

Chapter 2: Learning Moral Lessons from Stories

True/False Questions

1. The moral of “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” is that you should never lie, because sooner or later people aren’t going to believe you anymore, even when you tell the truth. (T)
2. The criminal justice system has recently begun to experiment with sentencing convicted offenders to reading books and watching films in order to teach them moral responsibility. (T)
3. There is a difference between stories that moralize and stories that discuss moral problems. (T)
4. A didactic story is a story that teaches a lesson. (T)
5. There is a sharp distinction between factual and fictional stories. (F)
6. Even stories that are believed to be factual have an element of poetic creativity. (T)
7. Traditional myths have two purposes: To strengthen social bonding and to serve as wish fulfillment. (F)
8. Fairy tales are, to some psychoanalysts, pure wish fulfillment. (T)
9. “Reality TV” represents a decline in reliance on narrative and plot to keep audience interest. (T)
10. The story of the prodigal son belongs to the category of parables. (T)
11. Kierkegaard believed that Abraham’s obedience to God was not an example of ordinary morality, but required a leap of faith. (T)
12. The anthropologist Carol Delaney asks why over the years hasn’t anyone wondered how Sarah felt about Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice her only child? (T)
13. Western (or “cowboy”) movies have changed very little over the last century. (F)
14. Western movies often feature a story of the Individual vs. larger forces. (T)
15. Crime stories generally concern themselves with the battle between good and evil. (T)
16. The science fiction genre sometimes referred to as “cyberpunk” contains visions of a dark and frightening future. (T)
17. We can learn moral lessons from morally good people, but not from morally flawed people. (F)
18. If one is opposed to war, one can find no moral lessons in war stories. (F)
19. The Western *Unforgiven* with Clint Eastwood provides a strong pro-violence statement. (F)
20. The story of the Golem figure teaches a lesson of keeping a moral perspective in our undertakings. (T)
21. The Pygmalion story type is a warning against unscrupulous creativity: You may be creating a monster. (F)
22. In the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, young Werther kills his beloved Lotte because she has broken up with him. (F)

23. Plato claimed that art is harmful because it fans violent emotions. (T)
24. Aristotle's idea of catharsis meant that we should purge all sex and violence from art. (F)
25. Aristotle viewed art as dangerous because it fans violent emotions. (F)
26. Greek drama began as religious festivals for the god Dionysus. (T)
27. As a young adult, Oedipus is told that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. (T)
28. As a young adult, Oedipus was in love with his mother and dreamed of killing his father. (F)
29. Aristotle believed that a good tragedy doesn't have to rely on what we today would call special effects. (T)
30. The FBI profiler John Douglas believes that seeing violence on TV and on film has no cumulative effect on children. (F)
31. Socrates was the student of Plato, who was himself the student of Aristotle. (F)
32. Rosenstand suggests that children need to be taught by their parents to process stories so that they will know the difference between fact and fiction. (T)
33. Rosenstand suggests that stories are to be seen as moral laboratories where we can explore the consequences of actions. (T)
34. Aristotle claims that "Dramatic poetry had a most formidable power of corrupting even men of high character. . . ." (F)
35. Plato warns against the dangers of letting one's emotions run free when watching a tragedy, but he also warns against laughing when watching a comedy. (T)
36. Umberto Eco, in *The Name of the Rose*, creates a pastiche of Aristotle's lost work on comedy. (T)
37. Raymond Chandler's description of the fictional detective suggests that the detective should be a perfect human being. (F)
38. In *Pulp Fiction*, Jules and Vincent have retrieved a briefcase full of jewelry from the gangster Wallace. (F)
39. Werther shoots himself while he is sitting at the piano, playing for his lost love Lotte. (F)
40. Medea kills her own children to get back at her husband Jason for having left her. (T)
41. Mingo might well be compared to Frankenstein. (T)

Multiple-Choice Questions

42. Medical students in many parts of the USA are exposed to stories of fiction in medical school in order to
 - a. learn to diagnose difficult medical problems.
 - b. learn about themselves.

- c. learn about what things are like from the point of view of the patient.
- d. learn about what it will be like to be a doctor.

Answer: C

43. The *immediate* evolutionary benefit of a good story is
- a. social bonding
 - b. relaxation
 - c. immediate moral knowledge
 - d. happiness

Answer: A

44. There are four common viewpoints to the issue of Hollywood and violent films mentioned in the text. Find the one that shouldn't be on the list.
- a. Hollywood should impose strict family values on its productions.
 - b. Hollywood is supplying a valuable social service, because we all need to watch violent films now and again.
 - c. Hollywood should create more films in nonviolent categories, such as family movies.
 - d. Hollywood is just responding to viewer demands.

Answer: B

45. The Trobriand people distinguish between three different kinds of stories. Which one does not belong on the list?
- a. sacred stories about the beginning of the world
 - b. fairy tales told as entertainment
 - c. semihistorical accounts of heroes
 - d. profane stories exaggerating one's personal achievements

Answer: D

46. The moral message of gruesome fairy tales may be the following:
- a. Evil is a continuous presence to which we sooner or later fall victim.
 - b. Only evil people have evil things happen to them.
 - c. Nothing is so bad that something good doesn't result from it.
 - d. Evil can be dealt with if we have fortitude.

Answer: D

47. What is a parable?
- a. the same as a fairy tale
 - b. an allegorical story for adults
 - c. a concept from mathematics, describing a curve
 - d. a story with two parallel endings

Answer: B

48. Why did the father of the prodigal son celebrate his homecoming?
- a. He had been away for thirty years.
 - b. He brought his new wife with him.
 - c. The father had given him up for lost.

d. The father was hoping that the son would help around the farm.

Answer: C

49. There are many ways to use narratives to explore ethics. Chapter 2 mentions several ways. Which one shouldn't be on the list?

- a. Many psychologists are using bibliotherapy to help children cope with difficult experiences.
- b. Many medical students are exposed to literature and film about persons with illnesses in order to have a better understanding of their patients.
- c. Many philosophy students are now reading stories about persons seeking the meaning of life in order to facilitate their own search for meaning.
- d. Some judges are sentencing offenders to reading books and watching films in order to make them understand moral responsibility.

Answer: C

50. Medea kills her two children. Why?

- a. Because she wants to remarry, and the children are in the way.
- b. Because she kills herself afterwards, and she believes a good mother does not leave the world without her children.
- c. There is no reason—it was a terrible mistake for which she is subsequently executed.
- d. Because she wants to get back at her husband Jason for leaving her.

Answer: D

51. Who, in Chapter 2, speaks these words? “And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers...”

- a. Jules, in Pulp Fiction
- b. Vincent, in Pulp Fiction
- c. Medea, in the play Medea
- d. Werther, in The Sorrows of Young Werther

Answer: A

52. On which issue would Plato and Aristotle most likely agree?

- a. art
- b. sex
- c. violence
- d. moderation

Answer: D

53. Which TV show would Plato and Aristotle most disagree about?

- a. The View
- b. Saturday Night Live
- c. The Sopranos
- d. American Idol

Answer: C

54. Based on The Republic excerpt, we can extrapolate that Plato would almost certainly condemn which contemporary phenomenon?

- a. computers
- b. gangsta rap music
- c. fast food
- d. warning labels on video games

Answer: B

55. Chandler's description of the detective hero most embodies which narrative archetype?

- a. the Bargain
- b. the Quest
- c. the Key
- d. the View

Answer: B

Essay/Study Questions

- 56. Relate the Trobriand myth of the grandmother who shed her skin, and analyze its moral message.
- 57. Relate the story of Abraham and Isaac, and analyze its meaning.
- 58. Compare Plato's and Aristotle's views on whether art has a positive or a negative influence, and discuss the topic of violence in films and on television with reference to Plato's and Aristotle's theories.
- 59. Discuss the following statement with examples from film and literature: "Literature can be used to raise one's awareness of potential future moral problems."
- 60. Can you name even more movies which seem to embody the story-archetypes of The Bargain, the Good Twin and the Bad Twin, and the Quest?
- 61. Do you agree with Plato that one ought always to be able to control one's emotions? Why or why not?
- 62. Evaluate the question of good and evil as it is presented in *Pulp Fiction*. What might Plato's reaction to this film be? Aristotle's?
- 63. Name three didactic stories, describe their plots, and explain their moral lessons. Do you agree with these lessons? Why or why not?
- 64. Discuss the phenomenon of Goethe's novel about Werther, a young man who commits suicide because of unrequited love: What were the effects of the publication? Why did this phenomenon happen? Do you think something similar could happen today, due to the inspiration of a film, a novel, or some other medium of fiction? If yes, what should be done to prevent it, if anything? If no, why not?
- 65. Compare and contrast Plato's and Aristotle's views on whether watching a dramatic play, or in today's world, a film, has a positive or a negative influence. Compare their viewpoints to the

current discussion on the subject of violence in films and on television. In your opinion, is one of the two viewpoints more correct than the other? Why or why not?

66. Evaluate Werther's reaction from your own point of view: Is suicide as a result of rejection a realistic scenario? Is it emotionally understandable? Is it morally defensible? Explain your viewpoint.
67. Can we defend Medea's actions in any way? Is Jason free of blame? What do you think Euripides intended as his moral of the story?
68. If so, is Aristotle right that we feel pity and fear because we understand what he is going through—that we might react the same way?