



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume I: Stories around the World in Film and Literature

Teaching Responsibility to Children in Different Cultures through Film and Literature Stories

Curriculum Unit 05.01.01
by Ekaterina Barkhatova

Introduction

"Logical consequences...teach kids to make choices and be responsible. Logical consequences say to kids, 'You hold all the cards. It's your choice.'" Alex J. Packer, *Bringing Up Parents* (Free Spirit Publishing, 1992)

"Once a child has fulfilled the obligation that comes with responsibility, he or she gains a sense of satisfaction.... It's these positive feelings that help motivate the child to continue taking on responsibilities in the future." Lawrence Balter, professor of applied psychology, New York University

I joined the seminar "Stories Around the World in Film and Literature" offered by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, so I could develop a teaching unit; I did not have to think about the topic of my unit for long. As a teacher, I felt instinctively that the unit would have to deal with the moral education of my students. I was also driven by the strong belief that the earlier we focus on right and wrong with our children the more assured we may be of them growing into responsible young people in the future.

Surrounded by everyday instances of students' chaotic demeanor in the classrooms and hallways, listening to teachers' conversations about inappropriate deeds of their pupils, disciplining my students every hour in school, I had not yet discovered the actual scale of this nationwide issue, until I researched books on the subject of my unit. Some specific instances of the young generation's actions and speech shook me deeply. Many teachers say that about twenty years ago students at least knew right from wrong. Today, to our terror, we clearly see that many children simply don't know the difference between right and wrong. They believe it is acceptable to pick up another person's property without permission, or to interrupt a conversation between two adults.

Many sources scream about a new kind of illiteracy in our society - moral illiteracy(1). In addition to millions who can't read and write, there are millions more who possess confused notions about values. Fortunately, I found a good number of books for teachers laying out "character education" for our children.

The student population of an elementary school (I teach at Timothy Dwight elementary school in New Haven, CT) needs to be extensively educated in regard to moral and ethical bases and principles. Regretfully, our

eight or nine-year-old children often lack the basic concepts of moral behavior. I would be elated to see our children doing their homework regularly, being helpful to their parents, speaking an appropriate language in school and at home, and acting courteously to their teachers and each other. I believe that the moral aspect of education is even more significant than the academic one. In my opinion, right in elementary school we need to do everything possible to fill the regrettable gap in the ethical upbringing of the students. One effective way to begin this process is through teaching authentic stories found in good literature and cinema.

In designing this unit on teaching responsibility to children I pursue two separate major goals: I want this unit to teach some important moral principals such as to be responsible for one's deeds and relationships with others, and I want the unit to be academically rich in developing pertinent knowledge skills applicable to understanding a story. I find that along with the lack of moral training, students need academic understanding of the tools necessary for their success: language, rhetoric, imaginative storytelling. Before they can portray their own situations as stories, they need to understand the elements involved: characters, themes, motives, settings, conflicts, solutions, etc.

How can stories contribute to student acquisition of moral values, such as responsibility? We can otherwise agree that stories provide a myriad of good examples, that our students may not observe in their day-to-day life. Stories tell our youngsters about the codes of conduct they need to know. They contain accessible scenarios of behavior, hopefully the behavior we want to instill in kids. Children just need to understand them and identify with the characters in those scenarios. We know that emotional attachment to goodness, or a desire to do the right thing, can be instilled.

Stories help to make sense out of life. Life is represented in stories where different characters are interconnected in plots that show decisions with consequences. Students can take lessons from these consequences. Knowing stories, modeling them, building on them, students can present their own lives as stories. This is especially critical for children as they search for a sense of meaning. And if this sense of meaning is not reinforced with more complex stories, then there simply can be no moral growth. Responsibility means the "ability to respond" to what happens. Most stories are about consequences of actions, thus about responsibility. Responsibility defines how characters relate to each other, to themselves, to their environment.

This unit offers written stories as well as fiction films. When we look at a film with students we will identify all characteristic elements of a story, describe main characters, and analyze the central theme or important message the film carries. It is not accidental that I have selected foreign films for my unit. I want my students to have some meaningful exposure to different cultures and their everyday routines by the vivid and available means of cinema. I strive to help students obtain a sense of belonging in the world's community. The well-being of our future communities will depend on this. To achieve this goal I have chosen to display how children of their age in other countries confront dilemmas and make choices. My students should know that it is not only for them that choices are often not easy to make, that children on other continents live through hardships and challenges as well. But with the right choices we all can overcome them and become stronger and more successful.

This unit covers a period of six weeks. I will begin by spending two weeks on *The Little Prince*, partially because this story is related in text and film, so the students will learn to work with two kinds of media during this unit. I understand that fourth grade students are developmentally not quite ready to read the whole book. So, I will reinforce the ideas about the responsibility of the Prince for his rose and planet by showing the film *The Little Prince* (2004; directed by Francesca Zambello; in English; runtime 88 minutes). We will begin by

watching the film and during the screening we will stop at the chapters I want my students to read and work on. I intend to use three chapters from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery (chapters V, VIII, XXI). I am particularly excited about this choice, because this story is a classic world tale, which for a long time has been taught to children throughout the world. I would be thrilled to familiarize my students with this story, helping them to become a part of the global village.

The third week will be devoted to the African movie *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* . In the fourth week we will work with the Iranian film *Children of Heaven* . In the fifth week we'll focus on the Greek myth *Icarus and Daedalus* , and the sixth week will be used for performing culminating activities. With every week I hope to build levels of complication, so students can see their growing ability to recognize responsible actions and derive value from them. Students will, hopefully, grasp that all kinds of responsibility are interrelated.

