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| **How the Grinch Stole Psychology Class** | | | |
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| |  | | --- | | http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/repository/e27.pyschol_4122.gif | | http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/common/shared/images/null_1x1.gif | | http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/common/shared/images/null_1x1.gif | "How the Grinch Stole Psychology Class" is a highly participatory activity that emphasizes the application of personality theories. The activity uses the 26-minute classic television movie, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas.* Students work in small groups to explain the Grinch's original evil personality as well as his transformation to the kinder, gentler Grinch at the end. To accomplish this analysis, concepts from assigned theorists are used. The activity can be accomplished in one class period.  Objectives Students will apply theories of personality to explain the Grinch.   * Students will apply four concepts from an assigned personality theorist to explain the Grinch's personality. * Students will explain the Grinch's personality transformation according to their assigned theorist.   Preparation This teaching activity requires minimal preparation.  Necessary materials:   * VHS or DVD commercial-free recording of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* * Projection equipment (TV and VCR or computer with DVD and projection capabilities) * Index cards: one card per group of four to five students; each card should have the name of one theorist written on it.   Procedure   1. Assign students to groups of four to six students. 2. Make introductory remarks similar to the following: "You are about to see a short documentary. The primary individual in the documentary has a rather distinct personality. Toward the end of the documentary, you will see a drastic transformation in his personality. In a moment, each group will draw a card with the name of one of the personality theorists we have studied in this class. Your group is to explain the personality of the individual in the documentary by using at least four concepts or terms from the theorist you drew. You will also need to explain how your theorist would account for this individual's personality transformation. Be sure to note the behaviors the individual exhibits that led you to your conclusions." 3. Each group draws a card with the name of one theorist on it. The theorists that have typically been covered in class thus far include Freud, Jung, Adler, Horney, Fromm, Erikson, Maslow, and Rogers. All these theories work well for the activity. 4. Show the 26-minute tape in its entirety. 5. Tell students to select a spokesperson for their group, and allow the groups 10 minutes to discuss the applications of their assigned theory. 6. Have each group report which four concepts they used, how the concepts apply to the Grinch, and how his personality was transformed -- all according to their assigned theorist. 7. Assist groups as needed to cite specific Grinch behaviors that fit each concept. If time permits, provide applications of additional concepts from the same theorist or prompt the class to do so. 8. Point out that it was possible to "analyze" the Grinch with each and every theory, and that the explanations for his personality and its transformation varied greatly depending on the theory being used. 9. Draw comparisons to other possible assignments that students may be required to do for this class. For example, students may have to analyze the personality of someone they know well according to one theorist.   Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Approach Applied to the Grinch   * **Freudian Concepts:**   + **Death Instincts** -- the Grinch demonstrates a drive toward aggression and destruction. His desire was to destroy the Whos and their love of Christmas; perhaps indicative of an unconscious desire for his own death, but turned against the Whos.   + **Projection** -- the Grinch projected his own feelings of disappointment and misery onto the Whos when he predicted that they would all cry "boo, who" upon discovering that Christmas would not be coming.   + **Oral Aggressive or Sadistic** -- the Grinch's tendency toward pessimism, hostility, and aggressiveness typifies this personality. The Grinch can also be seen biting his nails and eating on a toothpick.   + **Id** -- the Grinch had an overactive id. He sought to reduce the tension, created by the Whos' enthusiasm for Christmas, by trying to keep it from coming. The Grinch wanted the Whos' merry-making to stop, and he had no regard for their wants and wishes. * **Possible Explanation for the Grinch's Personality Transformation:** The Grinch's unconscious motives became conscious. Freud would say that the Grinch gained insight into his desire for destruction. Perhaps he also developed a stronger superego that led him to rescue the sled before it toppled off the mountain.   Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology Approach Applied to the Grinch   * **Adlerian Concepts:**   + **Organic Source of Inferiority** -- the Grinch's heart was two sizes too small   + **Superiority Complex** -- characterized by an exaggerated opinion of one's abilities and accomplishments. The Grinch's need to demonstrate his dominance over the Whos by taking away Christmas is indicative of this complex.   + **Avoiding Style of life** -- an avoiding type stays safe by not facing life's problems so as to avoid possible failure. For years the Grinch lived alone on Mount Crumpit and avoided contact with the Whos.   + **Social Interest** -- innate potential to cooperate with others and serve society. Demonstrated by the Grinch at the end when the Grinch returned all the presents and even carved the Roast Beast. * **Possible Explanation for the Grinch's Personality Transformation:** Adler posited that we all have the innate potential to cooperate with others and to work toward societal goals (social interest). Adler also believed that environmental influences were stronger than biological influence; therefore, only when the Grinch encountered the "socially useful" environmental influences of the Whos did his potential for social interest become activated. Conversely, it may have been that his heart grew three sizes that day, thus compensating for his original source of organic inferiority.   Karen Horney's Neopsychoanalytic Approach Applied to the Grinch   * **Horneyan Concepts:**   + **Basic Anxiety** -- pervasive feeling of helplessness and loneliness. The Grinch most likely experienced a great deal of basic anxiety as a result of living alone (except for his dog Max) on Mount Crumpit for 50-some years.   + **Self-Protective Mechanism of Attaining Power** -- this was the Grinch's way of ensuring that no one would hurt him: "If I have power, no one can hurt me."   + **Aggressive Personality** -- characterized by dominating and controlling others. The Grinch demonstrates this personality trend by trying to control the Whos by taking away their Christmas. He also tries to control Max by making him into a reindeer.   + **Neurotic Needs for Power and Exploitation** -- The Grinch's need to feel powerful and to exploit Max are efforts to lessen the discomfort of basic anxiety.   + **Need for a Dominant Partner** -- neurotic need associated with the compliant personality. This need fits Max and explains why Max fit the Grinch like a hand in a glove. * **Possible Explanation for the Grinch's Personality Transformation:**  The Whos provided the Grinch with a feeling of safety and acceptance that he had never known. His feeling of basic anxiety was alleviated, and as a result his need to use the self-protective mechanisms to defend against the anxiety was eliminated. In the absence of this need to defend against basic anxiety, the Grinch was able to follow his intrinsic tendency toward self-realization.   Abraham Maslow's Humanistic Approach Applied to the Grinch   * **Maslow's Humanistic Concepts:**   + **Deficiency Needs** (physiological and safely needs) -- the Grinch had food, water, shelter, order, and stability in his life on Mount Crumpit.   + **Belongingness and Love Needs** -- the Grinch had adequately satisfied his physiological and safely needs, but he was lacking in the area of belongingness and love. He lacked others with whom he could feel as sense of affiliation, affection, and acceptance. Without fulfilling this level of the hierarchy, the Grinch was unable to progress any farther up the hierarchy.   + **Peak Experience** -- a moment of complete ecstasy when the self is transcended. The Grinch may have had a peak experience when he realized that the Whos did not need their decorations and presents, but that "Christmas perhaps means a little bit more." When the Grinch saves the sled from sliding off the mountain, his eyes change from red to blue, perhaps signaling a peak experience.   + **Jonah Complex** -- our doubts about our own abilities and our fears that we are not up to the task of becoming self-actualized. The Grinch spent so many years hating the Whos because he was afraid to maximize his innate tendencies and live in a different way. * **Possible Explanation for the Grinch's Personality Transformation:** The Grinch experienced from the Whos a sense of belongingness and love that he had never known. It allowed him to proceed up the hierarchy, possibly to becoming self-actualized at the end when he gives back all the decorations and presents and functions harmoniously with the Whos.   Carl Roger's Humanistic Approach Applied to the Grinch   * **Rogerian Concepts:**   + **Positive Regard** -- the Grinch most likely did not receive much approval, acceptance, or love in his life. This deficiency led him to live a life of withdrawal.   + **Unconditional Positive Regard** -- the Grinch experienced this acceptance of him even though he had tried to stop the Whos' Christmas from coming. They cared about him regardless of his behaviors.   + **Incongruence** -- discrepancy between one's self-concept and experience or behavior. At the end, the Grinch experienced a discrepancy after his heart grew; he found himself having just stolen the Whos' Christmas and now desperately needed to return their belongings to establish congruency within himself.   + **Fully Functioning Person** -- at the end, the Grinch exhibited many characteristics of a fully functioning person (or Grinch). He lived fully and richly in the moment. He had a more open awareness to all experience. He became open to positive as well as negative feelings. * **Possible Explanation for the Grinch's Personality Transformation:** The Whos provided the Grinch with a curative relationship. They were genuine and empathic, and they provided the Grinch and his dog Max with unconditional positive regard. Roger believed that experiencing such a relationship could be curative and that it was not necessary to enter therapy to experience this acceptance. The Whos' acceptance of the Grinch allowed him to accept himself and become fully functioning.   Resources Jones, C., and T. Geisel. 2000. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Burbank, C.A.: Warner Home Video.  Schultz, D. P., and S. E. Schultz. 2001. *Theories of Personality* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.  *This article originally appeared in the fall 2003 issue of the* Psychology Teacher Network *newsletter, published by the American Psychological Association. It is reprinted on AP Central through a collaboration agreement between the College Board and the APA.* |  |
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