

An Introductory Lesson in Invention

FROM STORY TO ISSUE

Definitions

- **Story:** A narrative that interests readers which can be in prose or poetry, true or make-believe
 - **Issue:** A “whether” statement that contemplates the choices characters make in the story. Students generate a new issue with each new essay.
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Background for the Teacher

Today, we need good men and women who can make wise decisions. Can this wisdom be cultivated in our students? Yes. They can get better at making good decisions by practicing.

If students keep asking “should he do that?” (which is a question we ask ourselves all the time), they can practice discernment and their judgment can improve. We naturally ask these questions about characters when we read stories and about decisions we see around us in everyday life.

After we find a “should” question to think about, we convert the question to an “issue” that begins with the word “whether.” (For example, we convert “Should Odysseus listen to the sirens?” to “whether Odysseus should listen to the sirens”). At that point we are pursuing not a yes/no answer, but something more open-ended that not only allows us, but causes us, to consider lots of ideas on both sides.

How do we accomplish this? How do we find an issue to consider?

Your Students Will Learn to:

- Choose three characters from a story to think about and write them down.
- Think of three actions that each character chose to carry out. Write those.
- Ask a “should” question.
- Turn the question into an issue using the cue word “whether.”

Steps to Teach the Lesson

- Your students are already reading stories and already asking “should” questions, so this lesson is not as new as you might think. Help them see, increase their awareness, of the thinking they are already doing. Read a short passage from a story. Pause the reading just when a character is about to make a decision and ask, “what should he do?”
- The *Tales of Wonder Volumes I and II* are excellent resources for short stories that have questions sprinkled within the text to draw the readers’ and listeners’ attention to these questions.

- Upon finishing reading a story, ask students to provide you with three characters on which they want to think. Write those down on a large board.
- Next, ask the students to tell you three actions each of those characters chose to do in the story. Write those down as well next to the respective character.
- Then, choose any one character and any one associated action and ask, “should Character A have done Y?” Do this with three characters and three of his actions.

Should _____ (a character) have done _____ (an action)?

- Finally, convert the “should question” into an open, thinkable issue by converting the words to “whether Character A should have done Y”.

whether _____ (character) should have _____ (action)

- N.B. Keep the issues concrete and simple. Narrowing your question yields more information you can find about that specific issue. REMOVE EXTRANEIOUS INFORMATION and add it to the ANI.

Instead of:

“whether John should have saved the turtle that he found on Monday”

Write:

“whether John should have saved the turtle”

Instead of:

“whether the third pig should have built his house of bricks after his brothers used other materials”

Write:

“whether the third pig should have built his house of bricks”

- **Practice** listing three characters and three actions per character, choosing one character and one action to ask a “should question,” and converting it into an issue beginning with “whether”. Complete this process as many times as needed with different stories.

- **Review** this lesson by asking students to compare what they did each time they completed this “Story to Issue” process. The following questions can help guide them to the idea: “What information did we start with each time? What type of question did we make from that information? How did we turn that question into a thought provoking issue?”

- **Assign** the Introductory Invention Worksheet for this lesson.
 - This lesson can be taught with the *Essay One Invention, From Issue to ANI* in the same class time.
 - The next step after generating an issue is to create an ANI chart listing the pros and cons or the reasons to do something (affirmative) and to not do something (negative). All the extra information we think of here that does not affirm nor negate the issue goes into the third column affectionately known as the “I Column” for informative. See *Essay One, From Issue to ANI* for this complete lesson and examples.

Examples

Example A

from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

Characters and Actions

1. Character one: Lucy
 - a. Action one: went to tea with Mr. Tumnus
 - b. Action two: became angry at Edmund's lies
 - c. Action three: watched Aslan's sacrifice

2. Character two: Edmund
 - a. Action one: lied about having been in Narnia
 - b. Action two: followed the White Witch
 - c. Action three: fought in the battle

3. Character three: Peter
 - a. Action one: killed the wolf
 - b. Action two: led the army
 - c. Action three: forgave Edmund

Pick one character:

Edmund

Pick one action he performed:

followed the witch

Ask a "should" question about the action:

Should Edmund have followed the White Witch?

Convert the "should question" to an issue:

whether Edmund should have followed the White Witch

Example B
from "The Gift of the Magi"

Characters and Actions

1. Character one: He
 - a. Action one: sold his watch
 - b. Action two: bought a hair-comb
 - c. Action three: gave Della a Christmas present

2. Character two: Della
 - a. Action one: wanted to give her husband a Christmas present
 - b. Action two: sold her hair
 - c. Action three: bought a watch

3. Character three: Storekeeper
 - a. Action one: sold comb to him
 - b. Action two:
 - c. Action three:

Pick one character:

Della

Pick one action he performed:

sold her hair

Ask a "should" question about the action:

Should Della have sold her hair?

Convert the "should question" to an issue:

whether Della should have sold her hair

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1. List three characters who appeared in the story you read.
Below each person, list three actions that he chose to do:

1. Character one:
 - a. Action one:
 - b. Action two:
 - c. Action three:
2. Character two:
 - a. Action one:
 - b. Action two:
 - c. Action three:
3. Character three:
 - a. Action one:
 - b. Action two:
 - c. Action three:

Pick one character:

Pick one action he performed:

Ask a “should” question about the action:

Convert the “should question” to an issue:

N.B. Be sure your issue is concrete. Remove prepositional phrases, “and”s, and other extra information. For example:

Change this: whether Edmund should have followed the White Witch since it meant sneaking away from his family

to this: whether Edmund should have followed the White Witch

Change this: whether boys ought to rebel when their brothers mistreat them

to this: whether Edmund should have followed the White Witch

Change this: whether Della and Jim should have sold their own valuable items in order to buy Christmas gifts for each other

to this: whether Della should have cut her hair

Change this: whether it is good for people to make sacrifices in order to bless others at Christmas time

to this: whether Della should have cut her hair

Change this: whether people should fish in unknown places

to this: whether the old man should have pursued his fish past his usual fishing spot

Change this: whether Prospero should have forgiven the men

to this: whether Prospero should have forgiven Alonso

Change this: whether the conspirators should have killed Caesar

to this: whether Brutus should have killed Caesar