The stories in this unit both in film and literature originate from four different countries of the world: France, Senegal, Iran, and ancient Greece. I believe that children in American public school should encounter the stories of other cultures that show perspectives on a universal notion that has no boundaries between countries. Therefore in the concluding lessons of the unit, students will use their acquired knowledge to compare the four kinds of responsibility studied - family responsibilities, responsibility in relationships (friendship), responsibility for one's own actions and words, and responsibility for the environment - and to draw conclusions about the meaning of responsibility in general. They will also illustrate and speculate about all the responsibilities of one of the characters that they became familiar with in this unit on a poster.

Although this unit may be taught with some modifications in any classroom, I developed it for fourth grade bilingual students. As an ESL teacher, I work with two groups of the student population: English language learners, who may just have arrived from other countries, and bilingual students (in our district, these are children with a Latin American background). These students completed thirty months in the district bilingual program, and are entitled to Language Transitional Support Service (LTSS). They already developed their BISC (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) - conversational language - often called playground language, but are still in need of CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) - academic language, necessary for success in school. Therefore in this unit I stress specifically working on academic skills while reading and viewing stories about responsibility.

I made a commitment to develop this unit in hopes of awakening those healthy grains of character in my students that desperately need some nurturing support - good soil, sun and water, thought-provoking humanistic stories and films - so they could grow into beautiful personalities with golden hearts and pure souls.

Unit Objectives

Considering ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students, CMT reading objectives, and six reading comprehension strategies being currently promoted in the New Haven school district (please, see Appendix), I identify the following unit objectives:

The students will be able to:

- become familiar with 4 stories of different countries dealing with the theme of responsibility in children;
- review the content knowledge of story elements: plot, characters, setting, problem, solution;
- identify an important message/ theme(s)/ the main idea a story has;
- make connections between the story's message and personal experiences;
- analyze a story regarding the main characters' behavior and the consequences it has;
- recognize the value of responsibility in the character's actions;
- apply critical thinking to the possible problem solution in a story.

Skills Development

- Students will write in a diary or personal journal;
- Students will describe story characters;
- Students will take notes as a teacher presents information, or during the film, in order to summarize key concepts;
- Students will summarize a story or a film;
- Students will locate information appropriate to an assignment in text or reference materials;
- Students will take a position and support it orally or in writing;
- Students will construct a chart synthesizing information;
- Students will act out a particular scene from a film;
- Students will work individually and cooperatively in groups.

The balance of academic and moral approaches (strategies)

The ultimate purpose of the unit is to combine academic study and moral teaching. In the beginning of studying a story or film, the academic aspect will be emphasized: students will obtain and process the subject matter, they will learn how to take notes during a film or a mini-lecture (*Taking Notes*), or how to write a summary of a story or a movie (*Summarizing*). At the midpoint of the process the combination of the two main unit goals will come into place. Students will select, connect, and explain information. For example, they will construct a chart synthesizing information about responsible/irresponsible deeds of characters (*Keeping a chart about the kinds of responsibility*), they will hypothesize and guess by taking a position concerning a responsible or irresponsible character (*What If*), and predict his or her actions orally or in writing (*Trying the other person's shoes*). These and other strategies – *Performing a scene*, *Writing in a journal*, *Identifying an important message* – are described below. The strategies apply to stories in film and literature.

Taking Notes

The fourth grade is a springboard for students to transfer to middle school grades. We need to ensure that students begin acquiring those complex learning skills such as note taking. We often assume something that is not the case with students, that they know, or will learn on their own, how to take accurate notes while not missing any part of the material related by the instructor. Risking sounding dull, I insist on teaching students how to take notes. Of course, they have to have some sort of writing fluency. But you can also teach them how to abbreviate, use symbols, and write in bullet points, noting only the key components of the material. They need to know that grammatical structures and spelling do not really matter in notes as long as the meaning is not violated. They have to realize that the purpose of taking notes is to use them as a support, as a memory tool to engage in future meaningful discussion or written response. In the case of this unit students will need their notes to write a summary of a film.

A good opportunity to learn note taking is available right away. Before we begin reading a story or viewing a film I plan to provide students with some brief but critical information about the country the story comes from: I will use a world map to locate the country, show pictures of the country's landscapes as well as local people engaged in daily activities; I'll also mention how children in this country organize their regular day. During my ten minute presentation students are to practice being active listeners and taking notes. I intend to model this skill, so during my first lesson I may ask another teacher to present the information and I will write down my notes on a big poster for all students to see.

Summarizing a Story

Summarizing a story also belongs to a group of challenging skills within which even middle and high school students struggle. My favorite technique here again is modeling. Excellent opportunities to write a summary would occur after viewing films like *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* and *Children of Heaven* . After viewing the first film I will teach the structure of a summary, which basically has to reflect all key elements of the story in three-five sentences: main character(s), setting, problem, solution. I will model writing a summary of the film *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* on a big poster which will be visible on the wall for the duration of this unit. Then students will write a summary using their own words. When they become familiar with the film *Children of Heaven* they will try writing its summary independently or in pairs.

Identifying an Important Message

Chapters 5 and 21 of *The Little Prince* seem to be well-suited to the purpose of painlessly teaching how to identify an important message in a text. During our reading aloud of these chapters I will direct students to seek the answer to the CMT type open-ended question: "What important lesson does the little prince learn in this chapter? Use examples from the text to support your answer." In these chapters it is not difficult to identify an important message. After hearing students' responses and scaffolding the discussion about the moral lesson in chapter 5, I will model writing down the answer to the question. After reading chapter 21 students will practice writing the response on their own.

The same procedure of identifying an important message should be performed after viewing separate scenes of the films *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* and *Children of Heaven*. In the film *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* there is a scene when Sili, the main character, is hired as a newspaper seller. First, she is met with suspicion and mistrust, because she is a girl. But Sili is determined to get a job and replies in a bold manner. The film *Children of Heaven* on DVD is broken down into 14 scenes, which makes it very convenient to work with the film in the classroom. To develop students' ability to identify an important message I would show scenes 3. *Swapping Shoes For School* (This is the key scene when Ali and his sister Zahra decide to use Ali's pair of sneakers to go to school. Ali acts responsibly toward Zahra's need to attend school, and Zahra takes responsibility for the situation by not telling the parents about the misfortune of Ali.) , 9. *Going Uptown For Work* (In this scene, students will observe how exceedingly problematic it is for a poor Iranian man to find a job to make both ends meet, and how children participate in providing for the family.) , and scene 11. *A Race For Sneakers* (This is one of the culminating scenes that shows the challenge of the consequences of Ali's loss, and how admirably he accepts it.).

Keeping a Chart about the Kinds of Responsibility

In the very beginning of the unit I will design a big chart reflecting the four stories under our study and the four kinds of responsibility students should find evidence of while working with these stories and films. After the study of a story/film we will, as a group, fill in the appropriate squares. At the end of the unit, the chart will demonstrate the students' gained knowledge about how children in other countries show responsibility in different aspects of their lives. We will use this chart as a comparative tool to draw conclusions about the nature of responsibility. Besides, having this kind of chart already at the initial stages of the unit will assist students with picking up appropriate information for the chart while continuing to watch movies or read stories.

(table available in print form)

Note: Please, see Lesson 1 for a sample from the story *The Little Prince* .

Trying on the Other Person's Shoes

A broad circle of moral values includes empathy, the ability to understand the other person's feelings and deeds. Not only do I want my students to be sensitive to others' emotions and moods, I also want them to comprehend the motivation of one's actions. That is why it is necessary to first discuss the character's traits and understand the model of his/her acting caused by these traits.

Chapter 8 of the story *The Little Prince* is a rather complicated selection. So, I would like to read this chapter

aloud for my students, making stops and discussing the development of the relationship between the prince and the rose. As a whole group we will portray characteristics of the prince and the flower. I am even thinking of graphing the little prince's feelings toward the rose which change from admiration to abashment, then to disagreement and experiencing that the flower is "a complex creature," next to disappointment and doubt, and finally to regret about his premature conclusions. Building on our discussion students will write their prediction about the little prince's future thoughts and attitude toward the rose. (Also, please, see Lesson 2.)

Performing a Scene

In order to understand the feelings and inner motives of a character's actions, I will offer students the opportunity to act out a particular scene during the study of each story or film. I will entrust students with choosing a scene. The only condition would be that the scene should demonstrate responsibility of a character, either through his or her words, or other characters' responses. I will perhaps help students transcribe the scene. I will have students in two, three, or four groups, so we can enjoy watching more than one scene. My role would be monitoring the process and assisting students with selecting a scene and preparation for the performance. This activity should receive special recognition, as the students will utilize their presentation skills and dramatic talents, so I would give each participant a credit for the work and organize voting for the most expressive performance. This kind of activity definitely helps students feel good about themselves, conveys an atmosphere of success, and builds a sense of community in the classroom.

Writing in a Journal

I believe that it is crucial in the course of this unit to allow students enough time to reflect on the theme of responsibility and to observe similarities in the character's and their own actions and experiences. In fact, they should be encouraged to make all three kinds of connections: text to text, text to self, and text to the world(2). When students know the story, they will be asked to write in their personal journals. They will be prompted to make connections giving some meaningful evidence of those bonds. I expect that students will have at least six opportunities to write in their journals in the duration of the unit study: after each chapter of *The Little Prince* (three chapters), after a short story, and after each of the two films.

What if?

This activity goes along with the activity "Trying on the other person's shoes," the assignment on prediction, but it allows students to find out the outcome of the story. Students face the challenge to imagine what would have happened if the character had not acted the way he or she did act. What if a responsible character, such as Ali from the film *Children of Heaven* or the little prince, went another route - not a quite proper route - would the outcome be the same? What would happen to the other characters dependent on them? The unfolding of the situation would be, obviously, profoundly different. How different? I will impose these questions for the small groups in which students will have to come up with their own scenario of the situation "What if..?" I will provide students with exact formulations of the questions to start their thought flow in the needed direction, towards the final product. This activity is targeted at the development of students' critical thinking and ability to foresee the consequences of wrong behavior.

Culminating activities

One in-class culminating activity will be a discussion of a chart about four kinds of responsibility. This chart should help us draw conclusions about the essence of responsibility and provide some specific examples of responsible attitudes. I would even like to create some posters with key phrases from stories, for instance: *"It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important"* or *"You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed."* (3)

The other culminating activity will be a group project. I am a big proponent of hands-on projects, in particular because they create many advantages for ESL and bilingual students. The projects usually serve as successful tools of differentiated instruction and involve multiple language skills and competences. They become a source of enjoyment for students as they take students' interests into account, and reflect how well students can operate in a group setting. Bearing the theme of the unit in mind I would divide students in groups of three where they assign certain responsibilities to each person. I would suggest they keep a track of their meetings to complete the project and record the participation of each group member.

The groups will each choose one story out of the literature stories and films we studied in the unit. As a group, students will have to construct a poster or a scrapbook featuring all responsibilities of a character they learned about during the work on the story/film. Here is the rubric that reflects the evaluation of the project (4). Students will receive it in advance.

Making a Poster: Responsibilities of (name of the character)

(table available in print form)

The Little Prince

Country Information (5)

France, officially "French Republic," is about 80% the size of Texas. Except for extreme northern France, the country may be described as four river basins and a plateau. Three of the streams flow west – the Seine into the English Channel, the Loire into the Atlantic, and the Garonne into the Bay of Biscay. The Rhone flows south into the Mediterranean. It is bordered by seven countries – Spain and Andorra in the south-west, Switzerland and Italy in the south-east, and Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium in the north-east.

Since 1972 France has been administratively divided into 22 regions, many of which correspond to the nation's historical provinces. France also has a number of overseas departments, territories, and countries which, legally, are part of the French Republic. In the late 1990s there were 40 French cities that had more than 100,000 inhabitants, but only Paris exceeded one million. Total population is 60,656,178, according to the 2005 estimate. About 75% of the population live in urban areas. The mingling of peoples over the centuries as well as immigration in the 20th century has given France great ethnic diversity. A large influx of predominantly North African immigrants has had a great effect on the cities, especially Paris and Marseille.

French is the nation's language. There are also a number of regional dialects, which are largely declining in usage. Roman Catholicism is by far the largest religion in France, although only an estimated 5% are churchgoers. With growing immigration from Asia, Turkey, and North Africa, France also has a large Muslim population, estimated at 3 to 5 million. Separation of church and state was made final by law in 1905. The educational level in France is high. The literacy rate is 99%, according to the 1980 estimate.

France is one of the world's major economic powers. Agriculture plays a larger role than in the economies of most other industrial countries. A large proportion of the value of total agricultural output derives from livestock (cattle, hogs, poultry, and sheep). France's leading industries produce machinery, chemicals, automobiles, metals, aircraft, electronics equipment, and foods (especially cheese). Tourism is an important industry, and Paris is famous for its luxury goods.

Plot Summary

The Little Prince

Story (1943) written by Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Film (2004) directed by Francesca Zambello; Runtime 88 min.; In English

The Little Prince is a well-known fascinating tale about the magical little boy who learns little wisdoms of life on the Earth.

During the World War I, a French pilot experiences an airplane crash in the Sahara Desert, where he is trapped while repairing his plane. One day he encounters the little prince, who tells the pilot (the pilot acts as a narrator in the story) about his wanderings to different planets. The little prince also describes his own tiny planet, where he used to watch out for the seeds of baobabs, and where he has had a capricious rose. It is because of a misunderstanding with that rose that the little prince has had to leave his planet. Here, on the Earth, he hopes to understand "a great many things" he considers necessary for living. The pilot first is puzzled and sometimes irritated by the unusual child, who demands different drawings from him. But, eventually he realizes how awfully sincere and true the little prince is. He comes to understand that everything that the boy is saying makes a lot of sense. The little prince finds what he was looking for – a real friend – the fox, whom he tames. The fox teaches the prince that "it is only with the heart that one can see rightly." Finally, the little prince decides to return to his rose on his planet, for whom he feels responsible. However, the snake confuses the prince saying that only with its bite can the prince go to heaven again, and it bites him. To the narrator's relief, he does not find the body of the little prince, and we are left with the impression that the boy with the hair of "the color of the wheat fields" has left for his planet.

Theme of Responsibility

The theme of responsibility runs through the whole story. The responsibility demanded by relationships with others leads to the understanding and appreciation of one's responsibility to the world in general. The relationship of the little prince with the rose drives almost all the endeavors the prince undertakes in the story: he leaves his planet because of the rose; he wanders from one planet to another in search of the truth, so he can understand his rose better; then, with the help of the fox, he realizes that the rose is really special for him, because it is in her that he invested himself. The little prince discovers the nature of real love, the source of which becomes the sense of responsibility he experiences toward his beloved rose. The fox also teaches the prince that friendship is really unique, and once you befriend someone you become responsible

for that person forever.

The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun

Country Information

Republic of Senegal is located in Western Africa. It is slightly smaller than South Dakota. Senegal surrounds Gambia on three sides and is bordered on the north by the Atlantic Ocean and Mauritania, on the east by Mali, and on the south by Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. 44 percent of the population are Wolof. Other principal ethnic groups are the Fulani, Tukolor, Serer, Jola, and Malinke. About 92 percent of the population are Sunni Muslim. About 2 percent are Christian (mostly Roman Catholic), and 6 percent follow indigenous beliefs. French is the official language. Almost half of the population also speaks Wolof, the most widely understood of the African languages, but Pulaar, Jola, and Mandingo are also spoken. Senegal is a constitutional republic under a multiparty democracy.

The spread of Islam and French expansionism occurred simultaneously during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; these two forces shaped modern Senegal. Senegal came to serve as the beachhead for France's conquest of a colonial empire in Africa. The country's largest city and capital, Dakar, is the setting in the film *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*. Its population, according to the 2003 estimate, is 2,476,400 people. Dakar served as the capital and the commercial center of colonial French West Africa. Citizens of Senegal were the first Africans to gain French citizenship rights, and the African nation has maintained close ties to France since independence in 1960. The name "Senegal" probably derives from "Zenaga" - the Zenaga Berbers - peoples from North Africa.

Education is officially compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 12, but the official data shows that hardly 50 percent of school-age children attend school. Therefore, the literacy rate of the country's population (age 15 and over who can read and write) is quite low: about 40 percent, according to the 2003 estimate.

The northern part of Senegal is part of the Sahel, a transition zone between the Sahara desert on the north and the wetter regions to the south. Vegetation toward the south consists mainly of savanna grass with scattered clumps of trees and spiny shrubs. Farther south, near the Gambia river, trees are more common. Primary economic activity in Senegal is agriculture, as well as roundwood production, fishing, phosphate mining, and manufacturing. Primary crops include peanuts, millet, corn, sorghum, rice, cotton, tomatoes, green vegetables, and livestock.

Today Senegal faces challenges common to many African countries, such as economic stagnation. The film *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* observes street life poverty. It claims to be a hymn to all children who demonstrate courage and hard work on the streets of Dakar. However, Senegal continues to serve as an intellectual and cultural center in French-speaking Africa. Its relative stability and political openness offer the hope that Senegal might once again lead Africa in building a democratic and economically secure society.

Plot Summary

The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun (La Petite vendeuse de soleil) (1999)

Directed by Djibril Diop Mambety; Runtime 45 minutes; In Wolof, with English subtitles

Sili, a young handicapped teenage kid, decides to hit the streets and sell newspapers ("The Sun" is the name of a newspaper) to make ends meet. The other newspaper boys don't like her moving on their territory and give her a hard time. In spite of that, Sili continues working. By that she proves that a girl also can be a support in the family.

Theme of Responsibility

There is more to say about this appealing movie. The central theme deals with the responsibility this girl feels towards her blind grandmother who may be the only member of her family. Sili speaks with great tenderness about her, introducing her as a close person and teacher. It was her blind grandmother who has taught Sili to tell stories and sing. So, Sili being a child on crutches goes to the city of Dakar to earn some money to provide for her family.

There is another teenager who acts as a responsible character; he stands up for Sili in dangerous situations, as she is confronted and terrorized by the newspaper boys. His loyalty and audacity wins Sili's trust, and she is willing to make friends with him.

Sili's determination to make money and courage are worth admiration. When she comes to ask for a job as a newspaper seller she is met with suspicion because she is a girl. But she pronounces the key phrase of the film: "What boys do girls can do too!" And she gets the job. When she finally manages to earn money like any child she happily celebrates her success with her friends.

Throughout the movie we observe Sili's firm desire to be useful and helpful to her grandmother. The girl does not stop selling newspapers even when there are life-threatening circumstances. Her honesty, compassion, and fearless attitude also help another street woman wrongly accused of a theft. Sili speaks for her and she is let out of the police station.

I view this touching story as a powerful tool to help our elementary students obtain the concept of responsibility. Besides, the film tells about a serious issue - challenges street kids experience today in some countries - in a simple manner appropriate for the students' language. It is precise, short, and teachable. It provides a lot of opportunities for discussion. Students may easily sympathize with Sili because of her age and handicap. Needless to say, the film also introduces children to an absolutely different environment where other kids of their age live through poverty and severe hardships. It helps us teach students about the world, and global problems we have in the world today.

Children of Heaven

Country Information

Iran, a Middle Eastern country south of the Caspian Sea and north of the Persian Gulf, is three times the size of Arizona. It shares borders with Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Physiographically, Iran lies within the Alpine-Himalayan mountain system and is composed of a vast central plateau rimmed by mountain ranges and limited lowland regions. Iran is subject to numerous and often severe

earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The country is divided into 30 provinces.

Iran's central position has made it a crossroads of migration; the population of 68,017,860 (according to the 2005 estimate) is not homogeneous, although it has a Persian core that includes over half of the people. Azerbaijanis constitute almost a quarter of the population. Other ethnic groups include Gilaki and Mazandarani - 8%, Kurd - 7%, Arab - 3%, Lur - 2%, Baloch - 2%, Turkmen - 2%, other - 1%. Iran has a large rural population, found mainly in agrarian villages.

Iran has a long and rich history. Islam entered the country in the 7th century A.D. and is now the official religion; about 90% of Iranians are Muslims of the Shiite sect. The remainder, mostly Kurds and Arabs, are Sunnis. Other religions - Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i - constitute 2%. The principal language of the country is Persian (Farsi), which is written in Arabic characters. Other languages are Turkic dialects, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, and Arabic. Among the educated classes, English and French are spoken. The literacy rate is 79%, according to the 2003 estimate. Iran has been an Islamic theocracy since the Pahlavi monarchy regime was overthrown on February 11, 1979.

Agriculture contributes just over 20% to the gross national product. The most important crops include wheat, rice, other grains, sugar beets, cotton, fruits, nuts, corn, etc.; livestock is raised. There is a variety of natural resources found in Iran. The petroleum industry is Iran's economic mainstay. Textiles are the second most significant industrial product.

Business operations are traditionally family affairs in Iran; often large government loans for business ventures have been obtained simply because the owners were recognized as members of families with good Islamic and revolutionary credentials (The Islamic Revolution occurred in 1979). Political activities also follow family lines. Successful members are expected to assist less successful ones to get their start. A person without family ties has little status in the society at large.

The head of the household - the father and the husband - expects obedience and respect from others in the family. In return, he is obligated to support them and to satisfy their spiritual, social, and material needs. In practice, he is more a strict disciplinarian. He also may be a focus of love and affection, and family members may feel a strong sense of duty toward him. Thus, in the film *Children of Heaven* and other Iranian films (*The White Balloon*, *The Color of Paradise*) we probably observe a typical poor Iranian family, where the father is the central authoritarian figure who is in charge of the function of his family.

Plot Summary

Children of Heaven (*Bacheha-Ye aseman*) (1997)

Directed by Majid Majidi; Runtime 88 min.; In Persian, with English subtitles

Zahra's shoes are gone; her older brother Ali lost them. They are poor, there are no shoes for Zahra until they come up with an idea: they will share one pair of shoes, Ali's, and keep it a secret from their parents. With difficulties they manage to carry out this plan for some time. When Ali participates in a race, there's a chance for them to obtain new sneakers. Ironically, Ali's victory does not bring the desired result.

