

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On

Ripped from the Headlines

BODIES OF VENETIAN COUPLE DISCOVERED FOLLOWING TRAGIC MURDER-SUICIDE

What's the story behind the headline? _____

WAR HERO STABBED IN SHOCKING SENATE-FLOOR TRAGEDY

What's the story behind the headline? _____

DESTITUTE PARISIAN GARMENT WORKER REVEALS THE TRAGIC COST OF TUBERCULOSIS

What's the story behind the headline? _____

TROUBLED DANISH PRINCE TRAGICALLY LOSES LIFE IN RIGGED DUEL

What's the story behind the headline? _____

THEBAN RULER MAKES TRAGIC DISCOVERY ABOUT HIS PARENTAGE

What's the story behind the headline? _____

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

Drama in a Tragic Key

The genre of tragedy has been one of the most enduring artistic forms across history: With roots in Greek Attica (a region of Greece that includes Athens), it has inspired writers for more than 25 centuries! And despite continual transformations reflecting the shifting interests of the ages, tragedy has always emphasized topics of solemn import, involving the whole community in issues of moral and social consequence. This focus has resulted in recognizable qualities that have remained fairly consistent in works of tragic literature since the days of the first Greek tragedians.

A central aspect of any tragedy is the tragic hero, the protagonist of the story, who features these qualities and experiences:

HIGH CHARACTER

Tragic heroes often possess an elevated position in society. But more important than their social status, tragic heroes exhibit goodness and virtue and face their destiny with courage and nobility of spirit.

HAMARTIA

A personal flaw, mistake in judgment, or misstep that leads to the tragic hero's change in fortune.

HUBRIS

An example of hamartia, hubris refers to the excessive pride of tragic heroes. It may lead them to break a moral law, ignore warnings, or aim beyond their station—all with disastrous results.

ANAGNORISIS

A moment of recognition, self-discovery, or sudden awareness of one's true situation on the part of the tragic hero.

PERIPETEIA

A sudden reversal of fortune for the tragic hero. This reversal often follows anagnorisis and starts the protagonist on the path toward destruction.

CATASTROPHE

The conclusion of a tragedy, with actions and events resulting from the climax of the play. The catastrophe ends the dramatic conflict and usually involves the death of the tragic hero, thereby offering a final demonstration of the hero's nobility of character and fulfilling the hero's unavoidable destiny.

CATHARSIS

The proper objective of tragedy, in the view of Aristotle: a beneficial purge of unhealthy emotions that restores a viewer's proper emotional balance. More specifically, watching tragic action unfold will cause the viewer to experience pity and fear; after the hero's downfall, the viewer can let go of these unhealthy feelings and enjoy a period of emotional relaxation.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

What is Tragedy?

VIEWPOINT: Aristotle, *Poetics* (c. 350 BCE)

Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type. ... Epic poetry agrees with Tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type. ... Tragedy endeavors, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit.

Of all plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot “episodic” in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence. Bad poets compose such pieces by their own fault, good poets, to please the players; for, as they write show pieces for competition, they stretch the plot beyond its capacity, and are often forced to break the natural continuity.

But again, Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design.

Translated by S.H. Butcher

VIEWPOINT: Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* (c. 524 CE)

The heavens may grant bright sunlit days and hide the same beneath the shade of night. The year may deck the earth’s countenance with flowers and fruits, and again wrap it with chilling clouds. The sea may charm with its smoothed surface, but no less justly it may soon bristle in storms with rough waves. Is the insatiate discontent of man to bind me to a constancy which belongs not to my ways? Herein lies my very strength; this is my unchanging sport. I turn my wheel that spins its circle fairly; I delight to make the lowest turn to the top, the highest to the bottom. Come you to the top if you will, but on this condition, that you think it no unfairness to sink when the rule of my game demands it. Do you not know my ways? Have you not heard how Croesus, king of Lydia, who filled even Cyrus with fear but a little earlier, was miserably put upon a pyre of burning branches, but was saved by rain sent down from heaven? Have you forgotten how Paulus shed tears of respect for the miseries of his captive, King Perses? For what else is the crying and the weeping in tragedies but for the happiness of kings overturned by the random blow of fortune? Have you never learnt in your youth the ancient allegory that in the threshold of Jove’s hall there stand two vessels, one full of evil, and one of good?

Translated by W.V. Cooper

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

VIEWPOINT: Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* (1305)

The tragic style is clearly to be used whenever both the magnificence of the verses and the lofty excellence of construction and vocabulary accord with the gravity of the subject-matter.

Therefore, remembering well that (as has been proved above) whatever is highest is worthy of the highest, and seeing that the style we call “tragic” is the highest kind of style, the subjects that we have defined as requiring to be treated in the highest style must be treated in that style alone. And those subjects are well-being, love, and virtue, and the thoughts that they inspire in us, as long as no accidental circumstance intervenes to defile them.

Translated by Stephen Botterill

VIEWPOINT: Chaucer, Prologue to “The Monk’s Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales* (1387)

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.
And they ben versified communely
Of six feet, which men clepen exametron.
In prose eek been endited many oon,
And eek in meetre in many a sondry wyse.
Lo, this declaryng oghte ynogh suffice.

Tragedy is to say a true story,
As old books make us remember,
Of him who stood in great prosperity,
And is fallen out of high status
Into misery, and ends wretchedly.
And they are usually in verses
Of six feet, which [we] call hexameters.
Also in prose many have been composed,
And also in meters of many different types.
Lo, this explanation ought to suffice enough.

Translated by Angela Marroy Boerger

VIEWPOINT: Sir Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesie* (1595)

It is the Comick, whom naughtie Play-makers and stage-keepers, have justly made odious. To the arguments of abuse, I will after answer, only thus much now is to be said, that the Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous & scornfull sort that may be: so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.

The high and excellent Tragedie, that openeth the greatest woundes, sheweth forth the Ulcers that are covered with Tissue, that maketh Kings feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants manifest their tyrannicall humours, that with stirring the affects of Admiration and Comiseration, teacheth the uncertaintie of this world, and uppon how weak foundations guilden roofes are builded.

The Stage should alway represent but one place, and the uttermoste time presupposed in it, should bee both by Aristotles precept, and common reason, but one day.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

VIEWPOINT: Milton, Preface to *Samson Agonistes* (c. 1670)

Tragedy, as it was antiently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.

This is mention'd to vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common Interludes; hap'ning through the Poets error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath bin counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratifie the people.

The circumscription of time wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to antient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours.

VIEWPOINT: Boileau, *L'art poétique* (1674)

There's not a Monster bred beneath the Sky
But, well dispos'd by Art, may please the Eye:
A curious Workman, by his Skill Divine,
From an ill Object makes a good Design.
Thus, to Delight, as Tragedy, in Tears
For Oedipus, provokes our Hopes, and Fears:
For Parricide Orestes asks relief;
And, to increase our pleasure, causes grief.

You then, that in this noble Art would rise,
Come; and in lofty Verse dispute the Prize.
Would you upon the Stage acquire renown,
And for your Judges summon all the Town?
Would you your Works for ever should remain,
And, after Ages past, be sought again?
In all you Write, observe with Care and Art
To move the Passions, and incline the Heart.
If, in a labour'd Act, the pleasing Rage

Cannot our Hopes and Fears by turns ingage,
Nor in our mind a feeling Pity raise;
In vain with Learned Scenes you fill your Plays:
Your cold Discourse can never move the mind
Of a stern Critic, natu'rally unkind;
Who, justly tir'd with your Pedantic flight,
Or falls asleep, or censures all you Write.
The Secret is, Attention first to gain;
To move our minds, and then to entertain.

... In noble thoughts must every where abound,
Be easy, pleasant, solid, and profound:
To these you must surprising Touches joyn,
And show us a new wonder in each Line;
That all in a just method well design'd,
May leave a strong Impression in the mind,
These are the Arts that Tragedy maintain.

