



Criminal Motivations

Irony and Characterization in "The Cask of Amontillado"



Brandy Hackett

Published by K20 Center

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Grade Level	9th Grade	Time Frame	150 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	Duration	2-3 class periods

Essential Question

How do a character's motivations affect their actions?

Summary

This lesson asks students to analyze the motivations of Montresor in Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" and engages students by placing them in the role of a forensic psychologist. In this role, having students will answer questions in a clinical evaluation. Students will analyze the use of irony in the text to decide if Montresor's motivations make him clinically insane and/or liable for his crime(s). The lesson concludes with students taking the stand as an expert witness for the case, using irony and text evidence as support. This lesson includes optional distance learning modifications. Resources for use in Google Classroom are included.

Snapshot

Engage

Students watch a video about what motivates others and then write about their own motivations to succeed.

Explore

Students work in small groups to create posters representing the different types of irony for a gallery walk.

Explain

Students read the story "The Cask of Amontillado" to Why-Light the text for irony.

Extend

Students watch a video and read a text to understand the role of a forensic psychologist. Students participate in a Hot Seat activity by role playing the parts of a forensic psychologist and the character Montresor.

Evaluate

Students role play the part of a forensic psychologist and create a clinical evaluation of the character Montresor.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.3.R.3: Evaluate how literary elements impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence:

- setting
- plot structure (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, *in media res*)
- conflict (i.e., internal, external)
- characters (e.g., protagonist, antagonist)
- characterization (i.e., direct, indirect)
- point of view (e.g., narrator reliability)
- archetypes

9.3.R.4: Evaluate how literary devices impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence:

- figurative language (i.e., simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism)
- sound devices (i.e., onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance)
- irony (i.e., verbal, situational, dramatic)

9.3.R.7: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics, using textual evidence to support their claims and inferences.

Attachments

- [Clinical Evaluation Rubric—Criminal Motivations - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Clinical Evaluation Rubric—Criminal Motivations - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Clinical Evaluation Rubric—Criminal Motivations.docx](#)
- [Clinical Evaluation Rubric—Criminal Motivations.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Criminal Motivations.pptx](#)

Materials

- Student devices with internet access
- Poster paper (one poster per group of 3-4 students)
- Sticky notes
- Highlighters (optional; three different colors per student)
- "The Cask of Amontillado" (linked below on Common Lit website)
- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Clinical Evaluation Rubric (attached, one per student)

Engage

Introduce students to the essential question on **slide 3** and the objectives on **slide 4**.

Go to **slide 5**. Begin by playing the video on the slide ("[What's Stopping You From Achieving Your Goals?](#)") for students. After viewing, ask students to answer the following prompts: *What motivates you to be successful? What keeps you going?* After giving students a few minutes to write down their responses, have students turn to an [Elbow Partner](#) to share. Give another minute or two for students to share before asking for students to share out as a whole class.

Embedded video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZRw91uNMq0>

Go to **slide 6**. Explain to students that a person's motivations, or why they do something, are not always obvious. The same is true in stories. Sometimes, a person's actions seem to oppose their words or their intentions. This is a form of irony.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

For online or distance learning, consider making this a whole-group discussion or dividing students up and putting them into breakout rooms to discuss the topic. You may also consider making this activity a discussion board post to which students can respond directly. Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.

Explore

Review the three types of irony with students on **slide 7**. Invite students to explore irony, intent, and motivation today. Do not yet define the types for students; academic vocabulary will come later in the lesson.

Put students in small groups of 3-4 students, and give each group a type of irony. You might create slips of paper with the descriptions of types of irony printed on them so that each group randomly chooses a type of irony or you may purposely assign the type to each group.

Go to **slide 8**. Have students work in groups to create a poster depicting an everyday situation that represents the type of irony they were assigned. Suggest that students plan out and discuss their poster ideas with their group before they begin. The poster must include a title identifying the irony and an image that reflects the irony in such a way that the definition is clear.

Sample Student Responses

Possible student responses may include the following.

When what is said is opposite of what is meant:

- When I tell my best friend I love her hair, even though I think it looks awful.
- When it's raining outside, but I say the weather is awesome.
- When I didn't study, but I say I'm so ready for the test.

When the audience knows what is happening but the character doesn't:

- When, in a horror film, the victim runs up the stairs directly to the bad guy.
- When everyone else knows a character's girlfriend is cheating on him, but he doesn't.

When what happens isn't what is expected:

- When a fire station burns down.
- When someones on social media about how they hate social media.

Post each group's poster in a different place around the classroom.

Go to **slide 9**. Invite students to take part in a [Gallery Walk](#) of the posters. Introduce the [Spend a Buck](#) strategy to students and ask students to work with their groups to vote on the best posters. Give each group a stack of sticky notes. Groups should decide together how to spend their imaginary 100 pennies (or \$1.00) on the posters hanging around the room and, for each amount spent, include the amount on a sticky note along with an explanation. These sticky notes should be left on the poster on which the money is spent.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

For online or distance learning, you may consider using a shared Google Slides deck with one slide per group. You may also consider having students create digital posters with tech tools such as [Popplet](#), [Piktochart](#), or [Canva](#). For the Spend a Buck activity, consider having students vote using a Google Form or a tech tool such as Mentimeter. Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.

Explain

Go to **slide 10**. Distribute a copy of "The Cask of Amontillado" to each student via link or printed copies:

- [Online reading link](#)
- [Printout for physical reading](#)

Introduce students to the [Categorical Highlighting](#) strategy. Ask students to use this strategy as they read the story to highlight the three types of irony and explain what they believe Montresor's purpose in using irony is. If possible, have students use three different highlighting colors. You can pass out highlighting pens to each student if working with physical copies of the reading, or you can have students use CommonLit's highlighting tool with the online version of the reading.

Go to **slide 11**. After reading the story, discuss the students' annotations, why they chose them, and define the three types of irony with students.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

While CommonLit provides tools for annotations, you might also consider making this activity a discussion board post to which your students can respond directly. Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.

Extend

Go to **slide 12**. Invite students to take their learning further by taking on a new role: that of a forensic psychologist. Ask students to think like a forensic psychologist and determine the motivations of Montresor in the story to evaluate if he is competent to stand trial. First, to help students understand what a forensic psychologist is and what they do, show the video on the slide ("[What is a Forensic Psychologist?](#)").

Embedded video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3-p1QnHrVk>

Teacher's Note: Hot Seat Information

Students may need more information before being asked to engage in the following Hot Seat activity. You may decide to provide students with more context by having students research laws for the defense of criminal insanity in their state ("[The Insanity Defense Among the States](#)") or review the types of questions asked by a forensic psychologist during an evaluation ("[Criminal Responsibility Report Writing Guidelines](#)").

Go to **slide 13**. Ask students to play the role of forensic psychologists. Students must imagine the following scenario: they are asked by the court to interview the defendant, Montresor, before his trial to determine if he is mentally capable of standing trial.

For the [Hot Seat](#) activity, ask for one person play Montresor to answer questions. Montresor will answer based only on text evidence. Before beginning the questioning phase, have the rest of the group should create questions to ask Montresor about the crime he committed and why and then ask the questions.

Teacher's Note: Montresor's Role

You may choose to play Montresor yourself, you may choose a volunteer to play Montresor, or you may conduct this activity in small groups with students taking turns playing Montresor.

Teacher's Note: Questions For Evaluation

You may choose to come up with a few questions together as a whole class, using [Mentimeter](#), Google Docs, or an interactive whiteboard.

Example questions include "How did you feel after committing the crime?" "Do you understand the consequences of putting up the wall?" or "How did you feel about Fortunato before this incident?"

Once you have given students time to come up with questions, begin the activity. Depending on how you choose to arrange the activity, your role may be different. For instance, if you choose to put students in small groups and take turns role-playing Montresor, then your role is to monitor groups around the classroom. If you choose to play Montresor, then your role is to provide students evidence through examples in the text with your responses and to ensure overall class participation.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

Specific questions may be posed through a discussion board for asynchronous discussions for students to reply as if they are Montresor, using specific text evidence as support, or students could choose a set number of the questions to answer on Flip to respond. You may also choose to have students respond to peers' Flip videos. Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.

Evaluate

Go to **slide 14**. After students have interviewed Montresor, ask them to testify as expert witnesses, determining whether Montresor is capable of standing trial. To prepare for this, have students build their own clinical evaluations as detailed on the slide. Pass out a copy of the attached **Clinical Evaluation Rubric**. Introduce students to [Flip](#) (find a tutorial here: [Flip Teacher Guide](#)). Invite each student to create a Flip video to explain their own clinical evaluation of Montresor.

- Students' evaluations should try to answer the following questions:
- Does Montresor understand the crime for which he is accused of committing?
- What is his current mental functioning?
- What is his version of the alleged offense?
- What is your impression regarding Montresor's capacity to understand his actions and his conduct?

Students can use the Clinical Evaluation Rubric to evaluate their videos before submitting them.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Categorical Highlighting. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/192>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow Partners. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/116>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Gallery Walk/Carousel. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/118>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Spend a Buck. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/154>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Popplet. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/663>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Piktochart. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/2394>
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- (2020). Flipgrid Teacher Guide. https://static.flipgrid.com/docs/Teacher_Guide.pdf
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- The University of Texas at Austin. (2020). Hot Seating. <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/hotseating-0>