Themes

The simple plot does not transmit the sense of an exceedingly tense atmosphere these two children find one day, after the shoes are gone. Their parents are preoccupied with various daily difficulties, such as paying rent or finding a job that brings a little bit more money to buy medicine for the sick mother. So, Ali and Zahra under any conditions cannot reveal the regrettable incident concerning Zahra's shoes. One night, when the whole family is together and the parents are discussing their plans for everyday survival, the viewer becomes a witness of the children's unspoken code of behavior not to impose more problems on their hard-working parents. Zahra agrees to tolerate the lack of shoes and runs as fast as she can every day after school for her brother to be on time for his classes. Their efforts are almost in vain, because Ali keeps coming late at school. One should see with what self-control and restraint he endures requests of the school headmaster about the reasons for his tardiness. Ali simply can't explain the whole situation with the shoes, because if he does the parents would surely be involved and very dissatisfied with this situation. At the age of nine he realizes that as a son he should be a support in the family, and not a source of troubles. Meanwhile he cares about his younger sister silently suffering the loss, and tries to please her with little but sincere signs of attention. This way he demonstrates his gratitude to Zahra for her courageous solidarity.

We also observe how incredibly exhausting it is for a poor Iranian man to provide for his family. Ali's father takes Ali on the search for work gardening in the city. We can't help admiring with what readiness and compassion Ali helps the father in this endeavor. He is eager to be useful to the family, and when the father is riding a bike on the way home, excitedly discussing future purchases, Ali timidly asks only to buy a new pair of shoes for his sister. What a noble heart he has!

Of course, when Ali finds out about the prizes for winning in a town school race, he can't miss the chance. With tears he persuades the physical education teacher to include him in the limited number of participants. He has to win the third place, because that award is what he and Zahra need most of all in their life now – a pair of sneakers. He cannot fail Zahra, because she trusts him unconditionally. The scene of the race is a culminating moment of the film. When it becomes especially unbearable to run, Ali hears the reproaching words of Zahra in his head and forces himself to continue the painful competition. To the enormous joy of his teacher, and to his and Zahra's unspeakable disappointment, Ali wins the first prize. But, unfortunately, the victory does not bring the desired pair of sneakers.

I view this outstanding film as a hymn to the responsibility a nine-year-old child feels towards his family, his sister, and his school. I would be very curious to see the reaction my students will have about the film and the main characters. With all my heart I wish they would observe such role models as Ali more often.

Icarus and Daedalus

(6)

Greek Mythology (7)

Greek mythology comprises the collected legends of Greek gods, goddesses, heroes, and heroines, originally created and spread within an oral tradition. Hundreds of years later, in Classical times, circa 500 b.c.e., those stories were written down. The Greek myths are our window into the distant past, seen not only by the Greek

poets but the past that existed in the hearts and minds of the humble citizens of ancient Greece.

While I am introducing students to Greek mythology, I'll show them the location of modern Greece: it is located in southern Europe; it forms an irregular-shaped peninsula in the Mediterranean with two additional large peninsulas projecting from it: the Chalcidice and the Peloponnese. Mount Olympus, rising to 9, 570 ft (2,909 m), is the highest point in the country. Olympus is the place where the most popular and celebrated mythological characters, the twelve deities that came to be known as the Olympians, lived. They shared a common belief and had a great number of followers. We know about them today, because they didn't forbid or punish the pursuit of knowledge; The Immortals (the other name for the Greek gods) considered beauty, poetry, and creative activities their blessings, which became a vital part of the Greek tradition.

Because ancient Greek stories survived hundreds of years of transformations, they may have different versions. But in all of them the Greek gods, most familiar from ancient Greek religion and Greek art, are depicted as human in appearance. They may have birth myths but they never grow old. They are capable of becoming invisible, able to travel vast distances almost instantly, and able to speak through human beings with or without their knowledge. Each has his or her specific appearance, genealogy, interests, personality, and area of expertise. The Olympian twelve gods are described in epic poems as having appeared in person to the Greeks during the "age of heroes." They taught the long suffering ancestors of the Greeks little miracles, useful skills, and the ways of worshipping the gods. They judged humans' deeds: rewarded virtue and punished vice. They also fathered children by humans: these half-human, half-divine children are collectively known as "the heroes."

Plot Summary

Icarus and Daedalus

This famous Greek myth will acquaint students with the characters Icarus and Daedalus, as well as with king Minos and the history of building the Labyrinth, Daedalus's architectural masterpiece. Notorious Minos made up his mind to keep Daedalus and his son Icarus in his kingdom, Crete, so that the skillful architect could invent more wonderful devices for him. He locked up Daedalus and Icarus in a high tower beside the sea. But the clever inventor sketched out a winglike framework to which he applied birds' feathers. He built a second pair of wings for his son. During their escape, in spite of Daedalus's numerous instructions how to "fly," Icarus became giddy with exhilaration. He probably saw himself being a god. He flew so close to the sun, that the wax that held the wings together melted, and Icarus plunged into the sea.

Themes

This myth has a rather distinct moral: parents bear responsibility for their children in many ways, especially for their children's safety. In their turn, children are to obey their parents, mostly because this obedience guarantees them safety and, ultimately, success. Safe childhood and successful upbringing require a measure of obedience, as Icarus finds out the hard way.

However, the other significant theme here is the importance for a human being to be free. The means of achieving this goal may be fatal, because, according to the myth, Icarus dies. But his glorious flight up to the sun becomes symbolic in the sense that the beauty of the moment should be experienced even if right after that death is inevitable.

Lesson Plan 1

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Content Objectives: Students will be able to review their notes and the three chapters of the story *The Little Prince* ; Students will be able to apply their concepts of responsibility to the text; Students will be able to identify instances of a particular kind of responsibility in the text.

Language Objectives: Students will be able to discuss the instances of responsibility in small groups; Students will be able to describe the examples of different kinds of responsibility; Students will be able to agree/disagree with the examples of responsibility suggested by other students.

Materials Needed: a big chart prepared at the beginning of the work on this unit, which reflects all four stories of the unit and four kinds of responsibility being observed in these stories; students' notes; text of the chapters 5, 8, and 21 of *The Little Prince* .

Sequencing of Activities

Initiation: (3 minutes) In this lesson, we will fill in the appropriate squares pertaining to the story *The Little Prince* . Students have viewed the film and read the assigned three chapters (5, 8, 21) already. Using their notes and the text they will give as many evidences of different kinds of responsibility presented in *The Little Prince* as they can. I intend to divide the class in four equal groups and assign each group to work on one particular kind of responsibility. I will ask students to prepare their notes and texts for chapters 5, 8, and 21. I will explain the objectives of the lesson.

Development: (30 minutes) The group work will take about 10-12 minutes. I will rotate from one group to another assisting with the assignment. Students will write down their examples. Then each group will report back to the class about their findings, providing specific instances of that particular kind of responsibility. The class will agree on those facts and I will record them in the chart (or there may be a proficient recorder among the students). Thus, after all groups have reported, the chart may look like this:

(table available in print form)

Closure: (7 minutes) To wrap up the lesson I will lead students in relating all kinds of responsibility with each other. I will stress that "responsibility" means "the ability to respond" to some events. In all those instances, provided by students, the little prince acted as an active person able to respond to happenings with appropriate actions. Most importantly, he was constantly learning how to become responsible for someone who needed him, his planet, his deeds and words. I will let students share their thoughts about the interconnectedness of those kinds of responsibility and make their own conclusions about the nature of responsibility. May a person responsible for his actions and words be irresponsible in the relationships with others, or be irresponsible for his environment?

Methods of Assessment: I will observe students' discussions in groups and their performance while filling in the chart.

Note: I will conduct similar lessons after students become familiar with the two films and another short story, so in our last week we can compare all instances of responsibility and speculate about its nature.

Lesson Plan 2

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Content Objectives: Students will be able to view the first two scenes of the film *Children of Heaven* ; Students will be able to become familiar with the main characters of the film; Students will be able to apply the predicting strategy to the film *Children of Heaven* .

Language Objectives: Students will be able to describe the main character Ali; Students will be able to compare their predictions with the partner and the actual development of the situation in the movie.

Materials Needed: the film *Children of Heaven* on a DVD; students' notebooks; pencils.

Sequencing of Activities

Initiation: (3 minutes) I will instruct students to pay close attention to the main character, Ali, and take notes while viewing the first two scenes of the film. Later they will need to characterize him with descriptive phrases and specific examples of his behavior.

Development: (30 minutes) 1). In the film *Children of Heaven* the main character Ali lives through painful remorse towards his sister Zahra because he lost her school shoes, and they both have to suffer sharing his pair of sneakers. After students get acquainted with this character in the first two scenes of the film I will pause. I will ask students to describe Ali in their notebooks. 2). Then together we will discuss all the descriptions and identify him as a responsible person. I will keep track of students' descriptions on the board. 3). After that I will ask students to apply the predicting strategy and write down their predictions as to how Ali will act in this particular situation. The CMT type prompt for this assignment would be: "What will Ali probably do next?" 4). I will let them watch the film to the end of the class period.

Closure: (7 minutes) Students will get into pairs to compare their predictions with a partner and compare their own predictions with the development of events in the film. Some students may report to the class about the outcomes of their comparison.

Methods of Assessment: Students will describe the main character, and, basing their descriptions on the first two scenes of the film, will write their predictions of the future actions of the main character.

Lesson Plan 3

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Content Objectives: Students will be able to recall the Greek myth *Icarus and Daedalus* ; Students will be able to interpret the myth following a prompt in a small group.

Language Objectives: Students will be able to perform their interpretation of the myth; Students will be able to give opinions about the performance of their classmates.

Materials Needed: copies of the Greek myth *Icarus and Daedalus* ; paper; pencils.

Sequencing of Activities

Initiation: (3 minutes) I will open the lesson with telling students about the origins of Greek mythology. First, myths were created and spread within the oral-poetic tradition (circa 800 b.c.e.). By the time they were written down (during the Classical times in Greece, circa 500 b.c.e.), they had survived 400 years of changes, interpretations, additions, subtractions to finally become the versions that we know today.

This fact permits us to try interpretation of the myth pointing out new angles of the characters' personalities.

Development: (35 minutes) I plan using this myth as the last story in the unit. By this point in time, students will have experienced several discussions about different kinds of responsibility. Therefore, I will let them experiment with interpretation of responsibility in this myth. I want them to sense their growing ability to see the workings of stories and also responsibility as represented in stories. I will post several questions directing them to interpret the story. This exercise will result in ambiguity. I think they may enjoy the opportunity to retell the story where two or more choices have some good or some bad outcomes (8). For example, why must Icarus listen to his father? Even if he fell into the sea, didn't he prove that the process of flying – when one enjoys the freedom of the flight and is not bound by his own body – is worth trying? If Daedalus knew about the possibility of Icarus's temptation to fly high, why did he choose the dangerous escape by air, and not some underground way, for instance? And why did Daedalus build a temple to the gods after Icarus had died?

I can also scaffold the developing of interpretation for students by providing them with the CMT type questions: "What type of person do you think Icarus was? Use details from the story to support your answer," "Using details from the story, explain why you think the tragedy occurred?" I will ask students to choose one of the routes to change the myth and come up with their own version in groups of three or four. Such arguing and thinking makes for more mature people. After they discuss their new myth, they will perform an impromptu play, telling their version of the myth. This activity of mythmaking has a lot in common with "what if" and "performing a scene" activities described above, therefore I expect students to be confident and build on their acquired knowledge and skills during the work on this unit's last story.

Closure: (2 minutes) Students will exchange their opinions about the plays they performed. We may acknowledge the most interesting performance.

Methods of Assessment: Students will demonstrate an impromptu play as a result of the group work.

Annotated Teacher Bibliography

ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 1997. Standards and goals are illustrated by vignettes for all grade levels.

Fourth Generation CMT Objectives . New Haven Public Schools Reading Department. Draft 1/14/05. The objectives are accompanied by a few examples of the type of stems created to measure each content standard.

Kilpatrick, William. *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. An important book that alarms about the moral upbringing of youngsters.

Kilpatrick, William, Wolfe, Gregory and Wolfe, Suzanne M. *Books That Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories*. New York: Touchstone, 1994. An excellent resource of character-building books of many genres classified by three levels: younger, middle, and older readers.

Lickona, Thomas. *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgement, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*. New York: Touchstone, 2004. Another solid book by Thomas Lickona on children's ethical and moral education.

Lickona, Thomas. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. Bantam, 1991. Practical guide of classroom strategies for teaching respect and responsibility.

Navarra, Tova. *On My Own: Helping Kids Help Themselves*. Barron's, 1989. How kids can learn to behave responsibly at home and out with their friends.

Shulman, Michael and Mekler, Eva. *Bringing Up a Moral Child: Teaching Your Child to Be Kind, Just, and Responsible*. Doubleday, 1985. This book offers more than just theory: through a problem-solving approach it provides practical tips for dealing with real-life situations involving children at various age levels.

Annotated Student Bibliography

Bennett, William. *The Book of Virtues: a treasury of great moral stories*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. This valuable book contains fables, fairy tales, poetry, songs, speeches, biblical stories, oaths, and much more. It is divided into ten virtues: Self-Discipline, Compassion, Responsibility, Friendship, Work, Courage, Perseverance, Honesty, Loyalty, and Faith. The selections are geared primarily to younger and middle readers.

Saint-Exupery, Antoine, de. *The Little Prince*. (any edition) A famous fable of love and loneliness was first published in 1943. Sixty years later it doesn't lose its power.

Films

The Little Prince (UK)

The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun (Senegal)

Children of Heaven (Iran)

Websites

www.us.imdb.com. Comprehensive Internet Movie Database, where you can find the most vital information about almost all national and foreign films.

<http://geography.about.com>. The Library of Congress, through the Federal Research Division, provides detailed study of the world's countries.

<http://print.infoplease.com>. Detailed reference about all countries of the world.

<http://messenger.com/myths/essays/origins.html>. Stewart, Michael. "Origins of Greek Mythology," *Greek Mythology: From the Iliad to the Fall of the Last Tyrant*. A good site on Greek mythology, it contains essays and a fun fact quiz.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_myth. Free encyclopedia on history and current events. I found loads of information about Greek mythology there.

<http://www.mythweb.com/teachers/tips/tips.html>. Invaluable lesson plans, activities, and ideas that allow students work creatively with Greek myths. The site also has lots of info on Greek mythology.

Appendix

ESL Standards

National ESL standards for Pre-K-12 students present three main goals: 1) to use English to communicate in social settings; 2) to use English to achieve academically in all content areas; 3) to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Each goal has three standards some of which appear to be key standards for my unit:

1.2. Students will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment.

2.2. Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.

3.3. Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

In 2004-2005 school year, Timothy Dwight elementary school joined the cohort of Cornerstone schools in the New Haven district. Cornerstone is a national literacy initiative that promotes best practices and teaches balance literacy. Included in the balance literacy approach is the teaching of comprehension strategies: connecting, picturing, wondering, predicting, noticing, and figuring out. These strategies are integrated

throughout the curriculum. I anticipate that when I begin teaching this unit to my fourth graders next year they will experience no evident difficulties in using these strategies while reading stories about responsibility.

CMT Reading Objectives

I hope my teaching unit would become a sound addition to the core curriculum for the fourth grade. Because the unit incorporates working with stories I also decided to correlate the unit's objectives with the Connecticut Mastery Test's reading objectives (CMT, 4th generation). I would like to capitalize on its four reading comprehension strands/objectives:

- Forming a General Understanding: Understanding the text's general content (A);
- Developing an Interpretation: Interpreting and/or explaining the text (B);
- Making Reader/Text Connections: Connecting or associating the text with life outside the text (C);
- Examining the Content and Structure: Elaborating on the text and making judgments about the text's quality and themes (D).

I anticipate that some of the actual activities may in some way duplicate the questions of the CMT. All four CMT strands have several objectives that are important for this unit. (9)

Notes

1. In particular, I refer to the books by W. Kilpatrick, and G. & S. Wolfe *Books that Build Character*, W. Kilpatrick *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong*, and T. Lickona *Educating for Character*.
2. The connecting comprehension strategy, being promoted by the Reading Department of the New Haven Public Schools, requires students to make three types of connections: 1) text to text – students think of some other story or book that has the same elements as the book they currently read (setting, problem, solution, or other), 2) text to self – students think of some situation in their life that they recall in connection to the book/story they read, 3) text to the world – students connect the book or story to some event in the environment around them – their school, town, or country.
3. These are the words the fox says to the little prince in chapter 21 of the book *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.
4. To create the evaluation rubric I used the website <http://rubistar.4teachers.org>.
5. I used these two websites to provide the information about the countries of France, Senegal, Iran, and Greece: <http://print.infoplease.com>; <http://geography.about.com>.
6. I found this Greek myth in *The Book of Virtues* by W.J. Bennett.
7. Visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_myth; <http://www.mythweb.com/teachers/tips/tips.html> for more information on Greek mythology.
8. The idea to end the unit with an ambiguous story, where morality is not easy to determine, belongs to Dudley Andrew.

9. Please, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education website at <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/curriculum>.

*Along with the films in this unit, I also recommend other foreign films that teach responsibility: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (Iran), *The Color of Paradise* (Iran), *Into the West* (Ireland), *The Secret of Roan Inish* (Ireland), *Not One Less* (China).

* I express my special thanks to the seminar coordinator, Crecia Cipriano Swaim, for her support and help during the work on this unit.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>