Translated by John Dryden

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

VIEWPOINT: Racine, Preface to *Phèdre* (1677)

I have taken the trouble to make [Phaedra] a little less hateful than she is in the ancient versions of this tragedy, in which she herself resolves to accuse Hippolytus. I judged that that calumny had about it something too base and black to be put into the mouth of a Princess. ... This depravity seemed to me more appropriate to the character of a nurse, whose inclinations might be supposed to be more servile.

Translation from *The Encyclopedia Britannica*

VIEWPOINT: Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (1767–69)

The names of princes and heroes can give a play pomp and majesty, but they contribute nothing to its emotional power. The misfortune of someone whose circumstances come closest to our own must naturally penetrate most deeply into our souls, and if we have compassion for kings, we have it for them as people rather than as kings. If occasionally their rank makes their misfortunes more important, it does not therefore make them more interesting. Though entire populations may be enmeshed, our sympathy demands a single subject, and a nation is far too abstract a concept for our sentiments.

Translated by Wendy Arons and Sara Figal

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

MUSICAL EXCERPT 1 (TRACK 13)

The Captain's room. Early morning. The Captain is sitting on a chair in front of a mirror. Wozzeck is shaving him.

CAPTAIN: Langsam, Wozzeck, langsam!
Eins nach dem Andern! Er macht mir ganz schwindlig ...
Was soll ich dann mit den zehn Minuten anfangen,
die Er heut' zu früh fertig wird?
Wozzeck, bedenke! Er, Er hat noch seine schönen dreißig
Jahr' zu leben, dreißig Jahre: macht dreihundert und
sechzig Monate und erst wieviel Tage, Stunden, Minuten!
Was will Er denn mit der ungeheuren Zeit all' anfangen?
Teil' Er sich ein, Wozzeck!

WOZZECK: Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann.

Slowly, Wozzeck, slowly!
One thing at a time! You make me downright dizzy ...
What am I supposed to do with those ten extra minutes
I'll have when you finish early?
Think about it, Wozzeck. You still have a good thirty years to live.
Thirty years: That's 360 months, and just think about how many
days, hours, minutes!
Why do everything so terribly fast?
Take it easy, Wozzeck!

Yes sir, Mr. Captain.

MUSICAL EXCERPT 2 (TRACK 14)

CAPTAIN: Wozzeck, Er ist ein guter Mensch, aber ...
Er hat keine Moral! Moral: das ist,
wenn man moralisch ist!
Versteht Er? Es ist ein gutes Wort.
Er hat ein Kind ohne den Segen der Kirche ...

WOZZECK: Jawo ...

CAPTAIN: ... wie unser hochwürdiger Herr Garnisonsprediger
sagt: Ohne den Segen der Kirche, das Wort ist nicht von mir.

WOZZECK: Herr Hauptmann, der liebe Gott wird den armen
Wurm nicht d'rum ansehen, ob das Amen darüber gesagt ist,
eh' er gemacht wurde. Der Herr sprach:
Lasset die Kleinen zu mir kommen!

CAPTAIN: Was sagt Er da? Was ist das für eine kuriose Antwort?
Er macht mich ganz konfus! Wenn ich sage:
Er, so mein' ich Ihn, Ihn ...

WOZZECK: Wir arme Leut! Sehn Sie, Herr Hauptmann,
Geld, Geld! Wer kein Geld hat! Da setz' einmal einer
Seinesgleichen auf die moralische Art in die Welt!
Man hat auch sein Fleisch und Blut! Ja, wenn ich ein Herr wär',
und hätt' einen Hut und eine Uhr und ein Augenglas und
könnt' vornehm reden, ich wollte schon tugendhaft sein!
Es muss was Schönes sein um die Tugend, Herr Hauptmann.
Aber ich bin ein armer Kerl! Unsereins ist doch einmal
unselig in dieser und der andern Welt! Ich glaub',
wenn wir in den Himmel kämen, so müssten wir donnern helfen!

Wozzeck, you're a good guy, but ...
you have no morals! "To have morals"—
that means "to be moral."
Do you understand? It's a good phrase to know.
But you have a child out of wedlock ...

Yes ...

