

A Company of Fools ***TEACHER'S GUIDE***

Cindy Sisti and Libby St. Jean



Fitzhenry & Whiteside

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Introduction to Teacher's Guide

A Company of Fools is appropriate for most students in grades four to eight as a text for independent reading, literature circles or guided reading. It can also be used as a whole class novel study to teach reading strategies. For more advanced students, use *A Company of Fools* to study such literary devices as characterization, metaphor, thematic development and writer's craft.

The first part of the Teacher's Guide is divided into thirteen sections. Each section contains plot summaries, guiding questions for pre- and post- reading discussion and an extension activity. The pre- and post-reading questions are not meant to assess literal comprehension, but rather to extend thinking and encourage inference. The end-of-section activities require students to go back into the text to extend thinking and develop reading strategies. They are meant to extend the student's understanding of the literary elements found in the text, and can be used after each section or at the end of the entire book.

Part II of this guide contains general activities which require more work and planning on behalf of the student and which apply to the text as a whole. These activities focus on the study of language arts. Specific elements include characterization, writing, drama and metaphor. Such exercises can be used at any point during the study of this novel.

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Section I
Guided Reading/Literature Circles

Prologue and Chapter 1

Chapter Synopsis

We are introduced to Henri— an orphan living in St. Luc’s Abbey, just outside of Paris, France, in 1349. Henri tells us that this book is a chronicle of his friendship with Micah, a fellow orphan at the abbey during the year of the plague.

Chapter 1 opens with the boys at St. Luc’s Abbey spying on the monks. We are introduced to some of the central characters—Brother Bart, Micah and Henri, as well as to the prior and the abbot. Brother Bart has brought Micah, a rough street kid, to the abbey. Henri is not impressed with Brother Bart’s “find” until he hears Micah’s incredible singing.

Vocabulary: Pestilence, chronicler, abbey, surplice, vestments, vestry, theological

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: How does it feel to be a new kid—at school, in a club or in a group—where everyone else seems to know each other? Invite students to tell about a time when they were the “new kid” or didn’t fit in with a group at first. How did they deal with this situation?

During Reading: Introduce the concept of narrator to your students. Talk about the difference between narrator—implied speaker—and the author. Ask students to describe the narrator of this story, based on what he’s said in the prologue. Ask them to think about the narrator as they continue to read the novel. How does the narrator reveal information about himself?

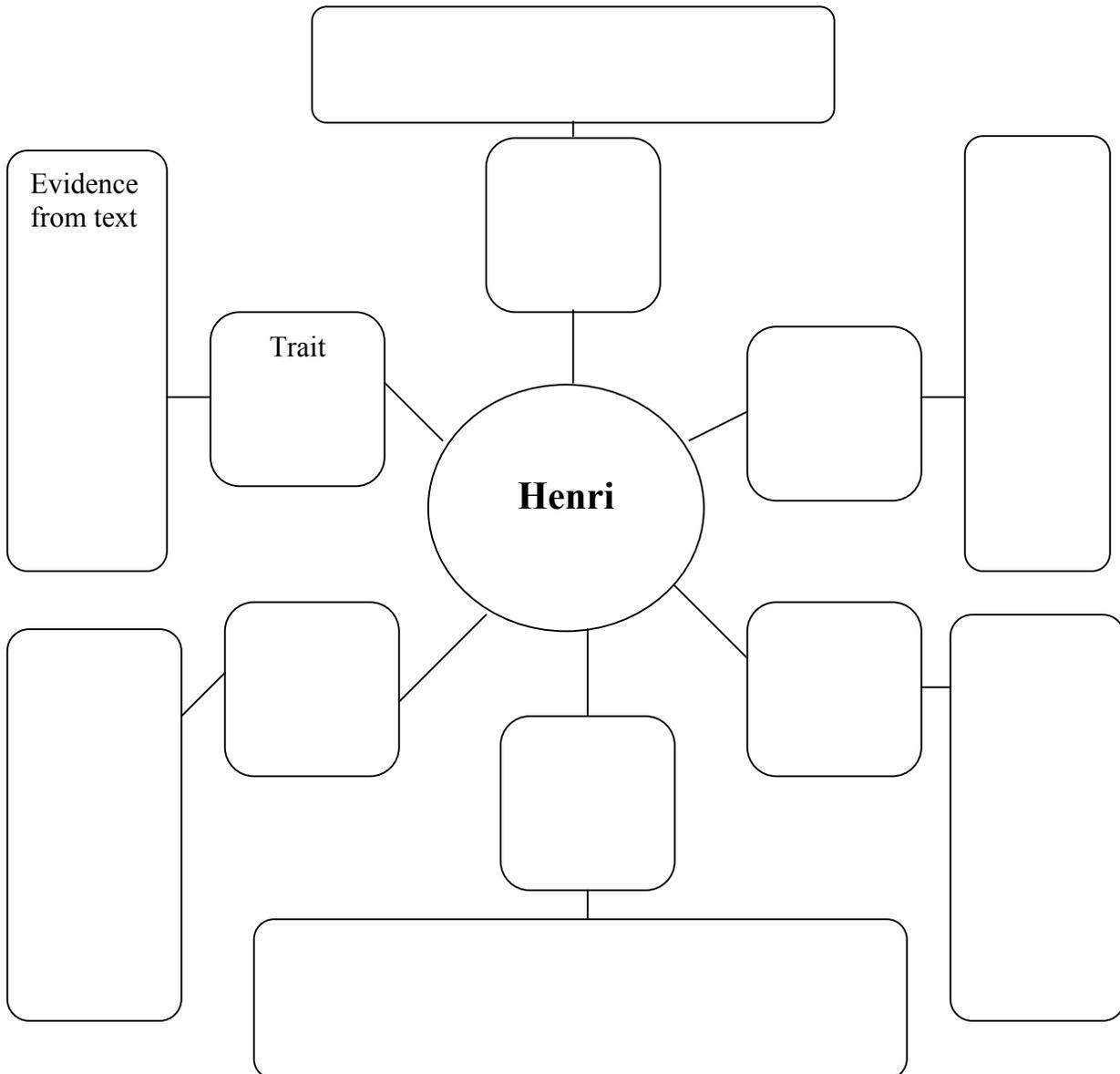
Student Note: The narrator is the voice and implied speaker of a fictional work, to be distinguished from the actual living author.

After Reading:

1. Who is telling the story? What title does he give himself? What does he call you?
 2. How does the narrator seem different than the new boy, Micah?
 3. The narrator tells us that Brother Bart is always returning to the abbey with things he finds on his journey. What are some of the things he’s brought back in the past? How do these things relate to Micah, Brother Bart’s newest find?
-

Character Development: Character Webs

We learn a lot about a character from what the person says, does and thinks. Using the organizer below, create a character web for Henri, based on what we know about him so far.



Chapter 2

Chapter Synopsis

In chapter 2, Brother Bart and Henri take Micah to have a bath. While there, Henri runs into a harbormaster from Marseille. The harbormaster tells Henri that he has seen the monstrous plague, the face of death itself. He cries out to Henri “*Memento mori!*” — remember death — and grabs him by the throat. Micah comes to Henri’s rescue by throwing his sandal at the head of the crazed harbormaster.

Vocabulary: cesspits, lute, alms, palmer, *memento mori*, Marseille

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: Read the historical note on page 185 to your students. It provides some background information about the Plague. Ask your students to discuss the difference between how we react to infectious illness now and how people reacted in the middle ages. How have we changed since then? How are we still the same? What medical inventions and knowledge has occurred since the middle ages that has altered how we respond to illness and disease?

After Reading

1. Henri feels very clean compared to Micah. Explain why. Estimate how many baths you have had in your life. How many baths has Henri had this year?
2. Henri meets a mysterious man leaning against the walls of the almshouse. Paraphrase (retell) his story.
3. Begin keeping a record of each monk and his duties in St. Luc’s Abbey. Add to your list as you read through the novel. (Hint: There are over twenty monks.)
4. Who is Henri’s foil in this story? Explain why you think so.

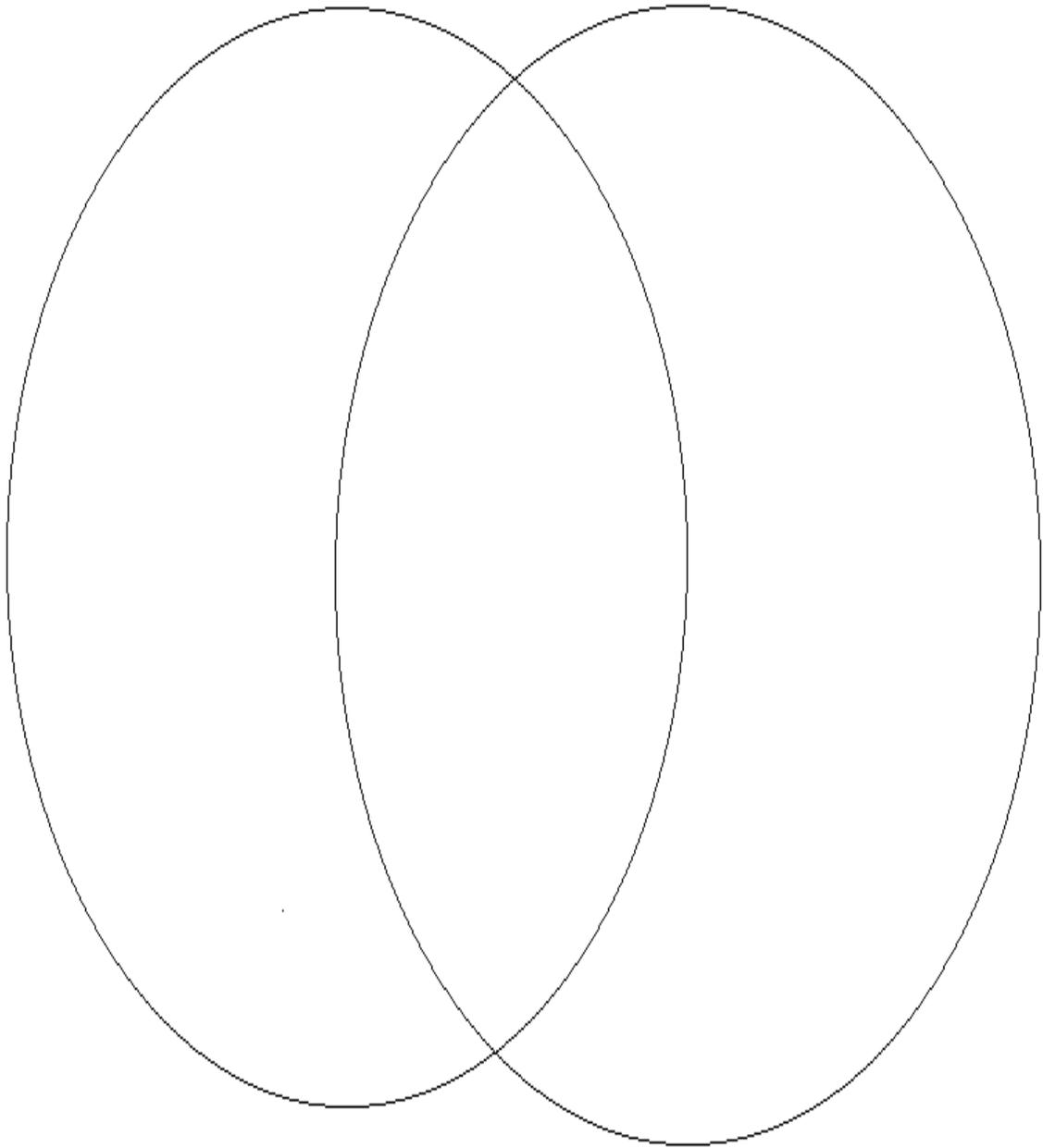
Student Note: A foil is a character in a play or story that contrasts and parallels the main character. Foils are used to help emphasize and reveal certain traits of the main character.

Character Comparison

Using the Venn diagram below, compare Henri and Micah.

MICAH

HENRI



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapter Synopsis:

Brother Bart explains what life at the abbey will be like for Micah. Bart tells Micah that he must go to school and sing in the choir. Micah is offhand and confident. Henri is taken aback by his blasphemy. Brother Bart relates his motto to the boys: *Dum vivimus, vivamus*— While we live, let us live—a direct contrast the choirmaster’s “*Memento mori*,” Remember death.

As Micah becomes accustomed to living at the abbey he continues to brag about his adventures in Paris and about how he was almost hanged. He makes disparaging remarks about life at the abbey. In response, Henri tries to impress Micah with the grandeur of the cathedral. Micah’s singing voice takes on a new quality in the cathedral and he is told he has the potential to become a solo boy. Micah immediately boasts to the other boys who promptly show him what they think of his claims by dumping Micah in the cesspit. Henri jumps in after Micah.

Vocabulary: refectory, troubadour, tunic, illuminator, scriptorium, lector, cowl, contemplation, profane, carrel, brazier, crypt, scaffold, astrolabe, dormitory, hornbook, probation

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: Micah spends a lot of time in these early chapters bragging about himself and his abilities. Invite your students to discuss bragging and self-confidence. What is the difference between being self-confident and bragging? When does self-confidence become excessive? When does it become arrogance? Why do they think Micah brags so much?

After Reading

1. Henri’s most prized possession is his father’s astrolabe. Research this important navigational tool.
2. There are many different kinds of intelligences. Both Micah and Henri are clever in their own ways. Explain using examples from these two chapters.
3. After the boys dump Micah into the cesspit, Henri jumps in after him. Why do you think Henri does this?
4. Micah is a braggart. List some of his exaggerations and lies. Make sure you use direct examples from the novel to support your claims.

A Challenge: For your more advanced students ask them to compare Henri’s astrolabe to Micah’s lute. What does each of these instruments say about their respective owners?

Comparing Chapters

In these two chapters, the author sets the stage by continuing to introduce key characters, settings and situations. Compare the two chapters using the following graphic organizer.

	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
What is the setting?		
What characters are important in the chapter?		
What is the main event in the chapter?		
How does Micah feel in the chapter?		
How does Henri feel in the chapter?		

Chapters 5 and 6

Chapter Synopsis

Arlo, one of the choirboys, rescues Micah and Henri from the cesspit and throws them into the river to get clean. The icy water makes Henri very ill. Henri is sent to the infirmary where he succumbs to a great fever. When he regains consciousness, Micah feeds him some soup. Henri explains the mysterious ability of Medicina the cat, who senses when people are near death and stays with them. Micah confesses to Henri the real story of his own close call with the hangman. He ashamedly admits that he was terrified and that Brother Bart had rescued him from certain death.

Henri is astonished to find himself becoming friends with someone so different from himself. When Henri is finally released from the infirmary he learns to his dismay that Micah has taught the other choirboys a humorous street song. He feels left out and alone again. Later that night Henri cannot sleep and wanders around the abbey. As he reaches the crypt he hears Micah, who has followed him. This is the beginning of the two friends playing all sorts of games and inventing Ghost Jump.

Vocabulary: limbo, kyrie, Eucharist, mimic, menace, sacristan, chalice, labyrinth, last rites

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: A good friend often brings out characteristics in us that we didn't know we had. Invite your students to talk about how friends shape our personalities. Ask them to think about Micah and Henri and, based on what we know about them so far, predict how Micah might change Henri.

After Reading

1. Give evidence to prove that Henri is frail.
 2. Why do you think Micah told Henri the truth about being arrested in Paris?
 3. Brother Bart's rosebush and Medicina the cat have special, almost mystical, powers. What are they?
 4. Both the cat and the rosebush are viewed as ugly and worthless when they are initially brought to the abbey. What do you own that is special to you, but seems ugly and worthless to others?
 5. Explain the situation that made Henri feel separate and alienated from his new friend. How did Micah demonstrate his caring for Henri?
-

Descriptive Writing

Deborah Ellis uses a lot of descriptive language in *A Company of Fools*. She is particularly adept at incorporating the five senses—sight, sound, taste, touch and smell—in her descriptions. Using the organizer below, find examples in the text where Ellis uses the five senses in her descriptions.

SMELL	SIGHT	SOUND	TASTE	TOUCH

Chapters 7 and 8

Chapter Synopsis

Henri, Micah and the boys share an intense dislike for the prior. Micah and Henri play a prank on him by placing a bitter herb in the communion wine and, later, by replacing a roast pig with a live one at an important banquet. Much to the prior's chagrin and the boys' delight, the pig causes chaos in front of the visiting Bishop.

The boys of St. Luc's choir are to perform at a fair in Paris. Micah brags about his worldly knowledge of the big city and the boys challenge him to bring back a bag full of money. Micah and Henri manage to escape the procession and Micah leads Henri through the maze of city sights. The two boys sing to the crowds and are rewarded with coins. They buy themselves pies, which they eat as they wander through the market, taking in the wondrous sights and sounds of the city. After seeing a peddler selling amulets to ward off the plague, they manage to rejoin the procession just as it is turning into the abbey.

Vocabulary: chronicle, communion, procession, Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans and Cistercians, exhilarating, litter, leprosy, amulet, St. Nicholas Day, Moses, relic, reliquary, benediction, compline, Requiem, mummers, introits,

Guiding Questions

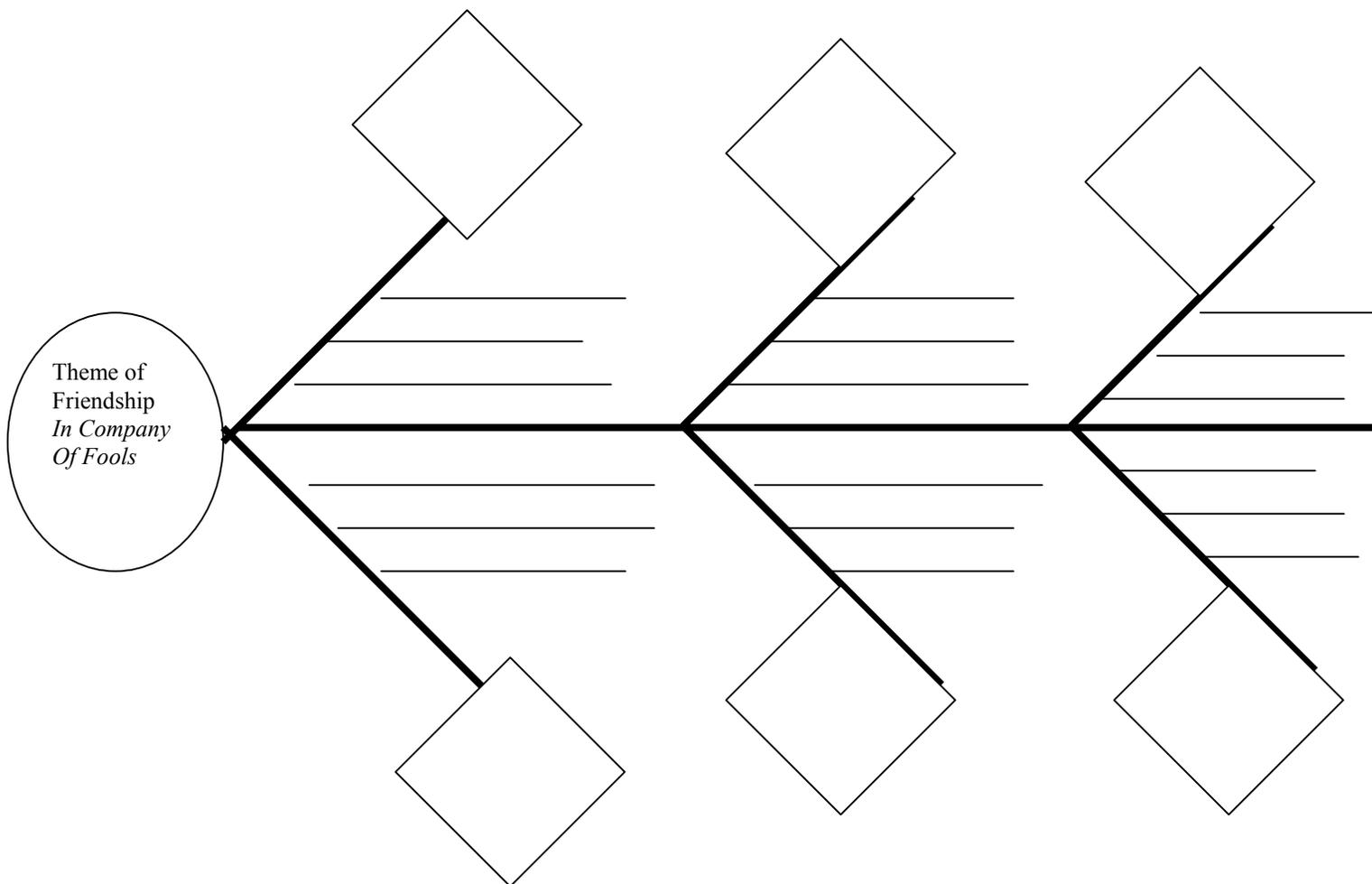
Before Reading: Henri and Micah play a lot of tricks on the monks. Invite students to talk about their own experiences with practical joking and trickery. Ask them to relate an incident where they were the executors of a joke. Ask some to talk about a time that they were the recipients of a practical joke. Ask them to think about the tricks that Henri and Micah play on the monks. Why do they think Micah and Henri play these tricks? How do they feel once they've carried out a successful trick on the monks?

After Reading

1. What is the prior's nickname? Why do you think he has earned that name?
 2. Why did Brother Bart become a monk? What word describes a person who does not believe in war or fighting?
 3. Give two reasons why you think that Brother Bart did not tell on the boys for the pig incident.
 4. What is leprosy? What is the incidence of leprosy today?
 5. Put yourself in Henri's shoes. Would you have gone with Micah to have fun on the streets of Paris? Why or why not?
-

Fishbone Organizer: Exploring the Theme of Friendship

A fishbone organizer helps explore complex issues in a text. It is often used to problem solve or to identify and organize various factors surrounding a topic. Use the fishbone organizer below to look at the theme of friendship in *A Company of Fools*. Use the boxes to note the different ways friendship is explored in the novel. List specific references from the novel in the lines below.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapter Synopsis

The plague arrives in Paris. At first the only changes it brings to the abbey are extra masses and prayers. The boys discuss various theories about the plague and its manifestations. Micah and Henri begin their very lucrative amulet business. All the boys trade their favourite possessions for amulets that will protect them from the plague. A procession of pilgrims comes to the abbey. The pilgrims are on their way to see the Pope at Avignon and are led by Gaston's father, the Marquis. The boys do a brisk business selling amulets to the crowd before the pilgrims leave, taking Gaston with them.

Vocabulary: blasphemy, crucifer, pestilence, pilgrims, opportunists, Marquis

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: Micah and Henri sell their magical amulets to the students at St. Luc's, who wish to ward off the Plague. Invite students to discuss the use of charms and amulets to ward off misfortune or bring good fortune. Invite them to tell the class about their own good luck charms.

After Reading

1. How does the arrival of the plague change life for Henri?
2. Describe some of the ideas that people believed about the plague?
3. What was the real source of the plague, and how did it spread?
4. In the market, Henri hears about more "cures" for the plague. List the cures that Henri is told.
5. Micah and Henri sell many of their "magical" amulets to the pilgrims. What lies do you think they told to increase the sales of their amulets?
6. Why do you think Gaston looks "a little afraid" when he goes off with his father and the pilgrims?

Note to Students: Abracadabra is a very ancient word that has been used since the second century. It was thought to have magical properties and was used to appeal to the spirits to aid the user. It was written on both stone and paper to ward off disease and misfortune. There were very specific instructions on how to wear this incantation. It had to be worn for nine days, folded into a cross, suspended from the neck by a strip of linen and had to be long enough to rest on the stomach. Before sunrise on the tenth day it was to be thrown into a stream that was running east. In Medieval times, the amulets that Micah and Henri made were folded to hide the written word, sewn with white thread and worn around the neck.

O-W-L

O-W-L is a strategy that stands for Observe—Wonder—Link to Life. Based on reader response theory, O-W-L teaches readers to read carefully, ask questions and make connections between what they are reading and their own personal experiences.

Use the O-W-L organizer below and have your students complete it based on what they read in chapters 9 and 10.

What I OBSERVED about this chapter _____

I WONDER _____

A LINK to my own experience is _____

Chapters 11 and 12

Chapter Synopsis

Pope Clement orders the monks to travel to Paris in devout processions in order to help those afflicted by the plague. The glimpses of the medieval city in the grips of the disease are very disturbing. Smoke is everywhere. Fires are burning, hawkers are selling a variety of things to protect the healthy, and an entire family is boarded up in their house. Lepers are blamed for the plague and stoned by angry crowds. Through Henri's eyes and pen we see the carts of dead bodies and the death dance of a plague victim who dies right in front of the two boys.

Devout processions become a regular feature of the boys' lives. They all have theories about the usefulness of this practice. Arlo believes they will end the plague, Henri knows they are simply obeying the pope's orders and Micah thinks they are useless. The prior tells people it is their finery and fashions, even their fancy shoes that have caused the plague. Vanity is the sin that has caused their suffering. He creates a bonfire and burns the people's fine clothes and trinkets—symbols of human pride and error. Finally the plague descends on the abbey and some of the monks fall ill. The rosebush that Brother Bart brought to the abbey begins to bloom.

Vocabulary: Pestilence, fumigators, pretension, vanity, fraud

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: In these chapters we learn that when Brother Marc gets a disturbing picture in his head, he paints the image because, once it is flat on canvas, it loses its ability to frighten him. Similarly, when Henri is overcome with fear or grief he writes down what's bothering him. "Writing horrible stuff down takes the horror away," he explains. Invite students to explore this concept. Why does writing something down or drawing a picture of some horrid image sometimes make it less fearsome and troubling?

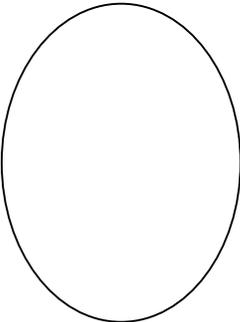
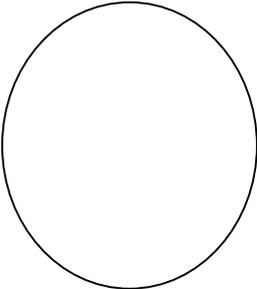
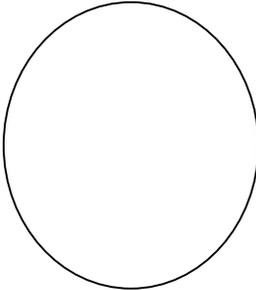
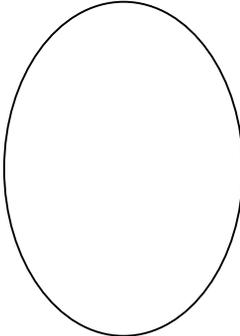
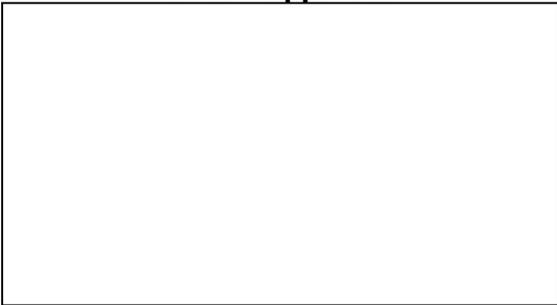
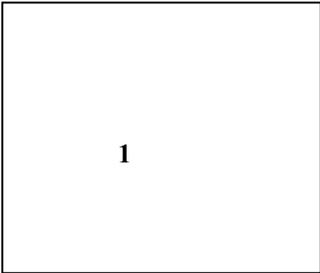
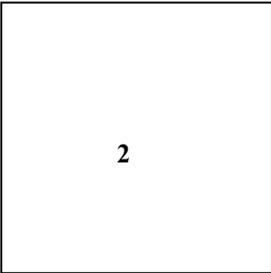
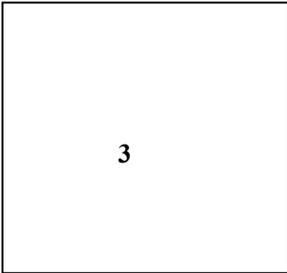
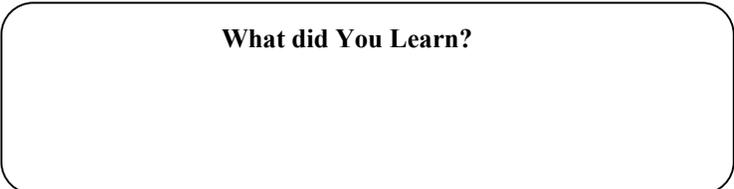
After Reading

1. Why are there so many fires in the city of Paris now that the plague has arrived?
2. Who orders the processions? Why are the people of St Luc's going on processions, according to Micah?
3. What does the prior say is the cause of the plague?
4. What happens to the rosebush once the plague arrives at the abbey?

A Challenge: Look up St. Benedict on the Internet. Why did the monks carry a banner of St Benedict on their processions?

Writing a Personal Memoir

Writing is a powerful tool for Henri. It helps him make sense of the frightening world around him and gives him power. Write a paragraph or short story describing a situation or experience that you may have had or heard about. To wrap up your story, discuss how writing it down has helped you understand this experience better. Use this planning guide to organize your story.

Who?	Where?	When?	Why?
			
What Happened?			
			
 1	 2	 3	
 What did You Learn?			

Chapters 13 and 14

Chapter Synopsis

The boys are angry because the prior cancels St. Nicholas Day, which is a day of celebration and merriment set aside for the choirboys. They rebel against the prior's decision and hold the party anyway. Micah encourages everyone to dance on the tables. The friendly monks sneak in food and the boys play a game of Ghost Jump in the crypt. Micah pretends to be the bishop and dresses in fine vestments. Henri has a great time at this clandestine party.

The next day, the boys perform a funeral mass in front of a pit of plague victims. The boys, monks and mourners are all overcome with grief and suffering. Micah begins singing a silly and comedic song and the boys join him in a merry and frivolous dance. The mourners begin to laugh. The boys are pleased that they have brought good cheer to those afflicted by so much pain and suffering.

The abbot enlists Brother Bart and the boys on a special mission. They create the "Company of Fools." Costumes are prepared. Henri is given the role of jester and Micah becomes the Pope. Through creative skits poking fun at themselves, the Company of Fools inspires laughter in the crowds that they draw. The performers all feel a sense of relief at their ability to do something positive. The company goes out every day and Henri and the boys enjoy every minute of it.

Vocabulary: plot, climax, resolution, patron saint, cloisters disdain, irreverence, sanctions, lamentations, town crier

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: Read the prologue out loud to your class. In the prologue, Henri writes that he wants to tell us about "the wondrous and sorrowful events that took place during the time of the Pestilence." The theme of duality is a central one in this novel. Good things happen simultaneously with bad. Ask students to discuss this idea. How can something be good and bad at the same time? Invite them to talk about an event in their lives that was shaped by both good and bad forces.

After Reading

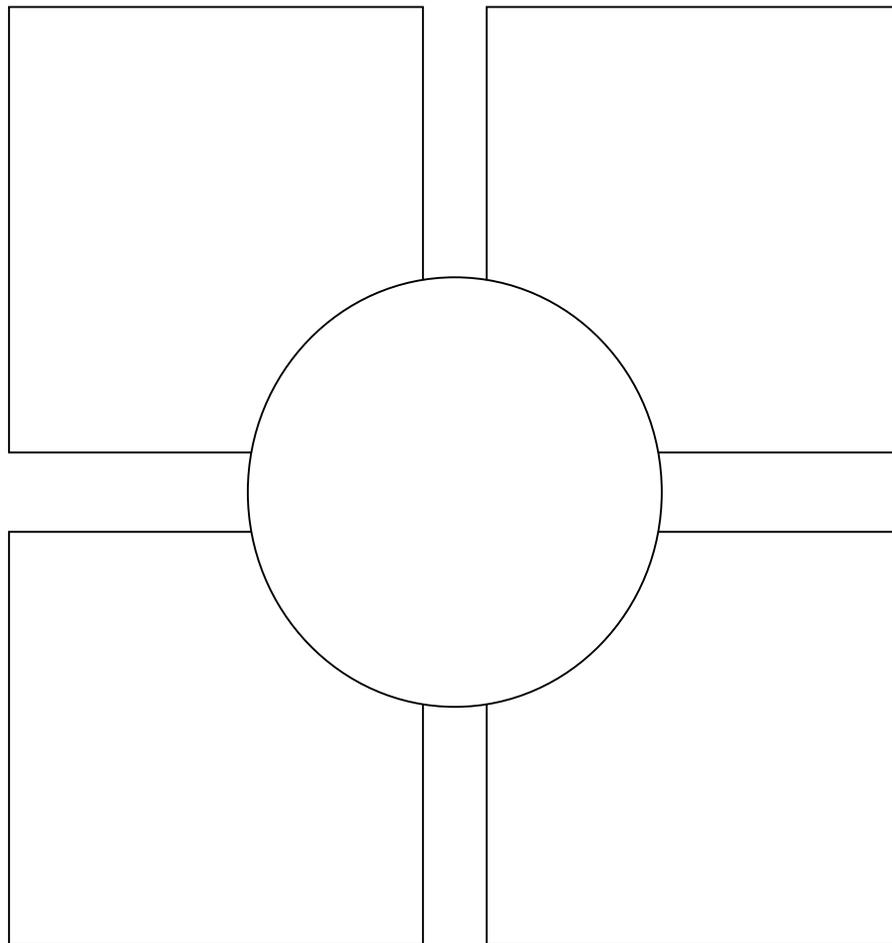
1. Why is Arlo so angry that the feast is cancelled?
 2. Which explanation for the importance of St. Nicholas do you think would be the most meaningful for Micah? Why?
 3. Why does the Pope cancel the processions?
 4. Why do you think the people begin laughing and dancing at Micah's antics the funeral service?
 5. How does Brother Marc's painting of grinning skeletons reflect what is going on in the novel?
-

Place Mat Activity

Place Mat involves groups of students working alone and together around a single piece of paper to simultaneously involve all members. The paper is divided up into pieces based on the number of members in a group (usually 4), with square or circle placed in the centre.

Have each member write 3 or 4 points about how the saying “laughter is the best medicine” applies to the novel *Company of Fools*.

Once they have come up with their 3 or 4 points, have each student circle or make a star beside the point that he or she believes is the most important to consider. Students then take turns reading the list aloud. The group listens attentively in order to decide the most important issue. Each key idea is written in the circle in the middle. Continue in this manner until each student has had a turn. When finished, one person acts as spokesperson for the group. This person reads out the points in the middle box for the whole class.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapter Synopsis

Micah and Henri, along with the rest of the Company of Fools go to the Hotel Dieu, the largest hospital in Paris. They seek to bring relief and comfort to the sick and dying. What Micah witnesses at the hospital is almost too much for him until he finds one small, very sick girl. Micah begins to sing to the young child. The girl's father—Lord Morley— tries to pay Micah for his beautiful singing, but Brother Bart does not accept the money.

Lord Morley arrives at the abbey a week later. He believes that Micah's singing miraculously cured his daughter, Azura, and wants to proclaim Micah a miracle throughout the country. He gives the abbot and the prior an entire estate for the privilege of spreading word of the miracle. The prior becomes angry at the blasphemy of this request, but the abbot accepts the gift of the estate and tells Lord Morley that his people have permission to spread the word of the miracle if they wish.

Lord Morley sends men to escort the Company of Fools on their sojourns. Trumpeters gather huge crowds and tell people that Micah's voice has miraculous healing powers. People demand to hear Micah sing. These new events change Micah. Brother Bart reminds Micah that he is only a boy and that he cannot really cure the plague. Micah, however, has begun to believe he really can work miracles.

Vocabulary: morose, catacombs, blasphemy, pox, Feast of the Annunciation

Guiding Questions

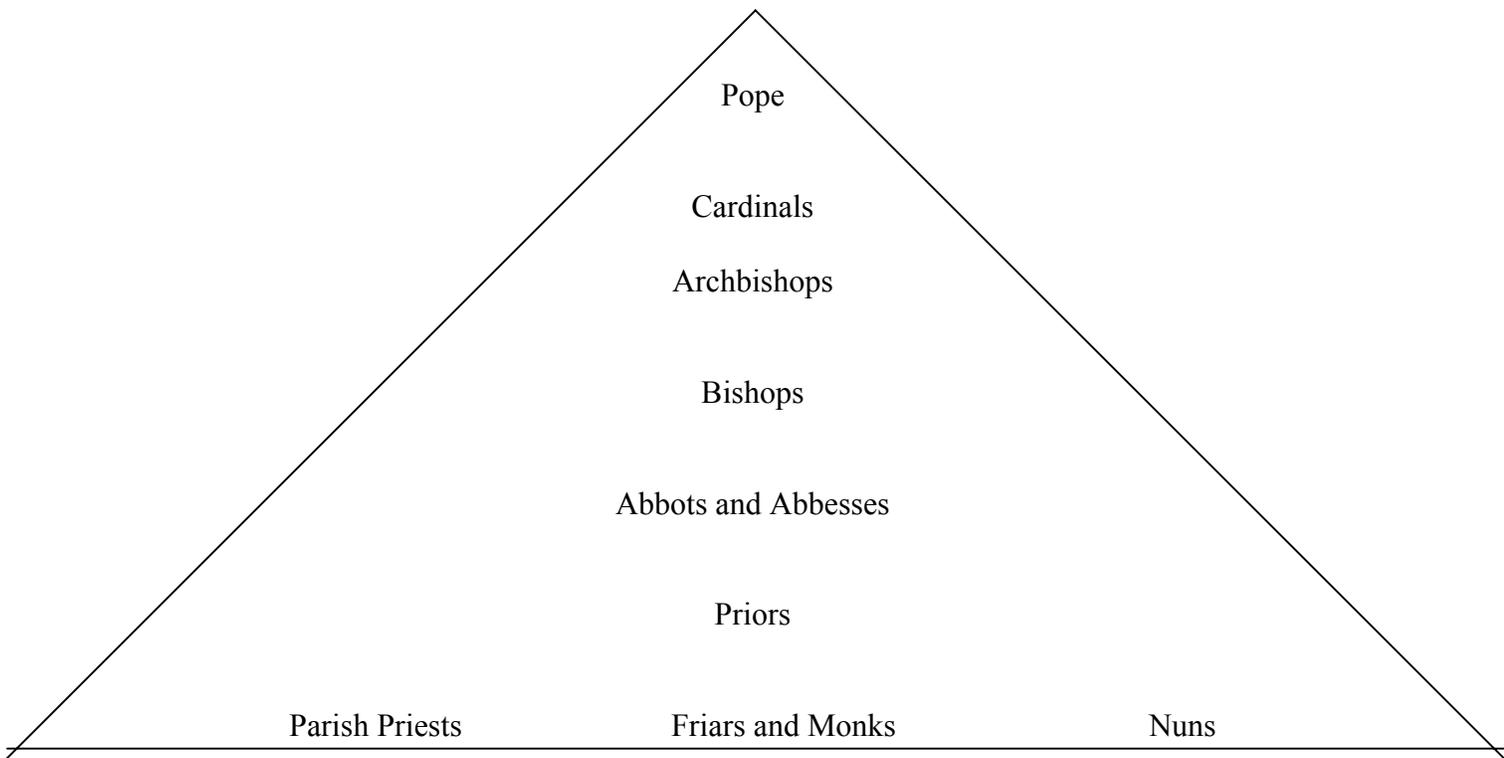
Before Reading: In these chapters, Micah is told that he has cured a young girl from the plague. Based on what you know of Micah's personality so far, how do you think he will react to such news? How might Henri and Brother Bart react?

After Reading

1. Why does Henri choose to stay at the Hotel Dieu and perform for the ill even though he knows that Micah wants to leave?
 2. Even though Micah's singing cannot really cure the people from the plague, it is special and does have a positive affect on the people of Paris. What does Micah's voice do for Lord Morley, when he is overcome with fear and grief at his daughter's sick bed?
 3. How does Micah change after Lord Morley's pronouncement?
 4. Why does Micah become angry with Henri?
 5. Why does Micah lash out at Brother Bart?
-

Pyramid of Power

During the middle ages, society was organized in a strict hierarchy based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. People knew their places and did not cross boundaries. People would have to answer to those above them on the pyramid of power



Micah shocked the others by his ignorance and/or flagrant disregard for his superiors. Give examples from the book to support this statement.

