
**Grade Level:** 9-12  **Curriculum Focus:** Literature  **Lesson Duration:** Two class periods

**Program Description**
Interviews with the author, dramatizations of the plot, and comments from World War II veterans reveal the turbulent times that sparked Joseph Heller's creative genius when writing this great antiwar novel.

**Onscreen Questions and Activities**
- Discuss satire as a literary genre. Compare different types of satire including caricature, parody, fable, lampoon, and irony.
- Discuss the qualities that a person would need to be a good satirist. Support your ideas using Joseph Heller and other satirists as examples.
- Activities:
  - Write a book review of *Catch-22* that might have appeared in a 1960s newspaper. Include biographical information on Joseph Heller in your review of his work.
  - Create a "Satire Bulletin Board." Display various satirical pieces including cartoons, essays, and songs. Use the examples that you collect to create your own satirical form. Then write a short piece of your own to add to the bulletin board.

**Lesson Plan**

**Student Objectives**
Students will understand:
- Active readers evaluate the actions and statements of characters in a novel.
- Active readers apply the ideas of a novel to contexts outside the novel.

**Materials**
- *Great Books: Catch-22* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- The novel *Catch-22*

- Resources about historical or contemporary figure who said no to an oppressive system (e.g., Nelson Mandela, Susan B. Anthony)
- Computer with Internet access
- Presentation software such as PowerPoint or HyperStudio

Procedures

1. For a research activity related to Catch-22, focus students’ attention on Joseph Heller’s remark that “the only freedom we really have is the freedom to say no.” Explain that while Catch-22 effectively dramatizes a fictional instance of “saying no” to authority, the principle of resistance exists in the real world too. Build on Heller’s statement by quoting literary critic Robert Brustein, who once said that the character Yossarian in Catch-22 “encouraged the rest of us [those outside the novel] to say no.” Tell students that in this activity they will research a historical or contemporary figure who said no to an oppressive system.

2. Ask students to brainstorm a list of individuals whom they might research. Such a list might contain some or all of the following people:
   - Mahatma Gandhi
   - Nelson Mandela
   - Susan B. Anthony
   - Jane Addams
   - Frederick Douglass
   - Cesar Chavez
   - A conscientious objector during the war in Vietnam
   - An activist in the abortion wars
   - An individual, perhaps from the community, who participated in student or race-related sit-downs in the 1960s
   - An individual in current events (such as a Miami relative of Elián Gonzalez in 1999-2000)

3. Once students have chosen their subjects, direct them to their textbooks, the library, and the Internet to do research on the individual. They can use printed sources as well as electronic texts, film or news footage, recorded protest songs, and interviews. For subjects who are still living, students may supplement their reading by arranging in-person, telephone, or email interviews. Whatever the source, make sure students are familiar with note-taking options and can keep track of reference materials so that they can prepare a bibliography for their research reports. Students may help one another by sharing sources, but for this project, you may want each student to generate an individual report. You may request that each report contain two parts: the first and longer part about someone who has said no, and the second part about the student’s own attitude toward saying no (written in the first person).
4. For the first part of their reports, students should seek materials that will help them answer questions about their subjects such as the following:

- What did the subject say no to?
- How did he or she say no?
- What were the reasons or causes that led to the subject’s decision to say no?
- Were his or her actions justified?
- Did those actions achieve an objective? If so, what was it?
- What did the person sacrifice or what price did the person pay to say no?
- Should the person be respected or applauded for saying no?
- For subjects who are still alive, can you find out if he or she would, given the situation, make the same decision again?
- How is your subject similar to or different from Yossarian in Catch-22?

Invite students to expand the list of questions.

5. For the second part of their reports, students should address personal questions, such as the following:

- How would you act in the situation that your subject was in? Why would you or wouldn’t you say no?
- What alternative action(s), if any, would you have taken?

6. When students have finished their research, give them the option of submitting a written report (which might include illustrations and other graphics) or of presenting a computer-assisted multimedia report (with video and audio clips) to the class. For the latter, students might use PowerPoint or HyperStudio or other software that allows them to combine media into a slide show. Regardless how they deliver their presentation, require that students hand in complete bibliographies of their sources.

Discussion Questions

1. The Vietnam War made Catch-22 an antiwar classic. How was the Vietnam War a “catch-22” situation?

2. Some critics have said that Yossarian is one of the first characters in modern American literature to fight against a powerful system. Imagine yourself in his position. Would you make the same choices he did? Why or why not? Does it make sense to fight powerful systems like the military? Can you think of any causes that might be worth fighting for?

3. According to Joseph Heller, “The only freedom we really have is the freedom to say no.” Explain what you think he means by this statement; then debate its philosophical merits. Do you agree or disagree with him? Support your opinion with examples from historical and personal experience. For example, how does the above statement compare with the “just say no” catchphrase from the war against drugs?
4. Analyze the impact of Heller’s choice of a satiric writing style on his novel. Would the book have been as effective if it had been written in a more serious manner? How might readers’ responses to the novel have been different? Would the book have the same meaning if the style were different?

5. Would *Catch-22* have been as popular if it had been published during World War II, rather than almost two decades after it ended? How might readers’ reactions to it have differed? Would it still have become a classic of American literature? Discuss how the time in which a book is published might or might not affect its success.

6. *Catch-22* is strongly critical of many societal institutions, including medicine, business, religion, government, and the military. Are Heller’s criticisms still valid? How do your experiences with large societal institutions—such as the public school system, your church, your community—compare with those in *Catch-22*?

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student’s report shows extensive research; well-organized presentation; well-supported comparison/contrast of subject and Yossarian.
- 2 points: Student’s report shows adequate research; fairly well organized presentation; insufficiently supported comparison/contrast of subject and Yossarian.
- 1 point: Student’s report shows inadequate research; disorganized presentation; incomplete comparison/contrast of subject and Yossarian.

**Vocabulary**

**capitalism**

*Definition:* An economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.

*Context:* Capitalism is an economic system that allows much freedom but provides few protections.

**catch-22**

*Definition:* A problematic situation for which the only solution is denied by a circumstance inherent in the problem or by a rule.

*Context:* Her parents’ contradictory rules made Sarah feel as if she were caught in a catch-22.

**farce**

*Definition:* A light dramatic composition marked by broadly satirical comedy and improbable plot.

*Context:* For the class play competition, the seniors wrote a hilarious farce in which the school administrators act like buffoons.
paradox

*Definition*: A statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.

*Context*: The team found it to be something of a paradox when the coach cut practice short because of their poor performance.

paranoia

*Definition*: A tendency on the part of an individual or group toward excessive or irrational suspiciousness and mistrustfulness of others.

*Context*: The manager dismissed Alice’s frequent complaints of harassment from other employees because he thought they were a product of her paranoia.

satire

*Definition*: A literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn.

*Context*: Although satire is often humorous, writers often use it to make serious statements about societal conditions.

**Academic Standards**

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit [http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp](http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp).

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts—Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
- Language Arts—Reading: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

**Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)