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CLASSICS

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for the Enriched Classic edition of
Candide by Voltaire

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Activities created by Robert Marantz

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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“The Best of All Possible Worlds?” (A Lesson on Differing Philosophies)

“...Martin especially concluded that man was born to live either in a state of distracting inquietude or of lethargic disgust.” (page 134)

Pangloss “...proved admirably that there is no effect without cause, and that, in this best of all possible worlds, the Baron’s castle was the most magnificent of castles, and his lady the best of all possible baronesses.” (page 4)

Candide concerns itself primarily with a question: how does one navigate through a world of evil? As Candide goes from one misadventure to another he is guided by the “best of all possible worlds” philosophy of his tutor Pangloss. Along the way, Candide befriends Martin, whose pessimism serves as a counterpoint to Pangloss’s optimism. As Candide makes his way through the world, he rejects Pangloss’s philosophy but cannot bring himself to embrace Martin’s.

How Pangloss and Martin each react to the various events in Candide reveals Voltaire’s own opinion on the limitations of pure thought without appropriate action. Both Pangloss and Martin represent thinkers, not doers. And in a world of evil, thought alone is not sufficient, according to Voltaire.

In this lesson, we will explore the competing philosophies of Pangloss and Martin in the context of Candide’s misadventures, as well as Voltaire’s own commentary.

This lesson will take one class period

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Start the lesson with a discussion about optimism and pessimism. Once the class has defined each, introduce the idea that Candide explores the competing philosophies of optimism and pessimism in the face of the evils of man. Candide is instructed by Pangloss that this is “the best of all possible worlds,” but after reading about all his misadventures, do your students think this is really the case? Allow them to reflect on that question while you begin step 2. (They will answer the question later.)

2. Write the names “Pangloss” and “Martin” on the board. Ask the students which one is the optimist (Pangloss) and which one is the pessimist (Martin). Jot down “optimist” under Pangloss’s name and “pessimist” under Martin’s name. Ask the students for other characteristics for each character and write them on the board under the character’s name.

3. Now ask the students to consider how Pangloss and Martin interpret the different events in Candide. For example, in chapter 4 when Candide is reunited with his old tutor, Pangloss describes his contraction of syphilis as a necessary part of the world, because the strains of the disease can be traced back to the New World. Had the man who brought syphilis to Europe never done so, Europeans would not also be able to enjoy chocolate. In other words, Pangloss sees the silver lining in this dark cloud. Martin, on the other hand, would explain Pangloss’s syphilis as a symbol of the evil and corruptibility of man. After modeling this for your students, have them consider how Pangloss and Martin might or actually react to each of the following events:

- Chapter 5: James the Anabaptist’s death
- Chapters 11+12: The old woman’s life story
- Chapter 19: Vanderdendur steals Candide’s sheep
- Chapter 24: Cacambo takes Candide’s money
- Chapter 30: Candide and his friends live on the farm

4. Have the students complete Handout #1 (two pages). In addition to describing how Pangloss and Martin consider each event, students will also consider which character is more of a realist for each case. (Note: For some of the events, neither character would have a realistic perspective. If/when students realize this, explain that this is Voltaire’s point. He was very interested in exposing the folly of philosophers who engage only in idle thinking and never follow up with action.)

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5. Once the students complete Handout #1, finish the lesson with a short reflection on the following prompt: Which character, Pangloss or Martin, more likely reflects Voltaire's own world view? Why? (This can also be assigned for homework.)

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of Candide (ISBN: 1416500308) for each student and Handout #1.

How Did It Go?

Because of the series of misadventures that Candide experiences, most students (and critics) consider Voltaire more of a pessimist than an optimist. Thus, your students' will most likely identify Martin as having the closer philosophy to Voltaire. However, the pessimistic Martin is all talk and no action; astute students will pick up on the fact that Voltaire's satirizing both extremes.

“Casting Call”

(A Lesson on Character)

Because of its satirical nature and exploration of evil, Candide has a certain timeless appeal. It is the type of story that can be re-imagined for each generation, and in virtually any medium. Indeed, it has been adapted to stage (as a musical) as well as screen (set during World War 2). What remains through each version are the characters. Each one is less a three-dimensional being than a two-dimensional archetype for certain personalities. These archetypes allow for numerous adaptations that are tailored to the events and mores of the eras in which they are produced.

In this lesson, we will imagine how Candide could be adapted into a film. Who would play the various roles? In choosing actors to play the characters of Candide, we will find ourselves examining who these characters are and what they represent in the story.

This lesson will take one class period.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Write the following on the board: “Who would you cast in a new film version of Candide?” Allow the students to think about this prompt quietly for five minutes. Instruct them to jot down their ideas on a sheet of paper.

2. Next, break the class into groups of four to six students. Explain that each group will cast and promote “Candide: The Movie.” Draw the students’ attention to the Major Character descriptions on pp. 156-57 as a guide.

3. For each character listed below, the groups will select an actor or actress who they feel could play the role well.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| • Candide | • Martin | • James the |
| • Cunegonde | • Baron of Thunder-ten- | Anabaptist |
| • Pangloss | Tronckh | • The Abbé from |
| • The old woman | • The Jesuit Baron | Perigord |
| • Cacambo | • Paquette | • Brother Giroflée |

4. The groups will then write a one-paragraph justification for each of their choices. Reasons for casting a particular actor could range from similarities to other roles he or she has played, a quality in that actor’s persona that would lend itself well to the character, or other well-considered rationale. (“Because he or she is funny” is not a sufficient enough reason. The point here is for the students to analyze the characters to an extent that allows them to find parallels in contemporary comedic characters and actors.)

5. Once the groups have made all of their casting decisions and documented those choices with reasons, each group will create the movie poster. The poster should include images from the story, some of the actors in the roles selected, and a tagline for the movie (i.e. “It’s The Best of All Possible Movies!”). Provide materials for the posters (see “What You Need”).

6. At the end of class, each group will present their poster to the class along with a brief review of their casting decisions.

7. For homework (or an in-class writing assignment), ask each student to reflect on one of the characters and the actor they chose to play that character. Specifically, who did they consider for this part? What was it about the character that led them to cast the actor they ultimately chose? Do they feel they have a deeper understanding of this character as a result of this activity?

What You Need:

Materials for posters (butcher or poster paper, glue, tape, colored pens and pencils, and entertainment magazines—i.e. People, Premiere, etc.), and a copy of the Enriched Classic edition of Candide (ISBN: 1416500308) for each student

How Did It Go?

This activity can be a lot of fun for the class, as it combines popular culture with group work. It's important that the students make the connection between who they chose to play Candide, for example, and why they made that choice. If the students considered multiple factors when casting a part (such as the look, demeanor, and importance of the character), then they engaged in thoughtful character analysis. If instead they chose actors because they were popular and funny, then these students did not get the full benefit from this activity.

“The Ironic Age” (A Lesson on Satire)

Unless one knows the historical context of Candide, some of the book’s satire may be lost on a modern-day audience. But the book’s concept should not. Today’s students are well-acquainted with irony, exaggeration, comic understatement, parody, and caricature. There are numerous contemporary examples of satire—from “The Simpsons” and “Late Night” to “The Daily Show” and theonion.com. So while Voltaire lived in the Age of Reason, it could well be that we live in The Age of Irony.

In this lesson, students will examine what elements make for a good satire and then get first-hand experience by writing their own satires.

This lesson will take one class period plus one night to complete.

NCTE Standards Covered:

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Begin the lesson by defining *satire*: According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Tenth Edition), satire can be “a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn” and “trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly.” Have the class augment this definition by asking how Voltaire satirizes the people, philosophies, mores, and events of his day. For example, he exaggerates the traits, philosophies, and behavior of people to poke fun at them (such as how the Baron would never consider Candide a match for his daughter since Candide “only” has 71 quarterings in his lineage as opposed to the more desired 72). Other such devices include understatement, parody, and caricature.
2. Ask the class to think of modern examples of irony, exaggeration, understatement, sarcasm, parody, and caricature. You can suggest that your students look at “The Simpsons,” “The Daily Show,” or theonion.com, for examples. Some of your students will come up with other contemporary sources.
3. Next ask the class to consider how Voltaire uses irony, exaggeration, understatement, sarcasm, parody, and/or caricature in *Candide* to get his points across. Ask for three examples from the text. (For instance, how does he satirize war?)
4. Now that your students have a handle on what makes for a good satire, it's their turn. Instruct the students to write their own satires reflecting the people, philosophies, mores, and events of their school or community. Make sure that each satire contains at least one instance of irony, exaggeration, understatement, sarcasm, parody, and caricature. The satires can be fiction (e.g. *Candide*), verse (e.g. Pope's “The Rape of the Lock”), or satirical essays (e.g. Swift's “A Modest Proposal”). Allow the students to complete this assignment at home. Students should write at least 1-2 pages and be prepared to share their work with their classmates at the next class.
5. At the next class, break the class into groups of no more than four students. Ask your students to read their satires to their groups. Each member of the group will create a scoring rubric on a separate sheet of paper. For each instance of irony, exaggeration, understatement, sarcasm, parody, and caricature in a student's satire, the listener will put a checkmark next to that element on the sheet of paper. At the end of the class, collect the satires and the scoring rubrics.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Candide* (ISBN: 1416500308) for each student

How Did It Go?

You should not grade the students' satires on how funny they are, but you can consider whether they have examples of irony, exaggeration, understatement, sarcasm, parody, and caricature in their work. The peer-initiated scoring rubric is a good way to assess how well your students understood the concept of satire. How many of your students were able to incorporate examples of each satirical element into their work? How many of your student graders accurately noted those examples. If all goes well, then you have a classroom of budding Voltaires!

Name: _____

Chapter 5: James the Anabaptist's death

How Pangloss might view this event: _____

How Martin might view this event: _____

Whose view is the more realistic, and why: _____

Chapters 11+12: The old woman's life story

How Pangloss might view this event: _____

How Martin might view this event: _____

Whose view is the more realistic, and why: _____

Chapter 19: Vanderdendur steals Candide's sheep

How Pangloss might view this event: _____

How Martin might view this event: _____

Whose view is the more realistic, and why: _____

Chapter 24: Cacambo takes Candide’s money

How Pangloss might view this event: _____

How Martin might view this event: _____

Whose view is the more realistic, and why: _____

Chapter 30: Candide and his friends live on the farm

How Pangloss might view this event: _____

How Martin might view this event: _____

Whose view is the more realistic, and why: _____

