

Advanced Curriculum From Vanderbilt University's Programs for Talented Youth

In the Mind's Eye

Truth Versus Perception

English Lessons for Gifted and Advanced Learners in Years 6–8

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Introduction

In the Mind's Eye: Truth Versus Perception is designed specifically with gifted and high-achieving middle-years and early high school learners in mind. These concept-based lessons are accelerated beyond typical year-level standards and include advanced models and organisers to help students analyse a variety of texts. The unit invites students on a philosophical exploration of the themes of truth and perception. Lessons include a major emphasis on rigorous evidence-based discourse through the study of common themes and content-rich, challenging informational and fictional texts. The unit applies concepts from Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" to guide students in discovering how reality is presented and interpreted in fiction, nonfiction, art and media. Students engage in activities such as Socratic seminars, literary analyses, skits, art projects and creative writing to understand differing perceptions of reality. Lessons include close readings with text-dependent questions, choice-based differentiated products, rubrics, formative assessments and English tasks that require students to analyse texts for rhetorical features, literary elements, and themes through argument, explanatory and prose-constructed writing. The unit features art from M. C. Escher and Vincent Van Gogh, short stories from Guy de Maupassant and Shirley Jackson, longer texts by Daniel Keyes and Ray Bradbury, and informational texts related to sociology, Nazi propaganda and Christopher Columbus. This unit encourages students to translate learning to real-world contexts and problems by exploring themes of disillusionment, social deception and the power of perception.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the Mind's Eye: Truth Versus Perception is one of four units designed specifically for gifted middle-years students (years 6–8) to support the acquisition of textual analysis skills including identifying the relationship between literary elements within a text, evaluating arguments, enhancing thinking and communication skills, and connecting conceptual generalisations from cross-curricular themes through

a variety of media including literary texts, art and primary source documents. The Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM; VanTassel-Baska, 1986) is the conceptual framework used for the unit design. Components of the framework are embedded in each lesson: accelerated content, advanced literacy processes of the discipline (e.g. rhetorical analysis and literary analysis) and conceptual understandings. For example, the accelerated content includes English learning goals that correspond to common curricula. Those selected for each unit are above the year level(s) for which the unit was intended. Each unit also includes process skills and specific models to help students evaluate the development of effective arguments; analyse a variety of texts, art and primary sources; and connect literature to real-world applications (see Appendices A and B for more information on the models). The content of each lesson is connected by an overarching theme and key generalisations that span a variety of disciplines. These concepts vary by unit and include power, truth versus perception, individuality versus conformity, and freedom. Table 1 shows how each unit in this series aligns with the ICM features. The ICM model was selected based on its evidence-supported success in increasing gifted student achievement (see VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2008).

INTENDED YEAR LEVEL(S)

It is well known in gifted education that accelerated content is essential for increasing the academic achievement and social-emotional growth of gifted students (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015; Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004; Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011). This unit is intended for and has been piloted with gifted students in years 6–8. The unit is aligned to example learning goals and general standards primarily focused on years 9–10 with some lower level goals included as needed. The accelerated content is necessary so that gifted students have the opportunity to gain new English content knowledge at a pace and level that is appropriate for their learning needs. Gifted students' readiness and experience levels vary, as do their abilities. Because school contexts and content emphases are different, it is up to each teacher to determine which unit is best suited for his or her particular students and at which year levels. Some gifted students may find this unit engaging as a year six while others may need to wait until years 7 or 8 to fully participate and understand the unit concepts. Teachers of year nine and ten students may find that these units are on target for many of their general education students.

Table 1
The Integrated Curriculum Model Alignment by Unit

Unit	Accelerated Content	Advanced Processes Models/Organisers	Concept/Generalisations
<i>Finding Freedom</i>	Based on typical learning goals and standards for students in years 9 and 10	Advanced Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humanities and Social Sciences Connections Rhetorical Analysis Organisers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasoning About a Situation or Event Big Idea Reflection: Primary Sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom requires sacrifice. Freedom requires responsibility. Freedom is threatened by internal and external forces.
<i>Perspectives of Power</i>		Advanced Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literary Analysis Visual Analysis Rhetorical Analysis Organisers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big Idea Reflection Reasoning About a Situation or Event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power is the ability to influence. Power is connected to a source. Power may be used or abused.
<i>I, Me, You, We: Individuality Versus Conformity</i>		Advanced Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literary Analysis Visual Analysis Rhetorical Analysis Organisers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big Idea Reflection Reasoning About a Situation or Event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both conformity and individuality are agents of change. Both conformity and individuality involve sacrifice. There are positives and negatives to both conformity and individuality.
<i>In the Mind's Eye: Truth Versus Perception</i>		Advanced Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literary Analysis Visual Analysis Rhetorical Analysis Organisers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big Idea Reflection Reasoning About a Situation or Event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of truth varies. There are negatives and positives in realising the truth. There are consequences to believing perception rather than the truth.

Lesson

3

“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson

Goals/Objectives

Content: To analyse and interpret literature, art and media, students will be able to:

- evaluate how literary or visual elements impact a work’s overall message,
- respond to interpretations of texts through a variety of contexts by justifying ideas and providing new information,
- analyse how an individual’s motivation and behaviour are revealed, and
- relate interpretations of texts to the real world.

Process: To develop thinking, reasoning and communication skills, students will be able to:

- analyse meaning, purpose and literary/visual elements;
- make inferences from provided evidence; and
- communicate to create, express and interpret ideas.

Concept: To understand the concept of truth in English, students will be able to:

- make and defend generalisations about truth versus perception,
- explain the positives and negatives of knowing the truth,
- analyse the consequences of believing perception rather than truth, and
- explain the relationship between truth and other concepts.

Materials

- Student copies of “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, available at http://sites.middlebury.edu/individualandthesociety/files/2010/09/jackson_lottery.pdf
- Handout 2.3: Concept Organiser, continued from previous lessons
- Handout 3.1: Blank Literary Analysis Wheel
- Handout 3.2: Big Idea Reflection
- Rubric 1: Product Rubric (Appendix C)

Example Visual Analysis Lesson

Students view the lithograph “Relativity” by M. C. Escher (available online). Do not reveal the title.

Step 1: Close viewing questions. Lead students through an initial viewing of the art.

- What detail of this art is interesting to you? (Ask every student; short response.)
- How many staircases are there? (Sample response: Seven; some overlap.)
- How many sources of gravity are in this picture? (Sample response: Three.)
- What behaviours do you see of the people?
- What is the focal point of the picture? Justify your answer.
- How does Escher produce “dual effects” within this art? (Sample response: The ceiling is also a floor.) Note that although two people may be on the same staircase, they exist in two separate dimensions. Do they know of each other’s existence? (Sample response: One is going up, one is going down, but they are going in the same direction.)
- Round-robin: If you had to give the lithograph a title, what title would you give it? (Ask every student; short response.)
- Share with your neighbour why you chose this title (or if time permits, elicit this as whole group).
- Share the real title of the lithograph. “Relativity”. Why do you think Escher gave it this title?

Step 2. Visual Analysis Wheel, separate elements. Lead students through completing relevant parts of the Visual Analysis Wheel during discussion. Focus first on the separate elements.

- **Purpose/Context:**
 - *What is the context of this art?* Lithograph printed in 1953.
 - *What do you think his purpose/motive is in creating this?* To express an idea of reality. (Note: Students may not be able to determine this until after discussing the art to some extent.)
- **Point of View/Assumptions:**
 - *What is Escher’s point of view toward reality?* Escher is revealing that there are multiple experiences and perceptions of reality. People perceive reality differently.
- **Images:**
 - *What do you believe are the most prominent images in the picture? Why? How might they be symbols for something deeper?* Staircases = journey in life; featureless people = unaware people, emotionless; windows to outside = ways to get out of isolation.