

Power of Myth

Lesson 4: Mythic Dualities: Good and Evil

10.10.2021

Objectives: Exploring mythic dualities of good and evil.

Materials: Flyswatters and words, laptop, lesson attachment.

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- No “Graffiti Wall” wall today. Start Silly Fun right away by placing the words on the floor and having youth duel. As more youth come into class, they can join the circle.
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Swat-Off Opposites (5 minutes)

Youth gather in circle on the floor. Spread words (attached) around the floor in the center of the circle. Give two youth sitting opposite each other flyswatters. Say the OPPOSITE of one of the words below (in parentheses). The first youth to swat the opposite word gets to keep his or her flyswatter for another turn. The slower of the youth passes their flyswatter to the person on the left. Keep reading and swatting, passing the flyswatter around and dueling different youth.

Swat-off words: (teacher reads the word in parentheses; repeating is fine)

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|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| • Clean (Dirty) | • Old (Young) | • Sick (Healthy) |
| • Cold (Hot) | • Slow (Fast) | • Safe (Dangerous) |
| • Easy (Difficult) | • Small (Large) | • Wise (Foolish) |
| • Wealthy (Poor) | • True (False) | |
| • Death (Life) | • Tall (Short) | |
| • High (Low) | • Narrow (Wide) | |
| • Weak (Strong) | • Kind (Mean) | |
| • Light (Dark) | • Male (Female) | |
| • Loud (Quiet) | • Start (Finish) | |

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads: (from Elie Wiesel, Romanian Holocaust survivor, author, and Nobel Peace Laureate)

“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference.”

4. **Mythic Dualities in Films** (15 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: Dualities are pairs of opposites, and they often appear in myths as symbols. The stark contrast makes it easier to notice differences: between good and evil *characters*, between making a good or bad *decision*, between the extremes of the human experience that myths are so good at revealing. Sometimes, such duality is expressed by color, or music, or the changes in setting (e.g. the myth moves from a lush jungle forest into a barren desert or a sterile fortress). Sometimes, such duality appears in character portrayals: the tall, strong hero standing over the shorter, weaker sidekick (e.g. Batman and Robin). Sometimes, the duality is expressed in a challenging task that demands the hero become the opposite of what they are (e.g. king disguised as pauper, woman concealed as man, living hero who ventures into the land of the dead.)

Such dualities signal that we are likely listening to a myth, with **archetypal** categories (or fundamental human categories that seem to transcend geographical, historical, or cultural differences); categories that help us better see the human experience.

- Watch scene from “The Rise of Skywalker,” stop after Rey’s necklace is taken: <https://www.disneyplus.com/video/79938276-b6d2-41e2-938d-5dc5decd4d53>
(13:50-24:50, 11 minutes)
- Invite youth to share some mythic dualities they noticed (e.g. dualities in characters, settings, plot elements).

5. **Other Types of Heroes** (5 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: Many main heroes fit into character types like the “loner” or “flawed” heroes who, alone, have to overcome an opposite, antagonistic character or force. But often there are also “minor” heroes who accompany the main hero on the adventure. These accompanying heroes usually complement the main hero by having opposite traits or skills that the main hero lacks and benefits from.

Let’s consider a few common accompanying hero tropes:

- **The Reluctant Hero** who gets “roped into” the cause and is clearly not as committed as the main hero. Usually, this person gets tricked into helping, or helps because they want part of a reward or they are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. This character, however, often ends up helping to save the day.
- **The Romantic Hero** is out of place in their world and rejected by society, and so the “wilderness” or difficult place they have to journey through is usually everyday life.
- **Tragic Heroes** are doomed from the beginning, taken down by their own personal flaw or blindspot, no matter who tries to help them.

6. Questions for Discussion (15 minutes)

- From the clip we watched, does Finn and/or Poe fit one of these three character tropes? In Star Wars or in other myths, who might qualify as one of these three types? Han Solo? Hermione Granger? Princess Shuri (Black Panther’s engineer sister)? Samwise Ganges? Others?
- Most stories primarily follow a main hero, but well-written accompanying heroes have full, exciting lives of their own. Which accompanying heroes do you wish you knew more about? Which accompanying heroes do you relate to? Why?
- If our heroes do have a flaw, what is it? What’s something about them that constantly gets them into the trouble and shapes their adventures?
 - What is Rey’s flaw? Harry Potter’s flaw? Black Panther’s flaw? Others?
 - Are there similarities in these hero’s flaws?

(Hint: In the clip we watched, Ray choosing to go alone and, at first, rejecting help from Finn and Poe is comparable to Harry rejecting help throughout the Harry Potter series and Ron and Hermione insisting they go together).
- Invite youth to take a moment to think about a real hero in their lives.
 - What makes that person your hero? What part of your hero’s story first grabbed your attention? Do they have a flaw? What opposite or different traits and skills do you have that compliment your hero?

7. Mythic Dualities Inventory (10 minutes)

Group youth into triads. Prompt each group to choose a film or series like *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, or *Lord of the Rings*. Their task is to complete an inventory of dualities (attachment) in three minutes (teachers time). Youth should think of the setting, characters, plot, and more when looking for pairs of opposites. All dualities that are specific (e.g. one is short and another tall, one an old man and the other a young boy) counts!

- *Important to note:* mythic dualities are *not just any* random opposites we see, but function as an **important** element in the myth.
- Invite groups to share how many mythic dualities they found in their film.

Questions for Discussion:

- We began considering opposing dualities, and then discussed minor or accompanying heroes who help the hero and make the stories more complex. What do accompanying heroes teach us about dualities? About our notion of heroes?
- Would it affect the story if C-3PO and R2-D2 were the same? Both on wheels? Both able to talk?
- Would it affect the story if Hermione Granger's character was a man? If Ron Weasley's family was wealthy?
- How do our heroes and their relationships with each other challenge and transcend (move beyond) opposite and binary categories?

8. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets