These are meant to be rough notes for reference, as opposed to a script. There are many spots in which discussion will be free flowing, and flexibility is key; I am including these to give a deeper idea of what my lesson is roughly designed to look like.

Alright good morning everyone. You are eighth graders in my English class, but you already know that, that's a weird way to start a class, I didn't need to say that. But just in case any of you forgot. We're going to continue talking about stories, and today we're going to discuss what makes a character morally good. First, let's quickly recap from where we left off last week. Last week, we explored stories as engaging ways for individuals to express their viewpoints to others. These can be written stories, movies or TV shows, or oral stories. Oral stories have been used for thousands of years for people to pass on information and express themselves to others in a memorable way. We also told our own stories and talked about the classical story structure: characters and setting are introduced, a conflict is put forth, and the story builds to the resolution of this conflict.

Over the course of the next month, you are going to be crafting your own short story. This story is going to be your way of expressing your unique views. Specifically, you're going to write a story about a character who you think is a good person overcoming a difficult situation. We're going to start the very beginning of this process here today.

First we are going to brainstorm. I want you to start this activity by thinking about the qualities of a character that you believe to be a good person. You might call this character the hero of the story, but hero might be too loaded of a term; this doesn't have to be someone who necessarily saves lives, it could just be an everyday good person. What qualities do you think this person would have? I want to make a distinction here: when I say a good character, I mean what you believe to be morally good, not just an interesting character. Many people would think that a character like the Joker or Lady Macbeth are very interesting, but not good people. So i'm going to give you about 4 minutes to write down, on scrap paper or in a doc on your device, a list of qualities. Remember, we are trying to focus on qualities, not actions. So less things like "saves lives" and more the characteristics that make them do good things, like "brave" or selfless". You have four minutes, GO!

Alright, so now that you have your list, I'm going to put you into groups. Today, let's go with groups of three. Yeah, I think that will give us an even number of groups. You're going to do the same exercise, but you are going to collectively make a list of the qualities that your group thinks a good character would have if you were writing a story together. After five minutes, I want you to elect a spokesperson to a) present your list, b) discuss what qualities were most shared, and c) discuss what qualities were different or debatable. I'll give you a 90 second warning near the end and remind you to have a spokesperson ready.

Alright we are going to go over a few thought experiments. A thought experiment is a made-up scenario that's meant to express an idea. This first one is called the trolley problem. As you were born in Kamloops in 2006 you might not know what a trolley is, so we can call it the train problem and it works just as well. This picture sums it up well. A train is barrelling towards 5

people tied to the tracks. It's not a good day. However, you have the chance to save. You're this person here with the lever. You can pull the lever and the train will veer off on to another track and only hit one person. Now, in this thought experiment, these are your only two choices in the world. You can't stop the train, or jump in front of it, or anything else. Two options: pull the lever, and it hits one person, or don't and it hits five. I want to hear your opinions. I'm going to try the polling feature on Blue Button here. I've never used it, so bear with me. I want to try to be as anonymous as possible to avoid groupthink.

Alright, so I'd love to hear your opinions. Why would you do this?

Okay, let's make a slight modification. Let's say that there's only one track. Still 5 people tied to it, still a train barrelling down. This time, you are on a bridge overtop of the tracks. There is a very large man next to you. As you know all of the laws of physics, you know that the only way in the world to stop this train is to push the large man onto the tracks. He will be crushed, but it will stop the train's momentum and save the 5 people. You aren't big enough to stop the train yourself. Again, only two options. I'm gonna give you ten seconds to think about it. Alright, let's go to the polls.

Alright, once again, I'd love to hear your opinions.

Okay, one last one. Let's say you're a surgeon. A great surgeon. The best surgeon. And you've got 5 people in intensive care who are all going to die within a day if they don't get organs. They each need different organs, and there are none available. Now, out in the alley behind the hospital there's this homeless fella. He's got healthy organs. He's the same blood type as all of your patients. And you know that he has no family, no one would miss him. You also know that you could get away with tricking him into the hospital, putting him under, and taking his organs. This will of course kill him, but it will save your five patients. Do you do it??

Interesting. Once again, I would love to hear your opinions.

So it seems like we've got a couple of opposing forces here. One is this idea that we can base our actions, morally, on their outcomes. Whatever has the happiest outcome for the most people is the thing to do. But if you're really really strict on that, there ends up being things that a lot of us don't like, because if you were very strict on that, you would kill the homeless fella, right? On the other hand, there's this idea that there are certain rules that you should never break: never kill, never steal, etc. But if you take that to the extreme, then you wouldn't steal a loaf of bread to save your child from starving, and lots of people find that distasteful as well. There are no right answers, no easy solutions. The point here is to simply reflect on difficult situations

Also, these might seem like unrealistic scenarios. However, these dilemmas come up in real life. Right now, people are working on making automated self-driving cars into a thing. It's not crazy to think that you could be in Vancouver 15 years from now and robot cars will be on the road. When they are programming these cars, these exact same dilemmas come up: if an automated car is barreling towards 5 people, should it be programmed to swerve into one? Or to swerve off a bridge and kill its single passenger? Also, a real-life trolley problem sort of happened in California a few years back. An out of control train was barrelling towards a passenger train full

of people, and someone had to make the decision to let it hit the passenger train OR let it go off the rails into a neighborhood. They chose the neighborhood. It crashed into multiple houses and narrowly missed killing a pregnant lady, but it didn;t hit the passenger train. Not an easy decision to make, but a reason why this matters.

And to bring it back, these are moral dilemmas that you see in plenty of literature. You see them in the Hunger Games and Harry Potter. You see them in movies like The Avengers, questions of how much to value lives. You see governments right now trying to determine how much to value lives during the pandemic vs. how much to value businesses being open and people being able to live the lifestyle they're accustomed to.

Alright, so for this last activity, I want you to get into the mindset of writing for a character that you believe to be morally good. On our class site, which I'll link shortly, I've supplied a list of moral dilemmas, just like the ones we went over. I want you to choose one which you find especially compelling or challenging. In the voice of a character, write a paragraph of their inner monologue as they make their decision. Make sure to include a resolution. I'll give an example: