

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Inherit the Wind

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Notes

No less thought-provoking today than in 1955, *Inherit the Wind* will lead to energetic classroom discussion about freedom, separation of church and state, court bias, and literature.

Inspired by the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, in which Clarence Darrow argued for the defense and William Jennings Bryan for the prosecution, *Inherit the Wind* makes an ideal complement to lessons on persuasive writing, as both Brady's and Drummond's arguments contain elements of cool logic and fiery emotion. Cynical reporter H.L. Mencken provided the basis for E.K. Hornbeck's character, at times lending the play a poetic structure.

Some educators enjoy supplementing a reading of the text with a screening of the film version of the play (also available from Prestwick House), which stars Spencer Tracy and Gene Kelly.

All references come from the Ballantine Books edition of *Inherit the Wind*, copyright 1955.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify the protagonist in the play.
2. state the significance and origin of the play's title, relating it to specific events in the play and discussing its function in one of the play's key themes.
3. discuss the importance of an impartial judge, name at least four instances of prejudice in the trial, and discuss how they could be remedied.
4. explain the difference between a logical argument and an emotional argument, giving examples of both in the play.
5. discuss the political significance of the Scopes trial as a landmark in the separation of church and state debate, and identify at least three relevant current political issues.
6. identify the differences between flat and round characters and cite examples of each type.
7. offer an opinion, backed up with examples from *Inherit the Wind*, on whether one's conscience or one's duty should win out if the two conflict.
8. define the types of irony and identify two examples in the play.
9. identify both positive and negative traits in Brady and Drummond.
10. identify allusions in the play.
11. identify examples of simile and metaphor in the play.
12. identify foreshadowing in the play.
13. discuss the purpose of stage directions.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In Act One, Rachel says that a schoolteacher, as a public servant, should do what the law and the school board want him to do. Explain why you agree or disagree. Are there any circumstances, in your opinion, in which one's conscience should overrule one's duty?
2. At some points in Act Two—for example, when he calls Brady “Almighty” and bows to the crowd—Drummond seems to become more interested in humiliating Brady than in calmly making his point. Does this weaken your opinion of Drummond? Why do you think he does it?
3. In what way does Hornbeck's speech style differ from that of the other characters?
4. Why do you think the authors divide Hornbeck's speeches into short lines, rather than printing them in paragraphs as they do for the other characters?
5. Although he condemns it, Brady proudly admits that he has not and does not ever intend to read Darwin's book. Explain Brady's reasoning. What is your opinion of the way he believes?
6. At the end of the play, Drummond says that Brady has much “greatness” in him. What, in your opinion are Brady's strengths and positive characteristics?
7. What negative traits does Drummond have? Which characters in the play exhibit both positive and negative qualities? How do such characters add depth to the drama?
8. What does it mean to “inherit the wind”? Hornbeck suggests that the quotation would be a good obituary for Brady. How does Brady “disturb his own house”?
9. Consider the use of humor in the play. Find at least two instances in which a character uses humor cruelly, at the expense of another character.
10. Why does Hornbeck call Drummond a hypocrite at the end of the play? Do you agree with Hornbeck's assessment? Support your opinion with details from the play.
11. Bert's case is about the separation of church and state, an issue still hotly debated in politics today. The central question in *Inherit the Wind* is whether the church has the right to determine what is taught in public schools. Name at least three current issues that show that full separation of church and state has not yet taken place.
12. When we read a play, stage directions tell us more than simply which way the characters move, when they enter and exit, and what tones of voice they use. List three other types of information learned solely from the stage directions in *Inherit the Wind*.

Inherit the Wind

Act One, Scene I

VOCABULARY

agnostic—one who neither denies nor admits the existence of God
benign—gracious; harmless
blithely—casually
caricatured—depicted in an exaggerated way, usually as a means of mocking the subject
contempt—disrespect
cooler—slang for “jail”
dogma—a point of view or belief put forth without sufficient proof
extradite—to surrender a criminal to the authorities where the crime occurred
flivver—a small, cheap automobile
galluses—suspenders
heretic—one who disagrees with established church beliefs
hinterland—a remote region
hurdy-gurdy—a stringed instrument operated with a crank
impassively—emotionlessly
indict—to charge someone with a crime
infidel—a non-believer
levity—lightheartedness
monkeyshines—pranks
pariah—an outcast
privy—an outhouse
repast—a meal
rube—an unsophisticated person
unctuously—smugly insincere
vagrant—a bum
venireman—a member of a group from which jurors are drawn

1. What is the setting of the play?

2. What types of information do the stage directions provide for the reader?

Act Three

VOCABULARY

askance—with distrust or disapproval; sideways
brandishes—waves in a threatening manner
bulwark—a protection
crescendos—becomes louder
deference—respect; courtesy
Excalibur—the sword of King Arthur
exultant—filled with joy
grudgingly—unwillingly
hullabaloo—an uproar; confusion
indignant—angry
innocuously—harmlessly, without making much impression
insinuate—to imply
mélange—a mixture
nettled—annoyed
ponderously—clumsily
precedent—something that serves as a model
rotogravures—photographic sections of old-time newspapers
sine die—without any future date being designated; indefinitely
sotto voce—under one's breath

1. List at least three examples of a simile in Act Three.

2. The word “Moorish” refers to the Arab conquerors of Spain. Why does Hornbeck use the word “Moorish” to describe the courthouse?

3. Drummond refers to the implications of the trial by saying, “When they started this fire here, they never figured it would light up the whole sky.” What literary term does he use?
