1. This lesson serves as an introduction to Truman Capote’s  *In Cold Blood* . As such, it will not address the material of the novel or its time period, but will instead be centered around a philosophical exploration and discussion of one of the novel’s central themes: the nature of evil and our relationship as human beings to it. (I’m a white man, sue me)
2. As class begins, I will have a powerpoint slide up on the board, asking 3 questions:
3. What’s the worst thing you’ve ever done?
4. When you think about it, how does it make you feel?
5. If someone knew you did this, would they view you differently?
6. Students will have 3-5 minutes to write on these questions. They will not have to hand these in orshow them to anyone.
7. “What I want to do today then is talk about evil. I’m not going to ask you to share what you wrote, but up on the board I want to make a list of actions that we think are evil.”
8. “I don’t just want things that are bad. For instance, stealing a piece of candy is bad, right? But is it evil?”
9. Students answer no.
10. “Why not?”
11. Students answer and we briefly discuss.
12. “What if I steal a piece of candy, coat it in poison, and give it to a small child. Is that evil?”
13. Again, students discuss.
14. At this point, I will call on students and write their answers on the board until we have a list of 7-10 actions that we consider evil.
15. Through a stand-up, sit-down activity, the students will vote on how many of them consider each action to be evil.
16. First, the student who said the action was evil will briefly explain why, and then we will vote through stand-up/sit-down. (Stand up if you agree that the listed action is actually *evil*).
17. This should take 7-10 minutes.
18. I will now number the class off into small groups by counting 1-4 and will assign the groups space within the classroom.
19. The groups move to their assigned space.
20. “We’ve talked about evil actions so far, but now I want to talk about people.”
21. “Can a person commit one of these evil actions but not be evil?”
22. So here’s where things could get a little tricky, because my worst nightmare is some kid saying something like, “Rape isn’t actually evil.” I might prompt them here by asking something like, “If a soldier kills someone in a war, do we consider that evil?” The students will probably answer no to that. It’s a segue into the next part, so I want it to flow, and not be a lesson-derailing bump.
23. “What I’d like you to do now in your small groups is formulate a definition of what makes someone an evil person. What would they have to do for you to call them *evil*?”
24. “You’re going to have 6 minutes to discuss this, and then present your definition to the class.”
25. The groups discuss amongst themselves while I wander the room (and try to sit down surreptitiously behind them to observe).
26. At the end of 6 minutes, I will gather the class’s attention. I will now be up at the computer, with the slideshow open to a blank slide I can type on.
27. Each group reads off their definitions and I type them onto the blank slide.
28. As a class then, we will discuss the definitions. What parts do we agree with? What do we disagree with?
29. Together as a class, we attempt to formulate a definition of an evil person. Spoiler alert: it’s probably pretty hard.
30. I anticipate this process taking 6-8 minutes.
31. Once we have an agreed-upon definition, or as close to one as we’re going to get, we will transition into the lesson’s next phase.
32. “Tomorrow, you’re going to start reading *In Cold Blood*, which, and I’m not spoiling anything, is about a really brutal family murder, and about the men who did it.”
33. “One of the things you’re going to note as you read through it, is that you get to learn not only about the crime and what it did to the community, but also a lot about the background of the killers. This question of evil—what we do with it, and how we relate to it—runs throughout the book.”
34. If I get crunched for time and the previous discussions on evil are really engaging the students, it’s possible I will skip the next activity and go straight to written reflection. But I’d like to get it in. So that being said:
35. On one wall of the classroom will be a piece of paper taped up. It reads: IT IS MORALLY WRONG TO LOVE AN EVIL PERSON.
36. On the classroom’s other wall is a taped piece of paper reading, THERE IS NOTHING MORALLY WRONG WITH LOVING AN EVIL PERSON.
37. I’ll explain to the class the basics of walk-the-line: “There’s an invisible line stretching between these two pieces of paper, and that line is a continuum. Your beliefs can fall anywhere along this line. When I’m done explaining and say, ‘Go,’ walk to a spot on the line that best exemplifies your beliefs on whether it’s morally wrong to love an evil person.”
38. We now enact walk-the-line. Students walk to positions and once they’re settled, I ask students to explain why they chose where they did and try to persuade other students to move.
39. Ideally I would like 8-10 minutes of this with me just calling on students and having them move back and forth.
40. At this time, I will ask the students to return to their original desks from the start of class.
41. I will go back to the next slide on the PowerPoint, which displays the following quote: “The problem is not that there is evil in the world. The problem is that there is good. Otherwise, who would care?”
42. “With our remaining class time, and based on our discussion today, please write a half-page response to this quote. There’s no right or wrong answer, I just want your intellectual and emotional response.”
43. The students write until the bell.
44. When the bell rings, I will collect these readings for an informal assessment to see their thoughts and ideas.