

# Semester 2 Unit: Ethics in Literature

Content Area: **Language Arts**  
Course(s): **English 4A**  
Time Period: **Semester 2**  
Length: **4 - 6 weeks**  
Status: **Published**

## **Enduring Understandings**

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Literature raises important ethical questions that apply to our own decision-making.

Thought experiments are useful tools for unpacking the way we make choices of an ethical or moral nature.

Decisions of an ethical nature made by both individuals and groups often create a “ripple effect”, having larger repercussions on the community.

## **Essential Questions**

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How do we determine what is right / wrong?

How do individual decisions affect the larger community, and how do community decisions affect individuals?

How can the ethical dilemmas literary characters face help us reflect on dilemmas in our own lives?

## **Knowledge and Skills**

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Students will engage in discussion of thought experiments / classical ethical dilemmas.

Students will summarize, build on, and critique the work of moral philosophers.

Students will use the work of moral philosophers to analyze the decisions of literary characters and real people (including themselves) from an ethical standpoint.

Students will develop exhibitions (presentations, digital work, etc) to demonstrate their new understandings.

### **Assessment**

Students will work toward a final project in which they work in pairs or small groups to create a podcast exploring an ethical dilemma presented in literature through multiple philosophical / ethical “lenses” provided by the nonfiction texts we will have read alongside literature throughout the course.

### **Additional Resources**

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#### **Full Length Literary Texts**

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Albert Camus, *The Stranger*

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

#### **Short Stories / Poetry**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Apollo”

Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery”

Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”

Maggie Smith, “Good Bones”

#### **Essays / Nonfiction**

Radiolab, “How Do You Solve A Problem Like Fritz Haber?” (podcast)

Steven Pinker, "The Moral Instinct" (essay/article)

Peter Singer, *Ethics in the Real World* (essay collection)

Stephanie Ericsson, "The Ways We Lie" (in *Patterns for College Writing*)

Toni Morrison, "Goodness: Altruism and the Literary Imagination" (in *Patterns for College Writing*)

## **Transfer Goals**

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Students will be able to read and comprehend complex philosophical and literary texts.

Students will be able to use philosophical texts to prompt reflection on decision-making in literature and their own lives.

Students will be able to write and record a podcast.