That's how our reverend priest says it:
out of wedlock. It's not my phrasing

Mr. Captain, a loving god doesn't hold it against
a child if it's born out of wedlock.
Rather, he says:
"Let the little children come to me!"

Where does the Bible say that? What kind of an answer is that?
You're making me completely confused.

We poor people! You see, Mr. Captain,
it's a question of money—if you don't have money then you can't
afford to be moral!
A person also has to take care of their flesh and blood! If only I
were a gentleman and had a hat and a watch and glasses and could
speak well, then I'd like to be virtuous!
It must be nice to be virtuous, Mr. Captain.
But I'm a poor man! My kind can only ever be unfortunate—both
in this world and in the next! I believe that if we made it to heaven,
we'd have to help make the thunder!

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

MUSICAL EXCERPT 3 (TRACK 15)

WOZZECK: Der Platz ist verflucht! Siehst Du den lichten Streif da über das Gras hin, wo die Schwämme so nachwachsen? Da rollt Abends ein Kopf. Hob ihn einmal Einer auf, meint', es wär' ein Igel. Drei Tage und drei Nächte drauf, und er lag auf den Hobelspänen.

This place is cursed! Do you see that light area in the grasses over there, by where the toadstools grow? A head rolls through there in the evening. Someone once picked it up. He thought it was a hedgehog. Three days and three nights later, he was dead.

MUSICAL EXCERPT 4 (TRACK 16)

MARIE: Wie der Mond rot aufgeht!

Look how red the moon rises tonight!

WOZZECK: (*drawing a knife*) Wie ein blutig Eisen!

Like a bloody knife!

MARIE: Was zitterst? Was willst?

Why are you trembling? What do you want?

WOZZECK: (*stabbing her in the neck*) Ich nicht, Marie! Und kein Andrer auch nicht!

If I can't have you, Marie, then no one else can!

MARIE: Hilfe!

Help!

WOZZECK: Todt!

Dead!

MUSICAL EXCERPT 5 (TRACK 17)

WOZZECK: Wo ist das Messer? Ich hab's da gelassen ... Näher, noch näher. Mir graut's! Da regt sich was. Still! Alles still und tot ... Mörder! Mörder! Ha! Da ruft's. Nein, ich selbst. Marie! Marie! Was hast Du für eine rote Schnur um den Hals? Hast Dir das rote Halsband verdient, wie die Ohrringlein, mit Deiner Sünde! Was hängen Dir die schwarzen Haare so wild? Mörder! Mörder! Sie werden nach mir suchen ... Das Messer verrät mich! Da, da ist's. So! Da hinunter! Es taucht ins dunkle Wasser wie ein Stein. Aber der Mond verrät mich ... der Mond ist blutig. Will denn die ganze Welt es ausplaudern? Das Messer, es liegt zu weit vorn, sie finden's beim Baden oder wenn sie nach Muscheln tauchen. Ich find's nicht ... Aber ich muss mich waschen. Ich bin blutig. Da ein Fleck ... und noch einer. Weh! Weh! Ich wasche mich mit Blut! Das Wasser ist Blut ... Blut ...

Where is the knife? I left it just there ... Nearer, nearer. Oh, it's terrifying! There, something's moving. Silent! Everything is silent and dead ... Murder! Murder! Ha! Who is yelling that?—it's me. Marie! Marie! Why do you have that red ribbon around your neck? Your sins bought you a red necklace to go with your earrings! Why is your black hair so wild? Murder! Murder! They'll look for me ... The knife will give me away! There, there it is! Just under there! It sinks in the dark water like a stone. But the moon will give me away ... the moon is bloody. Will the whole world blab? The knife: it's too close to the shore, someone will find it while swimming or diving for mussels. I can't find it ... But I need to clean myself up. I'm bloody. There's a spot ... And another. Oh no! No! I'm washing myself with blood! The water is blood ... blood ...

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Soldiering On (CONTINUED)

Wozzeck: There, I Fixed It

According to the viewpoint of: _____

CHARACTER CHANGES:

SETTING CHANGES:

PLOT DETAILS:

THE OPERA ENDS WITH:
