empathic thinking. In developing empathy, my students will engage with Common Core standard RL.10.6, which has students examine point of view and cultural experience.

To examine point of view, my students will conduct deep character studies of protagonists in literature, which aligns with Common Core standard RL.10.3 about analyzing how complex characters develop. To analyze the characters, my students will find relevant textual evidence, which aligns with Common core standard RL.10.1. My unit will focus on *The Kite Runner*. Multiple characters in this novel undergo catharsis, so my students will be required to identify the characters’ tragic flaw, why the character struggles with that tragic flaw, and the process of purification.

I also believe that *The Kite Runner* is a strong novel choice to teach perspective which aligns with Common Core standard RL.9-10.6. The twenty-first century shows a

reincarnation of a medieval perception of God, especially in the Middle East where the novel is set. Pizzato describes this resurgence: “Religious fundamentalism involves terrorist acts...performed not only for a global audience, but also for a certain transcendent Being.”¹⁷ This is an ideal that is opposite to most American students’ mode of thinking, as most of the Western world values the individual much more highly. Of course fundamentalism is a mentality that is present within the evil characters in this novel and amongst some extremist Christian groups in the United States. After a deep character analysis, my students will use a cathartic scene from the novel to inspire students to write a soliloquy from such a character’s perspective.

Strategies to Encourage “Tribal Learning” and Initiate Impulse Awareness

Heterogeneous Grouping

This is grouping that aims to put a diverse combination of learners together into a group. As a teacher, this can be done based on ability, gender, confidence, interests, etc. For this unit, I would like to group together students of different perspectives. This would mirror the make-up of our tribal past, while allowing students access to diverse perspectives.

Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair Share is a strategy that builds student confidence and exposes them to a variety of perspectives. Whenever we are brainstorming as a class, I use this strategy. Students will first write or think silently. Then, they will find a person in the room and discuss their thoughts with this person. At this point, the students will feel more confident sharing with the whole class because they have (likely) received positive reinforcement from another person in the class. Finally, I will then ask participants to share their thoughts. This leads to a much more engaging classroom discussion since everyone must participate. Furthermore, Think-Pair-Share encourages both right and left brain activation. Students will analyze or organize their thoughts initially (left brain) so that they can then interpret the literary devices and their impact on the larger meaning of the work (right brain).

Novel to Self-Journal Entries

I have always used journals as a means for students to write daily, without rigid guidelines for organization or conventions. For this unit, I want to specifically use the journal as a means to interact personally with ethical questions raised by the text. Journals will be given twice per week. Possible prompts can include:

- What is betrayal to you? Give specific real life examples of what would be betrayal or not be betrayal.
- Good and evil are very vague terms that mean different things to everyone.

Explain what “good” means to you, and then also what does “evil” mean to you. Provide as many real-life examples as possible.

-What would you do if you were in _____’s situation? Why would you decide this?

-Is Amir a “good” character or not? Refer to the text to support your answer.

-Is Baba a strong father? Refer to the text to support your answer.

After students write for 10 minutes on the topic, I will ask them to take 4 minutes to share their journals with the person nearest to them. After their conversation, I will ask students to take 4 more minutes to return to their entries and note at least one important point made by the other person.

Journaling privately is necessary to allow students to identify the aspects of their own inner theater such as morals, attitudes, and perceptions of self and others. By first identifying these elements of the inner theater, students can then investigate the outer theater that influences them.

Strategies to Analyze Impulses

Mind Maps

Mind maps are used to track one’s thinking in visuals. Because I know that many of my students, like myself are visual thinkers, I like using this strategy to convey ideas in the classroom. This method also appeals to students who are spatial thinkers. The benefit of a mind map for all students is that it allows them to show relationships between concepts. For my unit, I want students to map the brains of the characters and themselves. Students will use visuals, colors, symbols, words, and organization to convey a person’s way of thinking. A mind map will encourage students to use both sides of their brain; they will use the left side with naming certain feelings, pictures, and colors, and they will use the right side for a more holistic view of contradictory aspects in a character’s mind map. This will also tap into the empathic role of the right side of the brain.

