

Criminal Motivations

Irony and Characterization in "The Cask of Amontillado"

Brandy Hackett
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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. Students will analyze the use of irony in the text to decide if Montresor's motivations make him stable enough to withstand trial. The lesson concludes with students creating a claim and providing reasoning for their conclusions about Montresor.

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" and use Categorical Highlighting to identify examples of irony.

Extend

Students watch a video and read a text to understand the role of a forensic psychologist. Students create interview questions to evaluate Montresor's character.

Evaluate

Students create a CER statement to determine the capability of Montresor and use evidence and examples of irony to support their claim.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

SYN301: Make straightforward comparisons between two passages

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

- CER Organizer—Criminal Motivations - Spanish.docx
- CER Organizer—Criminal Motivations - Spanish.pdf
- CER Organizer—Criminal Motivations.docx
- CER Organizer—Criminal Motivations.pdf
- Evidence Collection—Criminal Motivations - Spanish.docx
- Evidence Collection—Criminal Motivations - Spanish.pdf
- Evidence Collection—Criminal Motivations.docx
- Evidence Collection—Criminal Motivations.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Criminal Motivations.pptx

Materials

- "The Cask of Amontillado" reading (linked: online or printout; one per student)
- Lesson Slides (attached)
- CER Organizer handout (attached; one per student)
- Evidence Collection handout (attached; one per pair)
- Student devices with internet access
- Poster paper (one poster per group of 3–4 students)
- Sticky notes
- Highlighters (three different colors per student)

10 minutes

Engage

Begin by using the attached **Lesson Slides** to review the learning objectives and essential question on **slides 3–4**.

Move to **slide 5** and play the following video:

- *What's Stopping You From Achieving Your Goals?*

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=XZRw91uNMq0

After viewing, display **slide 6**. Ask students to take out a piece of paper and respond to the following prompts:

1. How do you want others to see you?
2. What actions do you take that reflect those characteristics?

Once students have responded to the prompts, have them turn to an Elbow Partner to share. Then, invite students to share out their responses with the whole class.

Explain to students that a person's motivations, or why they do something, are not always obvious. This is also true for characters in stories. Sometimes, a character's actions seem to oppose their words or their intentions. This is considered to be a form of irony.

30 minutes

Explore

Review the definitions of three types of irony with students on **slide 7**. Do not define the types for students yet; academic vocabulary will come later in the lesson.

Put students in small groups of 3–4 students, and give each group a description of irony. Move to **slide 8**. Have students work in groups to create a poster depicting an everyday situation that represents the description they were assigned. Suggest that students plan out and discuss their poster ideas with their group before they begin. The poster must include their assigned description of irony and an image that clearly reflects the description.

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 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 is the opposite of what was expected:

- When a fire station burns down.
- When someone posts 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** and review the Gallery Walk instructional strategy. Ask groups to hang up their posters around the classroom. Pass out stacks of two different colors of sticky notes to each group. Explain to students that they will rotate around the room together, stopping at each poster to discuss any comments and questions they may have for their classmates' poster. Groups should use one color of sticky notes to write down any comments they have and the other color of the sticky notes to write down any questions. Then, have groups place them on or around each poster. Facilitate the gallery walk activity with groups.

Once students have rotated through and reviewed each poster, ask them to return to their poster and discuss the comments and questions left for their group.

10 minutes

Explain

Distribute a copy of "The Cask of Amontillado" to each student via link or printed copies:

- Online reading
- Printout of reading

Display **slide 10** and review the descriptions of irony explaining what each type is called.

Move to **slide 11** and review the three different types of irony that students will focus on.

Display **slide 12** and review the Categorical Highlighting instructional strategy with students. Pass out three different colored highlighters to each student and ask them 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.

At this time, have students ready the story and complete the activity.

Teacher's Note: Highlighting

If you are using physical copies of the reading, you can pass out highlighters to each student. For the online version of the reading, you can have students use CommonLit's highlighting tool.

After reading the story, review the students' annotations, and why they chose them, as examples of the three types of irony discussed.

25 minutes

Extend

Teacher's Note: Critique the Bot Preparation

Review and use a modified version of the Critique the Bot instructional strategy. Choose an AI source you want to use for this activity.

Prompting the Chat Bot: Copy and paste everything below starting with "System Prompt" into a generative AI program to have it function as a chatbot of Montresor that students can question. Adjust any details as you see fit but try to keep most of it intact to assure proper functioning.

System Prompt: You are Montresor, the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*. You are role-playing as Montresor in a conversation with 9th grade students in the United States.

Persona & Voice:

- Speak in a sly, ironic, and slightly sinister tone, as Montresor would.
- Use a hybrid style: formal touches of 19th-century speech mixed with accessible language so that 9th grade students can understand you.
- Stay completely in character as Montresor at all times. Do not break character.

Content Boundaries:

- You may reveal details of the story, including the ending, if students ask.
- You must never describe violence graphically or in gory detail. Instead, speak indirectly about revenge, insult, pride, or justice.
- All responses must remain school-appropriate for 9th grade students.

Interaction Rules:

- Only respond as Montresor when students ask you questions or speak to you.
- Do not step out of character or provide literary analysis unless the student specifically asks Montresor to reflect on his story.
- Do not ask students questions unless they explicitly request you to.
- Keep answers engaging but not overly long (3–6 sentences is a good guideline).

Examples of Tone:

- *"Ah, my friend, an insult can wound deeper than any blade. To endure it without redress would be a failure of honor. And honor, you see, is a matter upon which I do not compromise."*
- *"We drank, we laughed, we descended further into the damp earth. Fortunato thought himself on a quest for Amontillado. I knew better."*

Invite students to take their learning further by taking on a new role as a forensic psychologist. Explain to students that they will 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, display **slide 13** and play the following video:

- *What is a Forensic Psychologist?*

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=H3-p1QnHrVk

Move to **slide 14** and place students into pairs. Pass out the attached **Evidence Collection** handout to each pair. Ask student pairs to create 2–3 questions they want to ask Montresor and write them down in the space provided on their handout. Tell students to keep in mind that their goal is to gain enough knowledge to determine if Montresor is capable of standing trial.

While student pairs work together to create their questions, make sure the chat bot is set up and prompted. Display the conversation with the bot on the board or screen so that students can view the answers as questions are asked.

Teacher's Note: Questions for Evaluation

Consider providing example questions for students such as the following:

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

Once students have created their questions, go through each pair and allow them to ask their question. Feed the chat bot each question and allow students time to take notes about Montresor's response.

Teacher's Note: Your Role

Have the chatbot set up ahead of time and cast it to your screen for students to see. As each pair asks their questions, feed the chatbot each question. Encourage students to take notes over the questions and responses to gather evidence to review and make their decision.

20 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 14** and review the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) instructional strategy with students. Pass out the attached **CER Organizer** handout to each student and explain that they will be making a claim about Montresor's capability to testify. They will use text evidence and evidence based on the interview with Montresor to support their claim and then provide a rationale and connection of their thoughts.

Review the CER Organizer handout with students and then allow them time to complete it.

Teacher's Note: Creating a CER Statement

When reviewing the CER Organizer handout, consider providing guiding questions for each step. For example, when reviewing the "claim" step, consider posing the following question:

- Do you think Montresor is capable of withstanding trial or not?

This reflective question can help students more clearly respond to each prompt.

Additionally, remind students to rely on the examples of irony in the text to support their claim. Make sure to lead them back to focusing on how irony impacts character analysis.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Categorical highlighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/192
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Claim, evidence, reasoning (CER). Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/156
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Critique the bot. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/3491
- 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
- Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2019). 9-3-R-4. http://elaokframework.pbworks.com/w/page/120909798/9-3-R-4
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- Portland Community College (2014, March 27). What is a forensic psychologist? [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3-p1QnHrVk
- SoulPancake. (2015, March 5). What's stopping you from achieving your goals? [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZRw91uNMq0