**Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” – Understanding Themes Through Song**

**The Basics**

**SUBJECT**

Pre-AP World Lit.

**TARGETED GRADE LEVEL**

10th Grade

**STANDARDS**

Texas LA standards: The student will be able to identify use and purpose of rhetorical strategies AND the student will draw conclusions and make predictions based on contextual clues.

**The Lesson**

**INTRODUCTION**

Students often have a difficult time following Plato’s “Allegory,” partly because the nature of an allegory is outside their experience and partly because the situation described is difficult to picture and follow. This lesson is designed as an introduction to the philosophy and themes behind the Allegory, to help students have a foundation for the issues.

The songs included in this lesson have been chosen to give a broad range of genres, and each deals with a different key element of the Allegory. In this way students can have both the familiar and the novel to challenge their thinking and provide context

**OBJECTIVES**

After completing this lesson students will be able to:

* Relate representational devices with relevant life experience. They will draw conclusions about the instruments, recording space, occasion and perspective based on what they hear.
* Identify and synthesize visual, lyrical and aural themes and how they contribute to meaning within a fixed piece or music, between two disparate pieces of music, and in real-world connections.
* Identify themes that will transition into “Allegory of a Cave” such as how perception affects knowledge, why knowledge is important and what types of ignorance exist in the world (and have existed, throughout time), and what risks (if any) are involved in overcoming ignorance.

**RESOURCES/MATERIALS**

**“Amazing Grace”**

The traditional nature of this song means that many students will already be familiar with it. I have used some of the background and strategies from the VAT, as well as some questions tying the lyrics to themes related to the Allegory, so that the students can look at something recognizable in a new way.

**Paramore “Ignorance”** (*Brand New Eyes*. Paramore. 29 Sept. 2009.)

Lyrics available at [www.paramore.net/music](http://www.paramore.net/music) and <http://www.metrolyrics.com/ignorance-lyrics-paramore.html>

Video available at [www.paramore.net/music](http://www.paramore.net/music) and at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OH9A6tn_P6g>

Many students may already be familiar with Paramore’s driving pop beat, if not this specific song. Dominant guitar and drum will help students connect with the “active” nature of change and the tone of the melody and singer’s voice should reinforce the “moving on” message of the lyrics. The lyrics further connect to the Allegory through the sarcasm of “Ignorance is good” and the idea that growing as a person sometimes means leaving people or ideas behind. Showing the video will add a visual element that shows some interesting parallels between the single lightbulb and how it hides/reveals different aspects of the band, just as the firelight in the Allegory shows only part of a whole.

**“Oliveros Gamper Duet.”** *Tosca Salad*. Deep Listening Band. 1995.

Free mp3 download available at <http://searchmp3.mobi/oliveros-gamper-duet-mp3-deep-listening-band>

Also available for purchase at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B000QOX3SQ> or iTunes.

This piece was recorded in the Dan Harpole Cistern in Pt. Townsend, WA. The cistern “once held two million gallons of water but is now empty, and is distinguished by a 45 second reverberation decay.” (“Ambient Reverb, no electronics required.” Valhalladsp.wordpress.com) The piece uses a variety of instruments and sounds that are distorted by the space, which affects the perception of the music.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/VOCABULARY**

1. In what ways is ignorance the result of choice? Or circumstance?
2. What are the advantages of enlightenment or education?
3. Should we take advantage of any opportunity for enlightenment or education? What are some risks involved with taking that step? Is it ever not worth it?

**PROCEDURES**

*Introduce the unit by explaining to students that “Allegory of the Cave” presents some ideas they may have already thought about as a symbolic story. In order to help them better understand the Allegory, the class will be looking at something they are familiar with – music – to introduce the overarching ideas and themes. Some of this music they may already be familiar with, and some might not be what they choose to listen to personally, but they should keep an open mind to see what connections they can make to what they already know.*

**DAY ONE**

1. Bell-ringer journal “Why do people engage in behavior they know is wrong?”

Students will have five minutes to write their thoughts on this topic, and then will share their ideas with the class, including specific examples of behavior.

1. Using the behavior discussed in the bellringer, students will use their technology – probably a whiteboard/notepad app – to show on a scale of 1-10 how guilty people would/should feel (they could also just chart this on a line on the board). For two or three controversial behaviors, have students pair up with someone who is at the opposite end of the spectrum. They should present their point of view and listen to why their partner disagrees. Is this based on religion? Personal experience? Media portrayal? What has influenced their different viewpoints?
2. Explain to students the background of the lyrics to “Amazing Grace,” namely: that John Newton was a slave trader, even after he converted to Christianity. After he realized that what he was doing was immoral, he testified before Parliament against the slave trade and contributed to the 1807-08 acts making the transport of slaves in British territories illegal.
3. Pass out lyrics and the graphic organizer, “Plotting the Story” and ask students to sing together verses 1, 2 and 5. (Alternatively, instructor may use suggested recording and focus on those verses.) After the class has sung/listened to the song together, ask them to fill in the graphic organizer using information from those three verses.
4. Discuss as a class how the message of the song builds, from wretchedness to redemption to rejoicing. Students should understand what causes these changes.
5. Play Paramore’s “Ignorance,” first without lyrics. Ask students to write down key words or phrases that stand out to them. As a pair/share or four-share activity, they should discuss these questions: Why were those words/phrases memorable? What themes develop as a result of those words? Then have one person from each group write ONE word/phrase on the board (or appropriate, available technology).
6. Pass out lyrics. Have students annotate words they chose as significant. Then play the song again, asking them to take note of what is happening musically during those key points. How does this affect the meaning of the words? Discuss as a class.
7. Show students the video (YouTube). How do the images from the video relate to the lyrics? Does the video illustrate a theme/themes of the song, or is it random? What is the significance of the single light bulb in relation to the lyrics? The music?
8. In groups of four, have students choose three other images that would work well with the word(s) that they wrote on the board. Have one person from each group add those images to the word they put on the board (or find apt examples of the images on their technology).
9. Discuss as a class how the words, music and images all come together to form themes. What are the key themes in this song? How are those themes similar to “Amazing Grace”? How are they different?
10. Give students the comparison/contrast graphic organizer to complete as homework, focusing on all the elements listed in the check boxes for both songs.

**DAY TWO**

1. Have students trade papers with someone on the opposite side of the room. Each student will then share a similarity/difference from their classmates’ paper that was something they themselves did not notice or think about. These papers will be collected for assessment.
2. As a class, briefly discuss the nature of caves – how were they formed? Where are they found? What limitations do caves put on our senses?
3. Ask students to listen to the Deep Listening Group piece with their eyes closed. Ask them to imagine they are in a cave, and they should focus on what they are hearing. What is making these noises? Where is the source of the sound in relation to them (the listener)? How does it make them feel? After listening and discussing these questions, have students take notes during a second listening.
4. While playing the piece a second time, students should make note of what instruments or sounds they hear. How do these work together to create the mood? Does the piece seem practiced and fixed, or improvised, and what makes them think so? What do they think the purpose of the piece is? How would the listening experience be different if they heard this piece in a concert hall? On the radio?
5. After the students have had time to complete their notes, explain to them that this recording was made in a huge underground cistern, which has a forty five second reverberation. These acoustics are what changes the tones of the instruments. They are similar to those found in caves. Caves can affect our senses differently – this is just one example of that.
6. Culminating question after they have had time to complete the notes: How does the space in which it was recorded affect both the source of the music and the listener?

**CLOSURE**

After completing this series of activities, students may choose their own song. This should be a song that made them realize something new or gave them an “AHA!” moment. They should then complete a dialectical journal with specific quotes/musical examples from the piece supporting what their revelation was. They should also include thoughts on whether their change in point of view lasted, or if they reverted to their original way of thinking.

**EVALUATION**

Students are evaluated both formally and informally throughout the lesson, by discussion, note taking and journaling.

**REFLECTION**

The purpose of this material is to help students understand the philosophy behind the “Allegory.” Hopefully through these three pieces students will see that darkness, real or metaphorical, can affect perceptions and limit knowledge.