Reflective Writing – Responding to the Journal Again

Towards the end of the unit, students will revisit previous journal entries and they will answer the same prompt again. This time, they must consider their own views, the views of the classmates whom they heard from, and the views presented from the texts in class. In their responses, they must complete the following tasks:

- Respond to the same prompt as before
- First sentence will acknowledge his/her previous opinion and then will identify if his/her opinion as changed.

- Cite at least three sources that impacted his/her perspective and use specific examples
- Explore how these varying perspectives either prompted different thought or further confirmed previously held beliefs.
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The purpose of this exercise is to ask students to reflect on the conversations that they have had and to consider how changing perspectives can impact one's moral definitions, which is an aspect of the inner theater.

Lesson Plans

Before reading the novel

Warm-up

My students will begin with a journal-writing prompt where students write for 10 minutes silently, individually, and without the risk of being graded on it. This will allow for them to write more freely. The prompt that I will use will be, "What factors contribute to a person's perspective? Please include examples as support when you are to provide them."

After ten minutes of free writing, I will ask students to share with a partner; each student will have 1 minute to share out, making for a total of 2 minutes of discussion. As students discuss, I walk around and listen to conversation so that I can target certain students to share out. While I want students to share their own original answers, I will try to target students who mention examples like the following: experiences, family, culture, religion, emotions, and traumatic experiences.

Class Discussion

At the end of two minutes, I will stop students' conversation, even though most conversations will still be going strong. This way, students will still be on task. On a large piece of chart paper, I write the question "What factors contribute to a person's perspective?" I call on specific members of the class to share out their answers. Then I allow any other students to contribute as well. As students contribute, I write their one-word answers on the board. If I feel that students' answers do not really fit into the category of answers that I am looking for (see above paragraph), then I try to guide them towards a more fitting answer if I can.

Now that the entire class has shared out their opinions and they are posted in the room, I give students the blank mind map handout. Their task at this point is to pick the four factors that they believe are most important to a person's identity and then place those

factors on the Appendix 2: Character Tracker that they will then be working with as they analyze character development in the novel. Students will be assigned a character to track by pulling character names out of a hat. The characters Amir, Hassan, Rahim Khan, Baba, and Soraya should be included as options.

During the Novel - Mind Maps

This lesson should occur sometime after chapter 16 (at least) so that students have enough information about characters in order to make a thorough analysis. I prefer to do this activity after chapter 19 because most surprising traits have been revealed. Others may rather use this activity at the end of the novel.

Warm-up

Students will respond to a question from my Note-to-Self Journal Entry Prompts. I want them to then again continue the process of writing on their own for ten minutes, and then share with another student for 4 minutes. Finally, they will return to their journals for four minutes where they can write down a new perspective that was heard in conversation.

These Novel-to-Self Journal Entries should be conducted as a warm-up for at least two days per week before finishing the novel.

Character Mind Map

At this point in the unit, we will have discussed characterization using the “Character Tracker” (see Appendix 2) that I have provided for them at the beginning of the unit. I plan to ask my students to take their thinking further using symbols, colors, and organizational patterns. I will introduce the “Character Mind Map” assignment, which is also placed in Appendix 3, and students will have approximately two days to create this assignment. This assignment is especially relevant because it requires students to consider the perspective of another character and understand that these characters have complex personalities with both positive, negative, and neutral personality traits.

My students will be given the following directions:

Complete the Mind Map for one character in *The Kite Runner*. You will fill in one side of the mind with what could be classified as “good” qualities/feelings for that character. On the other side, you will fill it with aspects that could be considered “bad” qualities/feelings for that character. In the middle, add characteristics that might be neither “good” nor “bad.” Fill the mind map with at least 5 quotes from the novel that exhibit the feelings/traits that occupy his/her mind and at least 3 symbols. Use color and visuals to fill in the rest of the mind map, but it must be relevant to the character.

Personal Mind Map

To further extend this assignment, an option includes having students then turn the assignment in on themselves. After creating an honest and complex portrayal of a fictional character, students will need to do it for themselves – which requires a level of self-awareness. Students can use the document in Appendix 3 for the “Personal Mind Map.” Students will receive these directions:

You will use the Mind Map to delineate your own internal thinking, just as you did with the characters in *The Kite Runner*. You will fill in one side of the mind with what could be classified as “good” qualities/feelings about yourself. On the other side, you will fill it with aspects that could be considered “bad” qualities/feelings about yourself. In the middle, add characteristics that might be neither “good” nor “bad.” Fill the mind map with at least 5 quotes from your warm-up notebook that significantly exhibit the feelings/traits that occupy your mind and at least 3 symbols. Use color and visuals to fill in the rest of the mind map, but it must be relevant to you!

After the Novel – Day One

Warm-up

Students will revisit use their journal to do “Reflective Writing” which has been describing under my “Strategies to Analyze Impulses” section. I will revisit the “Novel-to-Self” Journal prompts and ask students to write their new response. These can either be shared out or taken up and kept personal.

Tragic Heroes

I will first give students the handout titled “Tragic Hero” which can be found in Appendix 4. They will use this handout to work either together or alone in order to further their understanding of a tragic hero by tracking Amir’s traits. Students in my class will already understand the traits of a tragedy from their experience with Shakespeare so they will have some support with this assignment.

On this handout, I have a “Concluding Question” that is an extension for higher level classes but can be eliminated or broken down for a lower level class. With any level, we will discuss student opinions based on that question to help students understand the importance of these traits.

After the Novel – Day Two

Warm-up

Students will revisit use their journal to do “Reflective Writing” which has been describing under my “Strategies to Analyze Impulses” section. I will revisit the “Novel-to-Self” Journal prompts and ask students to write their new response. These can either be shared out or taken up and kept personal.

Catharsis in the Novel

Begin by giving the handout from Appendix 5, “The Emotionally Cathartic Moment,” to the students. This will provide support for them to understand what a cathartic moment may look like and how to interpret its meaning to the reader. Students will work on this assignment in pairs since it is an abstract and complex concept. Once all students complete the assignment, have them share out in their Heterogenous Groups.

After the Novel – Day Three

Warm-up

Students will revisit use their journal to do “Reflective Writing” which has been describing under my “Strategies to Analyze Impulses” section. I will revisit the “Novel-to-Self” Journal prompts and ask students to write their new response. These can either be shared out or taken up and kept personal.

Soliloquys

For the final day, students will be assigned the “Writing a Cathartic Soliloquy: A Multi-genre Assignment.” This document can be found in Appendix 6. The handout provides details for completing this assignment. This assignment should be completed at least partially in class so that I can monitor students’ progress. This is an assignment that requires attention to detail and multiple right and left brain functions. The left brain will analyze and order whereas the right brain will “fill in the blanks” in order to switch between genres.

Finally, since my students are hopefully feeling comfortable in the “tribal” community of my classroom, I will ask them to present their soliloquys in either small groups or to the whole class. This will be dependent on the level of comfort that has been reached in my class. I will either split students into groups of five to share their soliloquys, or allow each student to present.

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

RL.9-10.1. Use textual evidence for analysis of and drawing inferences from a text.

In multiple activities such as the handouts labeled “Character Mind Map,” “Tragic Hero,” and “Writing a Cathartic Soliloquy: A Multi-genre Assignment” students will be required to take evidence from the text and then make an inference about the character that they are analyzing.

RL.9-10.3. Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

This is the central standard to this unit as we will focus on characters primarily. The character tracker has them track the qualities of the character, the “Tragic Hero” activity will require them to analyze how a character can help to develop the theme. Finally the “Character Mind Map” assignment asks students to analyze the complexity of a character as both good and evil. This standard will directly connect the next standard that I will address in this unit: RL.9-10.6.

RL.9-10.6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

The focus of the final “Writing a Cathartic Soliloquy: A Multi-genre Assignment” is intended to ask students to place themselves into the perspective a character from this novel and then write in that character’s point of view. The novel that the students will be reading in this novel is *The Kite Runner*, a novel about a young Muslim boy growing up in Afghanistan. This perspective is one that is largely unrepresented in the student demographic at my school.

Appendix 2: Character Tracker

Directions: Use this chart document key moments in the text when a character's perspective is revealed. You must use exact quotes, including page number for full credit. Hint: This will help with a formal grade!

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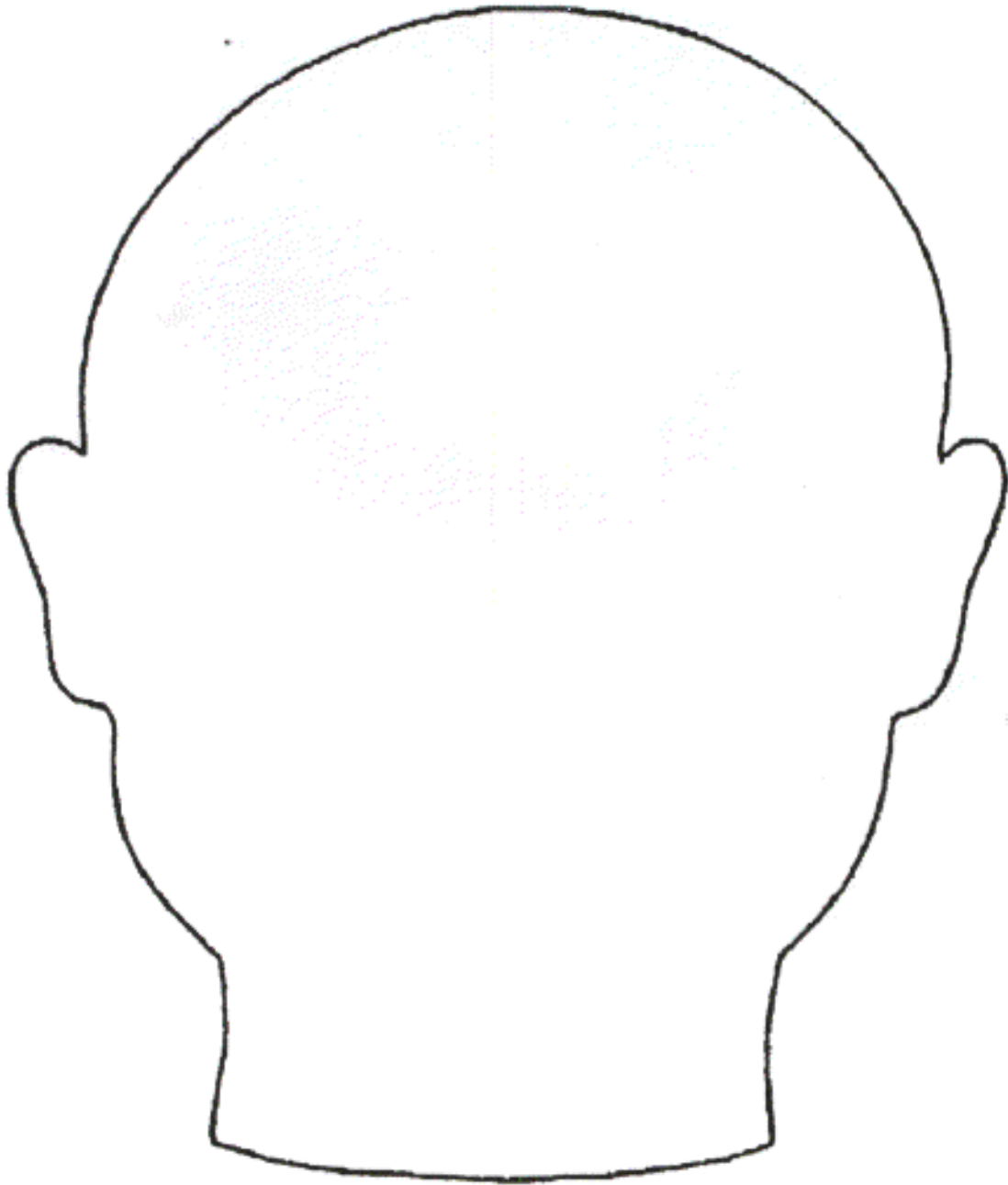
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Character Name

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Character Name

Appendix 3: Mind Map



Appendix 4: Tragic Hero

Aristotle defined the protagonist of a tragedy as a tragic hero in his philosophical work *Poetics*. Here he outlines the conventional traits and conventions for character and theatrical work to fall into the category of a tragedy. All tragedies must have a hero. It is arguable whether or not *The Kite Runner* can be defined as a tragedy, but we are going to establish a case for Amir as a tragic hero in *The Kite Runner* using the traits that Aristotle defined as “tragic.”

Trait of a Tragic Hero	Quote that shows this trait. Use MLA citations. I.E. (Hosseini 89).	Explanation of how that quote connects to the trait. Write in complete sentences.
Born of Noble Birth		
Possesses a Fatal Flaw		
Has Been Hurt Either Physically or Emotionally		
Takes No Responsibility for Flaw, Only for Circumstances that Create that Flaw		
His/her Fate or Destiny is Determined by Fatal Flaw		

Suffers More than He/She Deserves		
His/Her Downfall Arouses Pity or Fear		

Concluding Question: How does the characterization of Amir as a tragic hero contribute to theme of *The Kite Runner*?

Appendix 5: The Emotionally Cathartic Moments in *The Kite Runner*

Catharsis is the moment in literature, or life, when a character's emotions (think tragic flaw!) become so overwhelming that the person must have some sort of outward response. Then, because of the nature of their outward response, that person is able to identify the reasons his or her unhappiness and then make a change.

Example of Your Chart Using a Real-Life Example.

Character: Ms. Misko

Page Number of Cathartic Moment: Her dreams

What does the character realize about him/herself?	Quote that shows this realization.
I must be very afraid of anything changing.	In my dream, I shouted at my mother, "We cannot leave my childhood house! This is where I've always been happy!"

Your Chart for *The Kite Runner*!

Directions: Look at the characters about whom you have been collecting quotations. Pick the character that you feel you have the deepest understanding of, and then complete this chart.

Character: _____

Page Number of Cathartic Moment: _____

What does the character realize about him or herself?	Quote that shows this realization. Use MLA format.

Appendix 6: Writing a Cathartic Soliloquy: A Multi-genre Assignment

You have just read a soliloquy in *Julius Caesar* and so you know that a soliloquy provides the reader with the following information:

- 1.) The character's thoughts and feelings
- 2.) The events that occur off stage that the viewer/reader cannot see

These are important because in a play the viewer only hears dialogue and sees action; in a novel the reader receives so much more information. The narrator is able to provide the main character's opinions, fears, and emotions.

Using your character chart and your "Emotionally Cathartic Moments in *The Kite Runner*" handouts, you will create a soliloquy of the character's response/reflection on their cathartic moment. **After each step, check your progress with the teacher!**

Step One: Revisit the handout on "The Emotionally Cathartic Moment in *The Kite Runner*." Choose a character and complete the following for him or her:

Character: _____

Tragic Flaw: _____

Cathartic Scene where that Flaw is Realized by the Character (Need Page Number): _____

Step Two: Write at least a 15 line soliloquy where you reflect on the character's personal realizations about him or herself. Write this soliloquy like a real play: include Stage directions and a scene summary. Remember that these are personal thoughts!

Step Three: Annotate your soliloquy using brackets and then page numbers and references to show where you found reasoning for your own soliloquy to based on the text in the novel.

EX:	Ms. Misko: I never knew that it was weird that I so desperately needed pizza everyday after school. Does this make me a monster?	On pg.18 Ms. Misko dreams of dancing pizza.
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Step Four: Practice performing your soliloquy! Remember to use inflection in your voice, facial expressions, and hand gestures to add emotion to your soliloquy!

Materials for Classroom Use

Chart paper

This is important for the initial lesson in this unit.

A timer

This is essential for warm-ups and any Think-Pair-Share assignments. Use the timer to keep students moving and engaged.

Markers/Colored Pencils

It is necessary to have these available for the Mind Map assignment.

Reading List for Students

The Kite Runner by Khaled Housseini

This best-seller is told from the Amir's first person perspective. Amir's childhood was spent in Afghanistan with his best friend and servant Hassan. He makes one terrible mistake that haunts him for life and even follows him to America where he flees the Russian occupation.

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Achebe's novel tells the story of Christian missionaries invading an African village during the 19th century. While most of the novels during this time period show the European perspective, *Things Fall Apart* take the African perspective.

Night by Elie Wiesel

This is one of the most famous memoirs of the Holocaust. This book is raw and detailed about the ways in which Nazis were able to strip people of their dignity, humanity, and faith.

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Aristotle. *Rhetorica Et Poetica*. Trans. Immanuel Bekker. Berolini: Typis Academicis, 1831.

This translation is considered to be the best and the most complete. This is definitely not for someone who is only mildly interested in Aristotle.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. Malcolm Heath. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

This is a primary source that is essential to read when studying the tragedy. The writing has been translated, so it can be slightly confusing, but reading the

introduction from the translator is helpful when trying to piece together all of Aristotle's ideas.

Aristotle. *Politics - Aristotle*. S.I.: Nuvision Publications, 2009.

Catharsis is only briefly mentioned in *Poetics*, but it is explored more in *Politics* regarding music.

Beers, G. Kylene. *Notice & Note: Strategies for Close Reading*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2012.

I find this to be an invaluable source as an English teacher. Not only does Beers provide specific activities for low-performing readers, but she also spends a significant amount of time defending the use of literature and reading as a whole group.

Cozolino, Louis. *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*. New York: Norton, 2006.

Cozolino investigates the impact of neuroscience on our own human behavior. This is an interesting read because it applies to all relationships, not just those in the classroom.

Cozolino, Louis J. *The Social Neuroscience of Education: Optimizing Attachment and Learning in the Classroom*. New York, NY: Norton, 2013.

There are plenty of relatable classroom situations described in this book, which makes it a very engaging and quick read. Cozolino provides many strategies for creating a classroom culture where students feel safe and free to try new things – all supported by science and data.

Edwards, Betty. *Drawing on the Artist Within: A Guide to Innovation, Invention, Imagination, and Creativity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Edwards' book is a great resource for art teachers, but also for humanities teachers. This book explores the processes that people go through as they process complex ideas and concepts. This book also includes classroom strategies that can guide students through the process of deep thinking and expression.

Heath, Malcolm. "Introduction." *Poetics*. London: Penguin, 1996. Vii-Lxv.

Heath expands on the topics that Aristotle presents in *Poetics* by using Aristotle's other works for context. This is a very helpful read prior to the primary text as it provides examples and analysis of Aristotle's argument.

Pizzato, Mark. *Inner Theatres of Good and Evil: The Mind's Staging of Gods, Angels and Devils*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Publishers, 2011.

Pizzato explores human evolution as he describes the ways in which humans have grappled with the unexplainable. He finds that most Western societies created figures

of both good and evil, sometimes as a god-like human. Pizzato also explores the use of theater as symbolic of the human brain.

Pizzato, Mark. "Inner Theatre of the Brain" (Chart). Forthcoming in *Beast-People Onscreen and in Your Brain*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016.
Pizzato applies neuroscience terms to the roles in the theater. He also breaks down the many detailed functions of both the left and right brain.

Richards, Sam. "A Radical Experiment in Empathy." Sam Richards: October 2010. Accessed October 31, 2015.
https://www.ted.com/talks/sam_richards_a_radical_experiment_in_empathy?language=en#t-161183.
This could be used as an additional text for considering perspectives and empathy across cultures. Richards asserts situations from Muslim countries in the Middle East as a means for placing oneself in another's situation. The video can be difficult to grasp for lower levels, so I would recommend this to tenth grade or higher.

Notes

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- ¹ Pizzato, *Inner Theaters of Good and Evil*, 4.
 - ² Heath, "Introduction", xxxix.
 - ³ Heath, "Introduction", xxxvi.
 - ⁴ Heath, "Introduction", xxxix.
 - ⁵ Heath, "Introduction", xxxix.
 - ⁶ Pizzato, *Inner Theaters of Good and Evil*, 70.
 - ⁷ Wiesel, *Night*, 115.
 - ⁸ Pizzato, "Inner Theatre of the Brain."
 - ⁹ Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, 71.
 - ¹⁰ Aristotle, *Rhetorica Et Poetica*, 1468.
 - ¹¹ Cozolino, *The Social Neuroscience of Education*, 247.
 - ¹² Pizzato, *Inner Theater of Good and Evil*, 60.
 - ¹³ Cozolino, *The Social Neuroscience of Education*, 240.
 - ¹⁴ Pizzato, *Inner Theater of Good and Evil*, 72.
 - ¹⁵ Edwards, *Drawing on the Artist Within*, 43.
 - ¹⁶ Beers, *Notice and Note*, 17.
 - ¹⁷ Pizzato, *Inner Theater of Good and Evil*, 279.