Create a modern day pyramid of power for the government of your country, province/state, county/region.

Chapters 17 and 18

Chapter Synopsis

Anger is everywhere. Micah is angry with Brother Bart and Henri. Brother Bart is angry with Micah, the abbot and Lord Morley. Henri is angry with Micah. Tension grows among the choirboys and turns to fighting as the boys tease Micah about his inability to raise a fly from the dead. Brother Thomas arrives to stop the boys fighting and to tell them that the abbot has been taken by the plague.

After the abbot's funeral, Henri sees the prior scurry off to meet with Lord Morley. The crowds outside the abbey grow unruly waiting for Micah to come and sing to them. Micah has not forgiven Henri and shoves him off the cart on the way to Paris. Only Micah is able to silence the crowds of desperate and suffering people they find in the middle of the stinking and wretched city. Micah sings like an angel and gives the people hope. Morley's men are effective at gathering great crowds and inducing them to pay tributes to Micah. Brother Bart and Brother Jude object, but to no avail. The coins and offerings fill the cart.

Micah's singing is interrupted by a group of Flagellants, who believe that self-punishment proves their devotion to God and, thus, will prevent them from getting the plague. Henri is terribly upset by their fierce and self-punishing behaviour, but is comforted by Micah as they ride home together in the cart.

Vocabulary: poultice, symptoms, bloodletting, alms, flagellants

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: Anger is an important part of these chapters, especially in regards to Micah and Henri's friendship. Invite your students to discuss anger and friendship. Can we be angry with someone and still be friends with him or her? Can anger ever have a positive effect on a relationship?

After Reading

1. What exactly provokes the fight between Oswin and Micah?
2. What do the monks use to disinfect the infirmary? What products and procedures do we use today?
3. What do you think Brother Sebastien means when he tells Henri to stand by Micah, regardless of what happens?
4. How does Henri respond to the Flagellants? Why do you think the author introduces them at this time in the novel?
5. Micah, Henri and Brother Bart are angry at each other. Who do you feel is most justified in his anger? Use the text to provide concrete examples that support your argument.

Corridor of Voices

Corridor of Voices is a drama technique used to explore characters' internal thoughts and feelings. Following some warm up drama activities, the teacher presents a situation or reads a passage from the text under study. Students are given time to reflect on the character's thoughts and responses to the situation.

Students then divide into two lines and face each other forming a long "corridor." Another student plays the role of the character and slowly walks through the "corridor." As he or she passes each student these students voice possible emotion, reactions, ideas, and thoughts experienced by the named character. (Sometimes ideas get repeated, giving that idea or reaction more weight or importance.) The desired result is a "collage" of comments called out spontaneously but separately as the character slowly walks through the "corridor."

Have students perform a Corridor of Voices exploring the intense anger in these past two chapters. Name one student as Micah. The rest of the class—the corridor—must voice his reaction to the anger he is experiencing.

Chapters 19 and 20

Chapter Synopsis

Micah wants to keep the money and gifts that the people of Paris have given to him. Henri doesn't understand Micah's greed and his anger over this further distances him from Micah. Brother Bart refuses a cart for their next journey to the city but the prior provides them with a large cart to carry all the offerings and tributes from the people in the city. Micah hoards the coins dropped directly onto his cart and hides them in the abbey.

Rafe—the youngest of the choirboys—wakes up crying in the night and Henri sees Micah comforting him. All the boys have bad dreams and have begun to believe that the world is ending. Henri clutches his father's astrolabe for comfort at night. With the world's future looking so grim, Henri ponders his own. He expresses his desire to go to university to become an historian and observes how people who chronicle history shape it.

The prior drastically changes the Company of Fools. Micah is given an angelic robe to wear and a fine wagon to ride. The other boys and the monks are merely there to support Micah with background singing. This new format increases the offerings from the people. The prior gives Micah a gold medallion. This furthers the tension between the boys.

One night, Rafe develops symptoms of the plague. Micah goes to sing to him and bring him comfort. One by one the others join him. Rafe is taken to the infirmary where he dies three days later.

Vocabulary: Troubadour, gallows, perplexed, scapegoat, anguish

Guiding Questions

Before Reading The flagellants terrify Henri when he sees them. What does Brother Bart suggest to handle his nervousness? Invite students to share with the class instances where they have been extremely nervous. What types of coping strategies did they use to help them feel better?

After Reading

1. What arguments does Micah use to justify keeping all the money and tributes given by the dying people of Paris?
 2. Create a scene where you use logical and reasonable arguments to get a raise in your allowance. Work with a partner.
 3. What is greed? Who is guilty of greed in these chapters? Support your answer with examples from the book.
-

PMI (Plus/Minus/Most Interesting):

A Thinking Organizer

Note to Teacher:

PMI's are connected to critical thinking and help students make wise choices. Simply put the P stands for Plus—why something is a good idea or decision— M stands for Minus—why something won't work or is an unwise decision—and the I stands for Interesting—neither good nor bad. PMI's help us thoroughly analyze a position, idea or issue. Normally, our natural reaction to an idea is to like or dislike it, to approve or disapprove. If we like an idea it is very unnatural to look for the negative or Minus aspects. It is equally unnatural to look for the positive aspects in an idea that we dislike. A good PMI helps us overcome this narrow mindedness. It help enlarge the view of a situation and prevent a purely emotional reaction to an idea.

Bother Bart and Micah disagree about taking money and tributes from the sick and dying people of Paris. Using the PMI format to analyze this statement: It is wrong for Micah to take money for his singing.

Plus	Minus	Interesting

Chapters 21 and 22

Chapter Synopsis

The boys are devastated by Rafe’s death, especially Micah, who realizes that he does not possess special powers of healing. Henri hides in the cupboard when Micah goes to tell the prior he no longer wants to sing. The prior gets angry with Micah and threatens to charge him with heresy, blasphemy and black magic. He threatens to have Micah tortured and burned at the stake. The prior locks Micah away from the other boys. Henri tells Brother Bart all he has heard and Brother Bart realizes just how dangerous the prior has become.

Brother Bart and the boys come up with a plan. During the next procession, just as Micah prepares to sing, Henri slips out of the choir and loses himself in the crowd. He tells people that Micah is a fake. The crowd does not take long to turn on Micah with anger and violence. The prior threatens the crowd, as the monks and choirboys do their best to escape the ugly riot. A rock hits the prior and renders him unconscious. Brother Bart and Henri save the prior by pulling him onto the wagon. It is too much for Micah. His laughter turns to tears and he sobs into Brother Bart’s arms on the way home to the abbey.

Vocabulary: heresy, inquisition

Guiding Questions

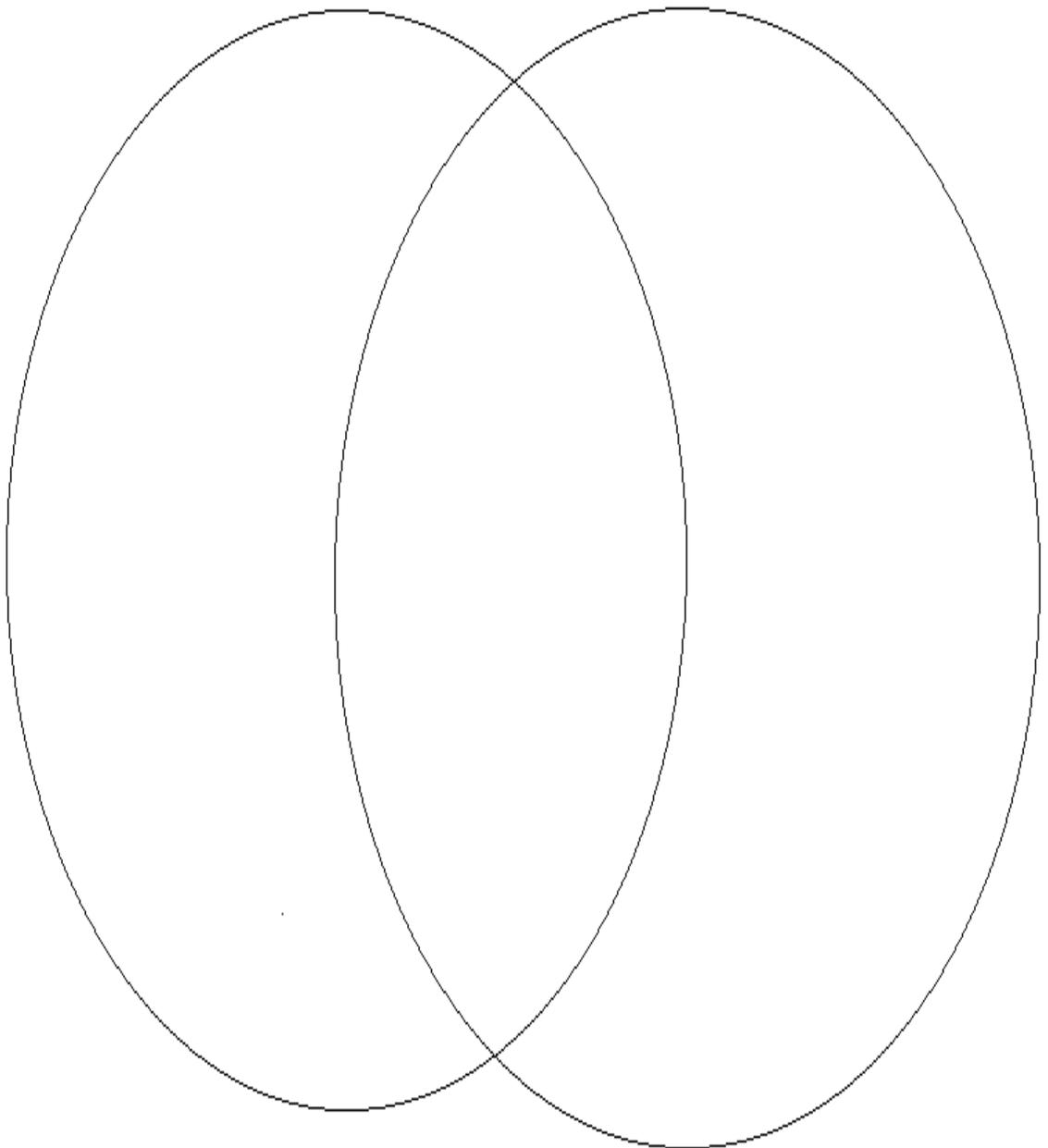
Before Reading: In the novel, many people stand up for their beliefs, but at times people’s actions and opinions are swayed by those around them. Invite your students to discuss this issue of peer pressure and crowd conformity.

After Reading

1. Micah finally stands up to the prior and refuses to be part of his greedy plans. He tells him that he will stop singing. How does the prior “persuade” Micah to keep singing and bringing in valuables to the abbey?
 2. One theme of this novel is good vs. evil. Brother Bart personifies goodness, while the prior personifies evil. Give examples that show this contrast.
 3. Why does Micah cry after the incident in Paris?
-

Comparing 2 Similar Scenes

Micah's experience performing with the Company of Fools is completely different in Chapter 22 (pp 168-172) than it is in Chapter 14, their first performance (pp 112-115). Using the Venn diagram below, compare the two processions.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapter Synopsis

The boys relax, because the prior is bedridden—even the Plague seems to be waning. Brother Bart and Micah spend time walking and talking. Micah decides to go out of the abbey as “The Company of Fools” one last time to “set things right.”

The next day Micah and Henri spend a perfect day together—swimming, fishing, and even playing Ghost Jump. In the morning Micah is gone. He leaves his lute for Henri. Henri feels abandoned and betrayed. Brother Bart helps him through this difficult time. The plague leaves the abbey after many monks have succumbed. The prior chokes on a chicken bone and dies. Henri notes that the rosebush has stopped blooming and Medicina returns. The plague has left the abbey. St. Luc’s is lucky—they have enough stores of food to survive and monks and choirboys to carry on. Other abbeys have not been so lucky.

Brother Sebastien and Henri observe the many lessons the plague has taught them including how to deal with the mysteries of this world and the things they don’t understand. Henri is hopeful mankind has learned a great lesson from the plague: how we, as survivors, have a responsibility to look after one another and learn from the catastrophe of the plague. Finally Henri records his best wishes for Micah — wherever he may be.

Vocabulary: resolution, mitre, conclave, retribution

Guiding Questions

Before Reading: In these chapters Micah wants to return to Paris with The Company of Fools so that he can “set things right.” What do you suppose he means by this? How can Micah set things right with the people of Paris?

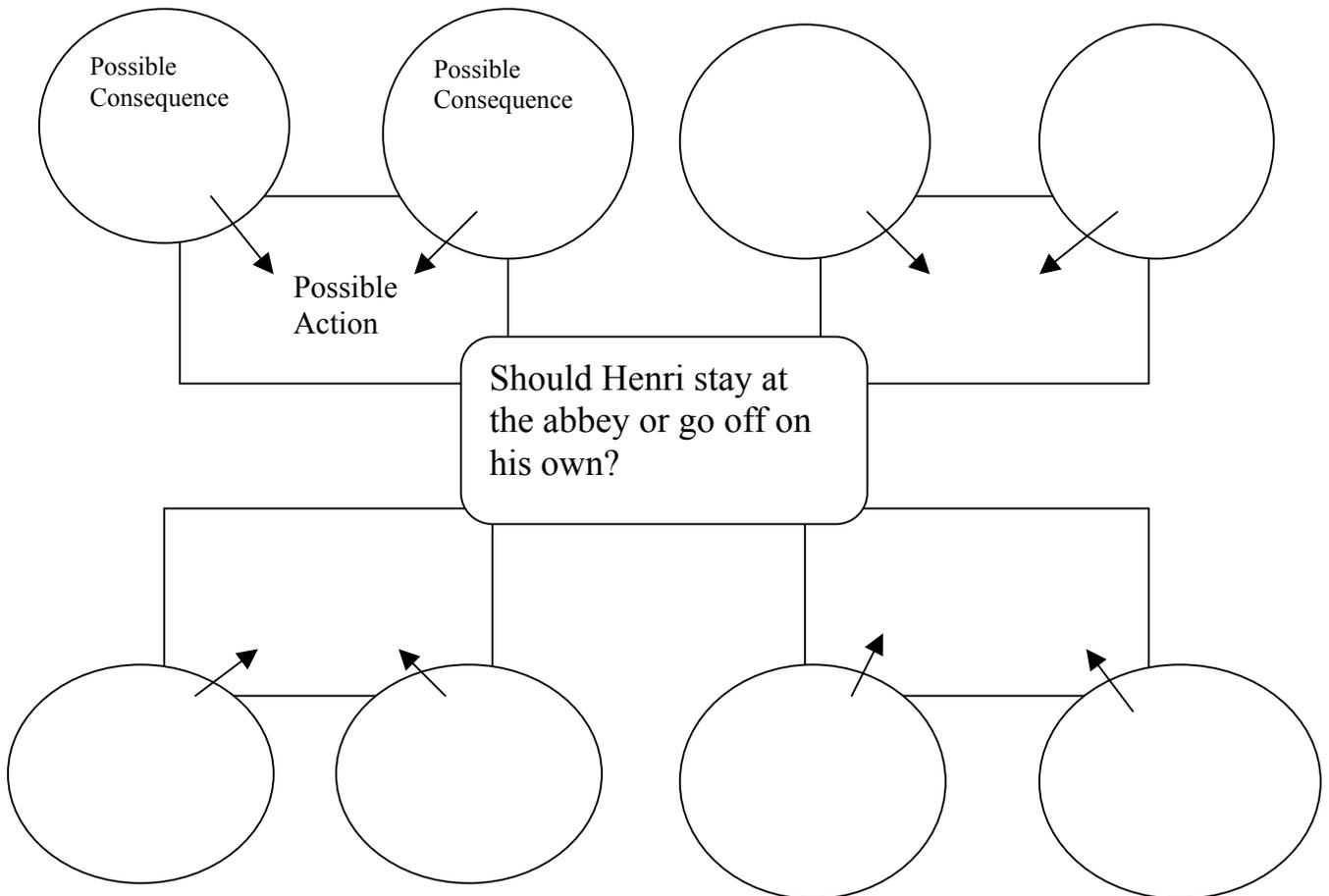
After Reading

1. How did Micah “make things right”?
 2. Micah and Henri spend a whole day together having fun. How would you spend the day with your best friend?
 3. What would you leave as a “good-bye” to a special friend and why?
 4. How does Henri feel after Micah’s departure?
-

Making Decisions

In these chapters, Henri must decide whether he should stay at the abbey or go off on his own. Like Henri, we all have to make difficult decisions. Whenever we have a serious decision to make, the best thing to do is to look at the choices and the consequences of each possible action. Use the organizer to help Henri weigh his alternatives.

In each rectangle, write one possible action for Henri. In the ovals around each rectangle, write two possible consequences for each. An example is done for you.



Section II

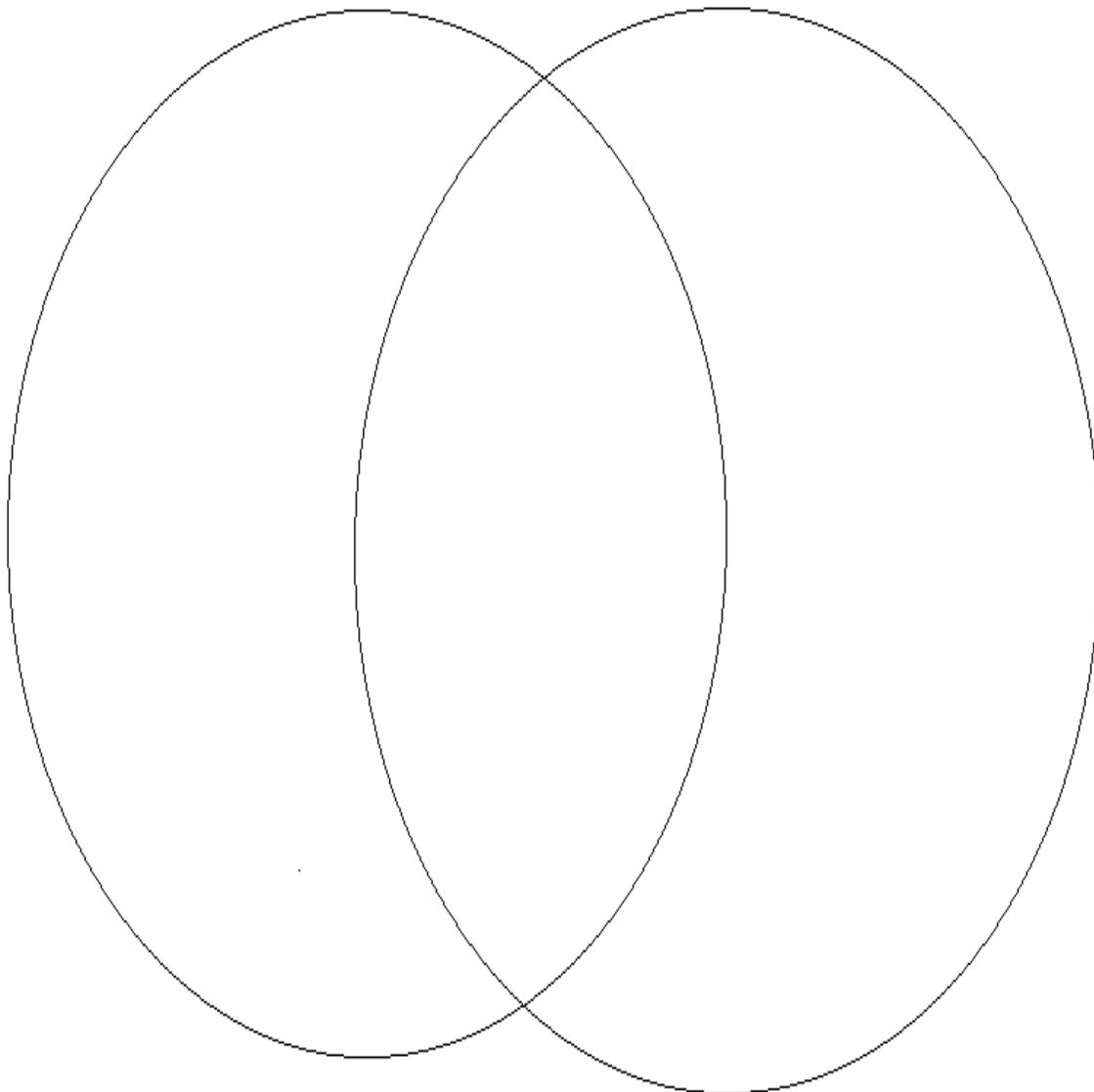
Novel Ideas for Every Classroom

Comparison Essay Part I: Character Analysis
Comparison Essay Part II: Writing A Comparison Essay
PMI: Character Study
Character Study: A Guided Writing Assignment
Venn Diagram for Character Study: A Guided Writing Assignment
Essay Questions
Concept Attainment Lesson: Introducing the Concept of Metaphors
Data Set for Concept Attainment Lesson on Metaphors
Match the Monk
Drama Performance Assignment
Drama Performance Rubric
Drama Tableau Assignment
Tableau Student Worksheet
Tableau Rubric

Comparison Essay Part I:

Character Analysis

Select 2 characters from the novel for comparison. Use the Venn diagram below to help organize the similarities and differences between these 2 characters.



Character Comparison Part II: Writing a Comparison Essay

Using the information that you collected in part I of this exercise, write a comparison essay about your two characters. Use the following outline to help organize your essay.

Paragraph 1

Introduce the two characters that you wish to compare

Paragraph 2

Write a detailed
description of character
A

Paragraph 3

Write a detailed
description of character B

Paragraph 4

Outlines similarities
and striking
differences between
characters A
and B

Paragraph 5

Write a conclusion that sums up the two characters two have compared.

Include at least one of the following:

Which character would you most like to meet and why?

- In what ways have these characters made the book interesting for you?
- Relate a personal experience. How would these characters react to this experience?

PMI: Character Study

Using the list and Venn diagram below to sort these traits into characteristics that are “Plus,” “Minus” and “Interesting.” Be prepared to defend your placement.

Use “Plus” for those positive character traits—ones that you admire in others and yourself.

Use “Minus: for negative traits that you would not like your friends to possess

Use “Interesting” traits that can be both positive and negative

Character Traits

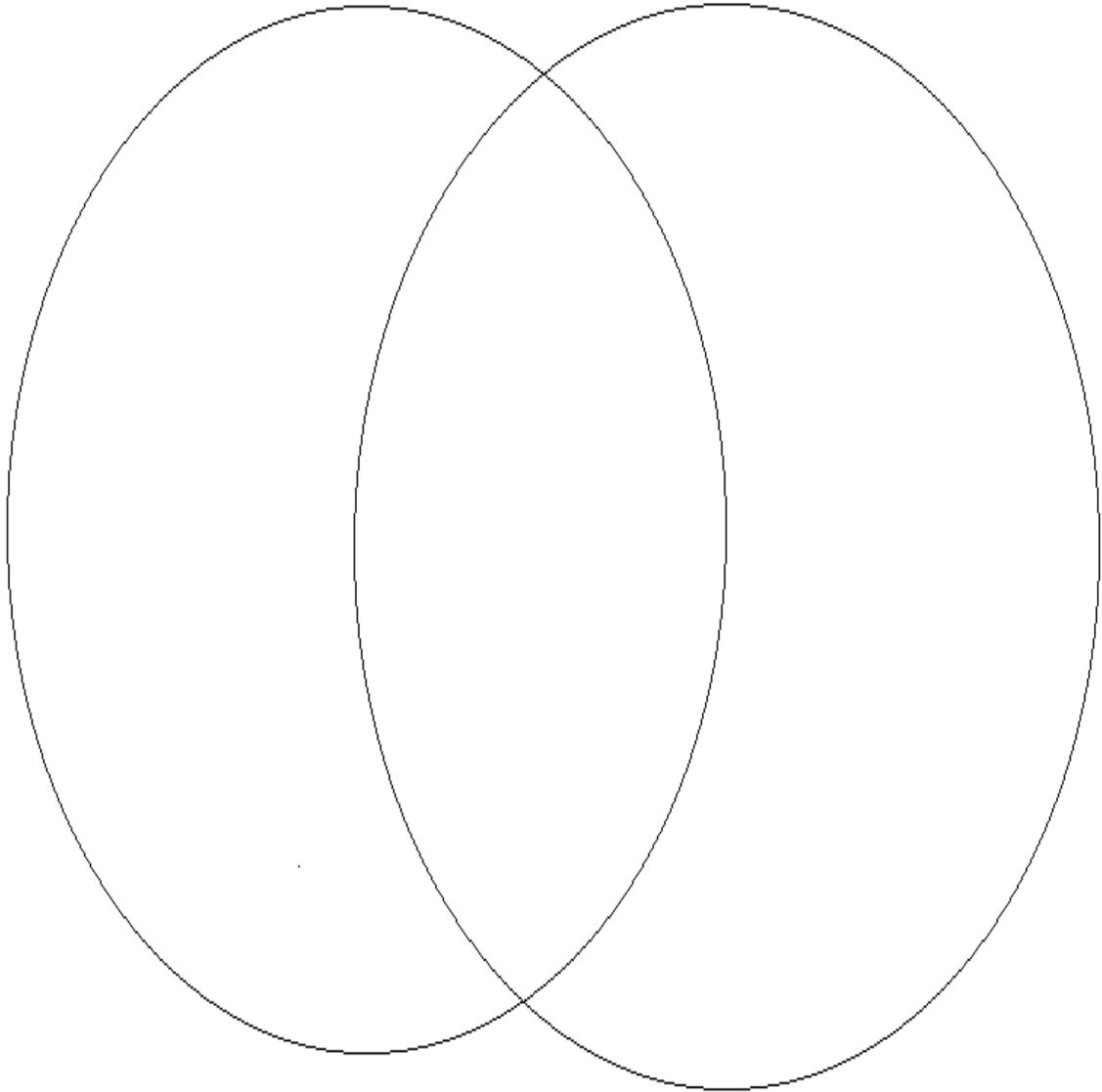
Respectful	Humility	Imaginative
Responsible	Serious	Inventive
Honest	Brave	Creative
Empathetic	Humorous	Independent
Fair	Resourceful	Studious
Showing Initiative	Stubborn	Intelligent
Persevering	Gullible	Mischievous
Integrity	Caring	Friendly
Courageous	Loyal	Adventurous
Optimistic	Carefree	Hard-working
Selfish	Unselfish	Timid
Generous	Self-Confident	Shy
Bold	Daring	Mean
Lazy	Busy	Patriotic
Fun-loving	Successful	Dreamer
Happy	Positive	Negative
Disagreeable	Conceited	Leader
Demanding	Bossy	Gentle
Loving	Proud	Wild
Messy	Neat	Joyful
Cooperative	Ambitious	Quiet
Witty	Curious	Determined
Energetic	Cheerful	Calm
Mannerly	Rude	

Venn Diagram

Plus

Interesting

Minus



Character Study: *A Company of Fools*

A Guided Essay Writing Assignment

Choose a character from *A Company of Fools* and three character traits from the list on page 42 that this character possesses.

First Paragraph: Introduce your character. Pretend that the reader does not know anything about the character. State the three traits that you wish to discuss with reference to the character.

Paragraph two: Discuss first trait. Use direct examples from the book to prove that your character possesses or lacks this trait.

Paragraph three: Discuss second trait. As above, paraphrase or quote examples from the text.

Paragraph four: Discuss third trait. Support with proof from the novel.

Paragraph five: Conclusion. Tie the ideas together in two or three general statements. Write something personal or reflective about the character or the traits.

You may wish to draw your character in a situation that represents the trait you have written about.

Essay Questions

1. *A Company of Fools* contains many examples of people running away from their troubles. Give examples from the book as well as from your own experience to support the statement: running away never solves anything.

Henri states: “I used to think that the boy who would be my friend would share my love of books. I imagined we would discuss philosophy and poetry. My friend turned out to be a boy who was rougher than rough, who couldn’t read a word, and would sooner balance a book on his head during a dance than learn what was inside (46). Explore the theme of friendship in *A Company of Fools*.

2. In the novel *A Company of Fools*, there are many instances in which people stand up for their beliefs. There are other situations in which people’s actions and opinions are swayed by those around them. Write an essay that explores the topic of peer pressure and crowd behaviour as it relates to the novel and to your own experiences.

3. “Monk, scholar, chronicler—you have to live with the contradictions in this chronicle. You have no choice. I am writing it and the person who controls the ideas. I may be small and insignificant in my self but my words have authority. They will settle into your mind, and you will think of me and my tale while you go about the other duties of your life. I am just a choirboy and when you find and read this, I am probably long dead. But my words live on. That is power. (154)’ What is Henri’s power? Discuss.

Other possible essay topics include:

- Humour
- Morality
- Overcoming Adversity
- Redemption

Concept Attainment Lesson:

Introducing the Concept of Metaphors

Kids love playing the “game” of Concept Attainment. Concept Attainment lessons are designed to create a situation in which students use inductive thinking to narrow down the characteristics that define a concept. Research shows that it is important for students to actively construct knowledge instead of passively absorbing it. Concept Attainment is a process that encourages them to be detectives: to analyse information, form a hypothesis and test it.

Students are given two sets of data. The first consists of a set of YES examples that succinctly and directly conform to the definition of metaphor. The second consists of a set of NO examples interspersed with YES examples.

The students are **not given** a definition of metaphor to work with.... They must come up with the characteristics that define metaphors from the YES and NO examples they are given. If the students are stymied, you may wish to clarify or extend their thinking, again, without revealing the definition.

Examples are given a few at a time to encourage the students to test their ideas. Following the data set, students are given a few “testers” that give them the opportunity to try out their hypotheses. Discussion will allow students to improve and refine their understanding of the concept.

