

THE GREAT DEBATE: Using debate and discussion tools to analyze soliloquy

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This exercise, also called “Angel/Devil,” is a TFANA favorite, and can be used in many different plays and speeches to highlight character choices, and engage students in debating the moral and ethical issues of the play. The exercise can be used with any speech or monologue where a character is working out a problem, or trying to decide what to do. (Great options include Macbeth’s speech in Act 1 scene 7, “When ‘tis done, ‘twere well it were done quickly”, and Isabella’s speech in Act 2 scene 4 of MEASURE FOR MEASURE, “To whom should I complain?”)

Use this exercise to:

- Engage with the moral/ethical dilemmas of the play
- Spark class discussion about the play’s issues, themes and conflict
- Analyze a character’s words and motivations in the scene
- Consider how a character’s internal thoughts/feelings might affect their physical body on stage

Preparing for the exercise:

- Identify a character who has a difficult moral dilemma or choice to make. Read a speech or scene where the dilemma is particularly charged.
- Discuss the different sides and points of view for the character, both for the characters and for the students themselves, setting up the opposing sides of a ‘debate’ of the issue.

The great problem for Cordelia in the scene below is: Should she stay true to her personal values, and speak simply about how she loves her father? Or should she give in to peer pressure, do what everybody else in the family is doing, and flatter him with unnecessary words?

- Help students make contemporary and personal connections to the problem.

Possible connections and conversations for Cordelia: When have you had to choose between “going with the flow” and doing your own thing? When have you / haven’t you given in to peer pressure? Does your family/ do your friends expect you to shower them with affection like Lear? Is that comfortable for you? Etc.



Playing the game:

- Choose one student to play the character. Have them stand in the middle of the room.

NOTE: For this exercise, the 'character' won't actually have to do any talking - it's a great opportunity for engaged but shy students.

- Choose two volunteers (or two groups) to argue the opposing sides. Place them on opposite sides of the room. The opposing teams might represent different characters in the play; or they might simply represent the two sides of the character's mind or conscience - the 'angel' and 'devil' on opposing shoulders.
- Ask the full class to list possible talking points for both sides.
- Allow both sides to debate the issue, giving each side one minute at a time to talk.
- As the debate happens, the 'character' standing in the center of the room should walk back and forth between the two sides, always moving closer to the side that is 'winning' them over at any given moment.

Cordelia Variation: Play the game using the words of the scene, to explore what Cordelia's physical movement in the scene might be as she wrestles with the question internally. Cast the various roles of the scene and place them on "stage", putting Cordelia somewhere in the center / where she has room to move. As the students read through the scene, stop at certain points to ask the actor playing Cordelia what they're thinking about (as Cordelia), and how they might move or shape their body language to reveal this inner thinking. Also consider how she might deliver the lines of text.

KING LEAR Act 1, scene 1

From [MIT Shakespeare online](#)

King Lear has decided the time has come to retire from leading, and to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. He brings them to the state room, and shows the map of the kingdom. This is what follows:

KING LEAR

Give me the map there. Know that we have divided

In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent

To shake all cares and business from our age;



Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,--
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,--
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
Our eldest-born, speak first.

GONERIL

Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA

[Aside] What shall Cordelia do?



Love, and be silent.

LEAR

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN

Sir, I am made
Of the self-same metal that my sister is,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;
Only she comes too short: that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square of sense possesses;
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA

[Aside] Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
More richer than my tongue.

KING LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;



No less in space, validity, and pleasure,
Than that conferr'd on Goneril. Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least; to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

KING LEAR

Nothing!

CORDELIA

Nothing.

KING LEAR

Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

KING LEAR

How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

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Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

KING LEAR

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA

Ay, good my lord.

KING LEAR

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

KING LEAR

Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate, and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist, and cease to be;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever.

