

From Theoretical to Applied: Ethics & Literature

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been discussing a variety of moral and ethical theories. This assignment will give you an opportunity to apply what you have learned to a work of literature or film that is especially meaningful to you.

You will analyze the character's ethical dilemma through various theories:

- Utilitarianism: Bentham, Mill
- Deontology: Kant
- Virtue: Aristotle

and more overarching ethical application:

- *Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong*
- You.

You will present this analysis in both essay and “presentation” form. Both formats will follow this structure:



Step One:

Choose a character from literature or film who has faced at least one important decision, likely a big decision, not something like...which sandwich to eat. (If you're die-hard about choosing a historical/famous figure approach, I won't say no, but let's chat about it first; politics can get messy.) Complete brainstorming sheet.

Step Two:

Offer a brief summary of the book/film, the character, their background, and the ethical decision in front of them. This section should be short, but keep in mind your reader may not be familiar with your character. If this is longer than two short paragraphs, it's too much.

Step Three:

Decide which ethical/moral theory your character demonstrates (choose from utilitarian, deontological, and virtue) and then proceed to prove it. In doing so, you may need to reference later moments in the text/film, which is just fine. You will absolutely use evidence, in the form of direct quotations and paraphrasing, from our reading to prove this decision. This analysis will be the most substantial part of your essay/presentation. You should also explore whether you think this was the best decision for your character; i.e., did they make the right or the wrong choice?

Step Four:

Move on to “what-ifs”. Speculate what would have occurred if your character had approached their decision from the two other theories. Offer evidence from the reading and from the text/film to support that conclusion. (This section will be a bit shorter. 😊)

Step Five:

Move on to overarching and personal reflection. Looking back to *Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong*, decide what the *top three* principles were for your character's choice and explain how you know. Finally, tell us what you think. Is it what you would've done? Why or why not?

The products:

- The essay should be at least three pages long, double-spaced, MLA all that jazz.
 - Include an intro, transitions, conclusion. You may divide into section breaks with headers, if necessary, but don't "number" the answers. This one is more formal than the others; I'm expecting polished, engaging, analytical, and **honors-level** writing. You're seniors so you know what this means.
 - You do not need to use citations, since I gave you the sources and I know what's up; however, if you use outside sources other than your text (which I do not recommend), you must cite it.
- The visual—PowerPoint, Google Slides, video, Prezi, whatever floats your boat should be a very simplified version of the essay with the expectation that you will share it with the class. Your visual does not need direct quotes, and there should not be more than 15 words per slide. It should look pretty, polished, and purposeful. When you present, you will, of course, do much more than read off the slides. Practice basic speech protocol.
 - In the earlier slides, as you give us the background of your character, use an **excerpt from the book or a clip of the movie**. Reminder: don't summarize for *too* long—boring!—but do keep in mind your classmates may not be familiar with your character.

*remember when I told you taking notes on the worksheets was worth it to simplify?
Hope you did that, because it's go-time! 😊

*Rubric to follow at a later date.

*See brainstorming sheet on next page.

3. Complete the chart below. When finished, star the theory that best aligns with what your character *chose* to do.

Your character's quandary: _____

| theory | Utilitarian (Bentham/Mill) | Deontological (Kant) | Virtue Ethics (Aristotle) |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| what this theory would've suggested your character do. | | | |

4. Compare your character's choice to those suggested by Andrea with her principles in *Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong*.

5. What do you think? Was it the right choice? Would you have done the same?