Because the metaphor of the plague is central to the understanding of the novel, *A Company of Fools*, it is important to address this concept—new to many students. There are many examples of metaphor in the novel but we have included some very basic examples so that students have a chance to attain a clear concept of metaphor.

Examples of student hypotheses at the end of the exercise:

YES examples state that one thing is something else.

It is a comparison, but it does NOT use *like* or *as* to make the comparison.

It gives a name of one thing to another thing.

It is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally meaning one kind of object or idea is used in place of another.

YES examples suggest a likeness or analogy between two things.

Data Set for Concept Attainment Lesson on Metaphors

YES Examples

Non-text examples:

- Her father was a bear in the morning.
- “What a pig! Don’t be so greedy,” she cried.
- The eagle eye of the teacher detected gum in the student’s mouth.
- Deborah Ellis ignited the students’ imagination with her description of the Plague.

Text examples:

- “This will make a fine addition to the priest’s pile!” she yelled. “You strutting peacock (p.98)”
- “I see a flock of giant crows,” Fabian announced. (p.9)
- Death got off the ship and rode into the harbor. (p.20)
- That boy is a devil, a demon, and has no place in our community. (p.77)
- He’s just a sour old pickle. (p.90)

NO Examples

- Mom was grouchy until she got her cup of coffee
- “You ate the whole box of chocolate all by yourself?” she asked incredulously.
- The observant principal confiscated the headphones from the daydreaming student.
- We dressed Micah up like a bishop.
- I was so happy I was weeping like an infant.
- His voice was clearer than the finest bell, and sweeter than the loveliest bird.
- The crowd parted for us as the Red Sea parted for Moses.
- He put his fingers behind his head like two horns and bared his teeth.

Match the Monk

The Abbey was a well-organized community where everyone had an important role to play. The boys were often “enlisted” to help in the wide variety of activities in the Abbey.

Can you match all the monks to their jobs?

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Brother Gulian | a) In charge of religious vestments |
| 2. Brother Peter | b) In charge of wine cellar |
| 3. Brother Nestor | c) In charge of the infirmary |
| 4. Brother Sebastien | d) In charge of cesspits |
| 5. Brother James | e) In charge of gardens |
| 6. Brother Marc | f) Choirmaster |
| 7. Brother Algernon | g) Cobbler |
| 8. Brother Paul | h) Cook |
| 9. Brother Beltran | I) In charge of the washhouse |
| 10. Brother Probus | j) Latin teacher |
| 11. Brother Kenneth | k) Prepares cathedral for night service |
| 12. Brother Keith | l) In charge of almshouse |
| 13. Brother Simon | m) Assistant sacristan and illuminator |
| 14. Brother Pascal | n) In charge of ordinary clothes, tailor |
| 15. Brother Joel | o) Chief illuminator |
| 16. Brother Jude | p) Chief sculptor |
| 17. Brother Bartholomew | q) Cellarer—organized all of the Abbey’s food stores |

Application Question Ideas:

Imagine you lived in the Abbey. Name the monk and task you would most enjoy and explain why. Which role would you least enjoy? Why?

In your everyday life how are tasks divided? For example: in your school, home, province/state, country?

Answers: 1. i), 2. l), 3. g), 4. c), 5. a), 6. o), 7. n), 8. f) 9. j), 10. m), 11. b), 12. e), 13. h), 14. k), 15. p), 16. q), 17. d).

Drama Performance Assignment

Explore one of the following themes of the book *A Company of Fools* with a 5–7 minute performance. Use a combination of drama techniques that you have learned e.g. tableau, mirror technique, corridor of voices, narration, etc., in order to bring clarity to your chosen theme and bring a deeper understanding to the audience. This is not a retell.

You can put your players into a modern day scenario that explains the significance of the theme you have chosen. Take risks with your format and think “outside the box”.

Examples:

- The Prior, Brother Bart and Micah are on the TV show OPRAH! (or a TV show of your choice).
- The Plague is explained from a rat’s point of view.
- You hold a debate: Power is a necessary evil in the book *A Company of Fools*.
- News Documentary: Humour in a Crisis— Helpful or simply diverting?

Within the drama performance you should clearly identify the theme, support it with examples from the book and include the resolution from the novel.

Optional:

Inspire your audience by relating the theme to your own lives today. Pose questions that relate the themes to society today.

Here are some sample themes in the book:

Overcoming adversity

Power misused

Humour

The Plague

Drama Performance Rubric

Performance Components	1	2	3	4
Planning and Cooperation	Group has difficulty planning performance due to the lack of cooperation skills and inattention on the part of some members.	Problem solving is challenging, roles are not defined or accepted. One or two members of the group do most of the work.	Group works together and roles are shared	Group works together effectively and roles are shared equitably. New ideas are embraced and all group members feel valued.
Knowledge and Content	Performance does not refer to the theme. Ideas are not represented dramatically and transitions are unclear and jarring.	Includes a basic idea of the theme. Ideas are not all clear and transitions need more rehearsal.	Includes theme and some references to the novel. Ideas are communicated and transitions are smooth.	Theme is well represented and supported with details from the novel. Original ideas are effectively communicated and transitions are smooth
Dramatic Conventions	Character and plot are minimally presented through dialogue	Only one example of tableau, mirror technique, freeze, narrator, and audience participation are employed	Some examples of tableau, mirror technique, freeze, corridor of voices, narrator, and audience participation are woven into the performance and bring the content to life.	Many examples of tableau, mirror techniques, freeze, corridor of voices, narrator, and audience participation are creatively woven into the performance and bring the content to life.
Delivery Skills	Opening and closing are vague and leave the audience confused. Performance is partially audible and expression does not match emotion. Body language and expression rarely used to augment the content. Backs are facing the audience. Playfulness and risk-taking are not evident. Props are not employed	Opening and closing are defined. Most voices are clear and contain appropriate expression. Congruency of effect and expression is attempted. Performers use low, medium and high levels of space sporadically. Performances are usually open to the audience. Use of props is predictable and unimaginative. Playfulness and risk-taking are rarely seen.	Opening and closing are well presented. Voices are generally clear and contain expression. There is a congruency between effect, facial expression and movement. Most levels of space are occupied and most staging choices match content. Performers are open to audience. Some creative use of props. Playfulness and risk-taking are evident.	. Clear and strong opening and closing. All voices clear and contain appropriate expression, eye contact made, congruency between effect and facial expression and movement. Staging choices match content. Low, medium and high levels of space are used. Performers are always open to the audience. Creative use of props. Playfulness and risk-taking always evident

Tableau Assignment

A **tableau** is a frozen “picture” created by the students. These pictures represent an event, idea or feeling from the novel. Creating a tableau is meant to encourage discussion and reflection. Through the use of body position, posture, and expression the group members can “reflect” on a moment from the novel. Students are directed to use all the space (low, medium and high space) within the performance area. Each tableau should contain one main focal point so that the audience knows where to look and is not distracted by competing points of focus.

One further element to the tableau exercise is “thought-tracking,” which is a device used by the leader of a drama session to gain further insight into a tableau. When the leader taps individuals in a tableau on the shoulder, they speak the character's thoughts out loud.

An assortment of tableau ideas:

- Micah being washed for the first time
- The mysterious man at the almshouse
- Micah dancing on the table for joy with the stunned choirboys looking on
- The choirboys playing Ghost Jump
- Micah being arrested and sentenced to death in Paris
- The drunken pig wakes up at the banquet. The clergy are horrified and the boys laugh from their concealed vantage point
- Micah and Henri creating amulets to sell to the other boys
- A procession through Paris in the midst of the plague
- The Company of Fools performs for the Paris crowds
- Micah performs at the Hotel Dieu for Azura
- Rafe being carried to the infirmary
- Henri telling the crowd that Micah is a fake
- The crowd turns on Micah

Tableau Rubric

Student Name _____

Components	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Planning and Cooperation	The group has difficulty planning due to lack of cooperation skills and inattention on the part of some members.	Problem solving is challenging. Roles are not defined or accepted. One or two members do most of the work.	Group works together and roles are shared.	Group works together effectively and roles are shared equitably. New ideas are embraced and all group members feel valued. Leaders grow by sharing leadership roles.
Delivery Skills	Opening and closing are vague and leave the audience confused. Performance is partially audible and expression does not match emotion.	Opening and closing are defined. Most voices are clear and contain appropriate expression.	Opening and closing are well presented. Voices are generally clear and contain appropriate expression.	Clear and strong opening and closing. All voices are concentrating an expressive. Eye contact is made. There is always a congruency between affect and facial expression.
Tableau Skills	There is no focal point to the tableau. Body language and expression are not used effectively. Backs are facing the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are not evident.	More than one focal point. Performers do not use all three levels of space: high, middle and low. Performances are usually open to the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are rarely seen. Use of props and costumes are unimaginative.	One focal point for the audience. Most levels of space are occupied and staging choices match content. Performers are open to the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are sometimes evident. Some creative use of props and costumes.	One clear focal point for audience. Staging choices match content. Low, middle and high levels of space are used. Performers are always open to the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are evident. Creative use of props and costumes.

Student Comment: _____

About The Author

Deborah Ellis loves to read. When doing research on medieval history, she ran across a tiny piece of information about a small group of monks and choirboys who traveled the French countryside during the time of the plague entertaining the villagers and townspeople with humorous songs and antics. Deborah was intrigued that people afflicted with such enormous suffering would turn to laughter to help them through their troubles. This idea became the cornerstone of the novel, *A Company of Fools*. Like her previous novels, *A Company of Fools* celebrates remarkable children who rise above their circumstances with courage and integrity. These heroes reach from the pages of books and inspire us to make a difference in our world.

Deborah grew up in Paris, Ontario. She has always been interested in peace, women's rights and economic justice. Her hobbies include "reading, running and poking around looking at things." Deborah's books include *Looking for X*, *The Breadwinner*, *Parvana's Journey* and *A Company of Fools*. These works have garnered her literary awards—including the Governor General's Award in 2000 for *The Breadwinner* and the 2003 Ruth Schwartz Award for *Parvana's Journey*—and praise from readers everywhere. They have been translated into many languages and are read by children all over the world. Deborah Ellis donates royalties from *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey* to the education of Afghani girls. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.