

Nomination Materials for
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2015 APA TOPSS Charles T. Blair-Broeker Excellence in Teaching Award

Two-Day Lesson Plan
Team Essay: Personality Theory

Background and Progression

In recent years, weather-related school closings have tightened our already tight schedule to the point that we need to ask students to learn a bit more “on their own.” With that in mind, I’ve adapted what was once a unit-ending summative *assessment* to be used as an immersive *learning* task. What follows is an attempt to guide such learning by immersing students in several theories of personality, with relatively little direct instruction beforehand. This is easier to execute because of the overlap between the unit on *Personality Theory* and so many others in the course, especially *The Biological Bases of Behavior*, *Learning Theory*, *Motivation and Emotion*, *Testing and Individual Differences* and *Treatment*.

I have successfully used the following progression with students across the spectrum of skills, habits and dispositions. Depending on the circumstance, I will at times allot more time for the work. What follows is a two-day plan. If time is especially tight, students might be asked to read about the major theories of personality before they embark on this progression.

The central activity in this progression, the “Team Essay,” is adapted from an idea proposed in the 2nd edition of the textbook *Psychology* by Benjamin, Hopkins and Nation, published by MacMillan. To guide their efforts in completing the task, students are provided with *Criteria for Success*, a summary of which is also included here. These are in part based on the directions that accompany the free response questions on the advanced placement psychology examination, but they serve as useful guidelines for any time-constrained writing in any course.

I provide two possible formats for allowing students to participate in the grading of this task. I also offer a scale, to be distributed after student teams complete their essays, to foreshadow several different kinds of reliability and validity, which students will explore further in their study of *Testing and Individual Differences*. Teachers may also use this scale to spiral back to concepts from the earlier unit on *Statistics and Research Methodology*.

The following elements from the *National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula* are addressed in this two-day lesson progression

*** Scientific Inquiry Domain**

Standard Area: Perspectives in Psychological Science

- *Content Standard 1:* Development of Psychology as an empirical science (1.3 Describe perspectives employed to understand behavior and mental processes)

Standard Area: Research Methods, Measurement and Statistics

- *Content Standard 1:* Research methods and measurements used to study behavior and mental processes (1.3 Define systematic procedures used to improve the validity of research findings, such as external validity)
- *Content Standard 3:* Basic concepts of data analysis (3.6 Explain how validity and reliability of observations and measurements relate to data analysis)

*** Individual Variations Domain**

Standard Area: Personality

- *Content Standard 1:* Perspectives on Personality (1.1 Evaluate psychodynamic theories; 1.2 Evaluate trait theories; 1.3 Evaluate humanistic theories; 1.4 Evaluate social-cognitive theories)
- *Content Standard 2:* Assessment of Personality (2.2 Discuss the reliability and validity of personality assessment techniques)
- *Content Standard 3:* Issues in Personality (3.1 Discuss biological and situational influences; 3.2 Discuss stability and change; 3.4 Discuss self-concept)

Day #1

1. To help in framing the team task that is at the core of this two-day plan, students take an "Introductory Survey." I provide two options here – I've used both, depending on circumstance and time constraints. Option #1 allows the teacher to present a brief overview of the Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic perspective, the Behavioral perspective, the Humanistic perspective and the Cognitive perspective. Option #2 asks students to respond to twelve statements that I use to frame the central elements of the major personality perspectives. I include a summary of possible talking points at the end of that survey. After a brief discussion, I collect and tabulate student responses. I report patterns and points of interest to students at the start of the next class session.
2. Next, I distribute the *One Stop Shopping* summary of psychology's big schools of thought, also included below. Students will use this, their textbook and prior learning from units on *The Biological Bases of Behavior*, *Learning Theory* and *Motivation and Emotion* to construct a team essay analyzing an intriguing personality of their choice.
3. Students then assemble in randomly assigned teams (I typically put a number in the lower-left corner of the *One Stop Shopping* handout, setting up teams of 3 or 4 students) to begin applying those theories to an analysis of a figure from history, fiction or pop culture. Recent choices for that analysis include Hamlet, Napoleon, Barack Obama, Tiger Woods, Beyonce, Justin Bieber, Kim Kardashian, a range of characters from *Harry Potter* and various controversial football, baseball and basketball players. As the students work, I float amongst the groups, gauging student understanding and offering clarification and elaboration when appropriate.
4. I allow for perhaps two-minutes at the end of this session for questions and points of clarification on the task itself and the theories of personality that are its focus.

Day #2

1. I begin this session with a quick report on student survey responses from Day #1. I use this to clarify whatever areas of relative weakness that I may have detected during the teamwork completed on Day #1.
2. Teams then continue to work on applying the major theories of personality to the person of their choice. Again, I visit and re-visit teams as they proceed, helping when necessary but mostly *listening* to assess student mastery of personality theory.
3. I provide two options for Self and Peer Evaluation of team process and performance, to be completed once the groups finish their essays. If time is tight, it may be necessary to give this as a homework task. This is an important component of any group activity – any teacher who has ever been randomly assigned to work with an especially aggressive or disengaged colleague will recognize the value of providing an opportunity for team

members to weigh in on their own contributions to the group and the effort and performance of their teammates.

4. Once student teams have submitted their essay, each student responds to a follow-up survey that links *Personality Theory* to the upcoming unit on *Testing and Individual Differences*. I include a copy of that survey, asking students to rate the task for validity and reliability of scoring.
5. I typically end this activity by asking students to read a personality analysis of *The Grinch That Stole Christmas*. I provide an example at the end of this progression. The text is mine, but the idea is not. It is my adaptation of a strategy offered by Christine Offutt of Lock Haven University in the Fall 2003 edition of Psychology Teacher Network. Use it (or your own version) as an example to guide students in writing their own "personality analysis" or (as I use it here) to review the efforts of your students after they've completed their own team essay. Because this is longer than what students could reasonably be expected to complete in the time allotted, a teacher might opt to use only the segments of it that address relative weaknesses in student understanding, or to clarify where clarification is necessary.

Option #1
Brief Introductory Survey: Personality Theory

Put a '1' next to the statement you most agree with, a '2' next to your second choice, a '3' next to your third choice and a '4' next to the one with which you least agree.

- _____ ***We learn our personality*** (People develop a personality through imitating the models around them, and through life's various rewards and punishments)
- _____ ***Our personality comes down to how we think about life and the things that happen to us*** (The essence of human personality is in how individuals perceive and explain themselves and the events of life)
- _____ ***Our personality develops through loving relationships which support us in reaching our fullest potential*** (If individuals receive unconditional positive regard (UPR), they will be better able to become self-actualized, a goal all humans want to reach)
- _____ ***Our personality is in large part based in conflicts and processes that we are not fully conscious of*** (The unconscious mind has a very big influence on the development of our personalities)

Option #2
Expansive Introductory Survey: Personality Theory

Please respond to each of the statements using the following scale:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
There's no truth Moderate Very strongly
to this agreement agree

- 1) _____ Children are born with a basic personality.
- 2) _____ Your basic personality does not change from situation to situation.
- 3) _____ Your basic personality does not change significantly after adolescence.
- 4) _____ Everyone has one or two significant personality traits that show through in pretty much any situation.
- 5) _____ It is possible to completely "forget" something that is simply too painful to remember.
- 6) _____ Your adult personality is influenced by many unconscious forces rooted in early childhood experience.
- 7) _____ Everyone has an "inferiority complex," whether it shows through on the surface or not.
- 8) _____ You *learn* much of your personality from the rewards and punishments you encounter in life.
- 9) _____ "Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so."
(William Shakespeare)
- 10) _____ Humans have little real control over most of what happens in life.
- 11) _____ Everyone strives to be happy and successful.
- 12) _____ All people respond positively to unconditional love and support.

For Debriefing of Option #2
Expansive Introductory Survey: Personality Theory

For teachers: possible topics to introduce in a follow-up content discussion:

- **Item #1:** Genetic predispositions; Trait Theory
- **Item #2:** Trait Theory; Mischel and situationism
- **Item #3:** To what extent is personality stable longitudinally?
- **Item #4:** To what extent is personality stable across situations?
- **Item #5:** Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic Theory
- **Item #6:** Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic Theory
- **Item #7:** Alfred Adler and The Neo-Freudians
- **Item #8:** Behaviorism
- **Item #9:** Cognitive Theory
- **Item #10:** Locus of control; Attribution Theory
- **Item #11:** Humanistic Theories; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Self-Actualization
- **Item #12:** Humanistic Theories; Unconditional Positive Regard

One Stop Shopping Psychology → The Big Schools of Thought

- **Biological:** The focus is on the underlying physiology involved in behavior and mental processes.
- **Trait and Type Theory:** The focus is on measuring and describing individual characteristics that are largely innate. *(Big names: Cattell, Eysenck, McRae & Costa)*
- **Behavioral:** The focus is on observable behaviors and how they've been learned, rather than exploration of unobservable mental processes. *(Big names: Watson, Skinner, Pavlov)*
- **Cognitive:** The focus is on thinking, including examination of how people perceive and explain themselves and the events in their lives. *(Big names: Heider, Rotter)*
- **Social-Cognitive:** The focus is on the interaction of environmental factors, reinforcements, thinking and self-perception. *(Big name: Bandura)*
- **Cognitive-Behavioral:** The focus is on combining elements of cognitive theory with learning theory, especially in therapeutic settings. *(Big names: Ellis, Beck)*
- **Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic:** The focus is on uncovering and understanding unconscious conflict, needs and wishes, especially rooted in early childhood experience. *(Big names: Freud, Jung, Adler, Horney)*
- **Humanistic:** The focus is on human potential and the free will to make one's life whatever one wishes it to be; A key point is human striving for self-actualization. *(Big names: Maslow, Rogers)*

Team Essay: Personality Theory

Discuss each of the given schools of psychological thought and demonstrate a thorough understanding of each while accounting for the personality of a figure from history, the arts, athletics, fiction or popular culture.

Possibilities include, but are not limited to:

- * Any character from Star Wars/Lord of the Rings/Harry Potter/Disney
 - * A figure from popular culture – an actor, actress, ‘celebrity’, etc.
 - * A musician or other artist
 - * A professional athlete
 - * A political figure
 - * An historical figure
-
- Any one Trait Theory
 - The Behavioral perspective
 - The Social-Cognitive perspective
 - The Freudian Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic perspective
 - Any one Neo-Freudian/Neo-Psychodynamic perspective
 - The Humanistic perspective

In a concluding paragraph, offer your evaluation as to which perspective best accounts for the behavior of the person you examined.

Criteria for Success in Essay Writing

Think of your reader as **an intelligent but unformed child**;
you are explaining what you know to him or her.

The successful essay will

- be legible (have mercy on your reader)
- have appropriate paragraph breaks
- be clear and direct - the tone can be “conversational” and informal, but not at the expense of clarity
- not merely list facts
- present a cogent argument using appropriate and sophisticated psychological terminology
- not assume understanding in the reader - instead it will *demonstrate* the essay writer’s understanding

Option #1
Self and Peer Evaluation: Team Activity

Your Name: _____

Give **YOURSELF** scores using the following scales:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No			Average				Exceptional
contribution			contribution				contribution

My **contribution** score: _____

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No			Average				Exceptional
effort			effort				effort

My **effort** score: _____

Give **YOUR TEAMMATES** scores using those same scales:

I give _____ _____ for **Contribution**, and
Teammate Name _____ for **Effort**

I give _____ _____ for **Contribution**, and
Teammate Name _____ for **Effort**

I give _____ _____ for **Contribution**, and
Teammate Name _____ for **Effort**

Option #2 Self and Peer Evaluation: Team Activity

Your name: _____

Use the following scale to rate **yourself** on the given criteria:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
None at all		Poor		Average but acceptable				Good	Terrific

- A- _____ **Focus** (Stayed focused on the task; No inappropriate digressions into personal or other topics)
- B- _____ **Courtesy** (Allowed all others to contribute in their own way; Gave others the chance to talk; Polite and considerate)
- C- _____ **Listening** (Attended to what others in the team said and did)
- D- _____ **Idea Generation** (Contributed appropriate and useful ideas to the team and to the process)
- E- _____ **Specific Contribution to the Final Team Product** (Carried his or her own weight in terms of organization, thinking and writing)
- _____ **Total points**

Teammate Evaluation

Use the same scale to rate **your teammates**

Teammate _____	Teammate _____	Teammate _____
A- ____ Focus	A- ____ Focus	A- ____ Focus
B- ____ Courtesy	B- ____ Courtesy	B- ____ Courtesy
C- ____ Listening	C- ____ Listening	C- ____ Listening
D- ____ Idea Generation	D- ____ Idea Generation	D- ____ Idea Generation
E- ____ Contribution	E- ____ Contribution	E- ____ Contribution
____ Total points	____ Total points	____ Total points

Your View:
Reliability and Validity of the Personality Theory Team Essay

Use the given scale to rate each of the following in terms of this team assessment

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Terrible!				Not bad		Marvelous!			

- A- _____ *Inter-rater reliability* (Would two or more scorers essentially agree in their assessment of your work?)
- B- _____ *Intra-rater reliability* (Would a single scorer essentially agree with his or her own score if later assessing your work a second time?)
- C- _____ *Content validity* (How valuable was this task in measuring genuine understanding of the concepts and terms in this unit?)
- D- _____ *Criterion validity* (Would your performance on this task match your performance on a different task purportedly measuring understanding of the same body of knowledge?)
- E- _____ *Predictive validity* (How well will your grade on this task predict your performance on the AP Examination?)

For Introduction or De-briefing Team Essay on Personality

The following text is mine, but the idea is not. This is my adaptation of a strategy offered by Christine Offutt of Lock Haven University in the Fall 2003 edition of Psychology Teacher Network. Use it (or your own version) as an example to guide students in writing their own "personality analysis" or to review the efforts of your students after they've completed their own team essay.

The Grinch That Stole Christmas – A Personality Analysis

The Grinch is certainly a mean one. In fact, he's a nasty, wasteful skunk. But, why? What are the roots of a heart that's made of unwashed socks and a soul that's full of gunk? There are several competing, though sometimes overlapping, theories that attempt to account for such personalities. Some psychologists emphasize **The BioMedical Model** in their approach. They might, for example, focus on *genetic predispositions*, or inborn tendencies and vulnerabilities. Perhaps Papa and Mama Grinch each themselves had a genetic inclination toward aggression and hostility, and their son was thus similarly inclined - though not predestined, of course!

A **Trait Theorist** would look to itemize the characteristics that manifest themselves in the Grinch in most (if not all) situations. For example, The Grinch would likely fall on the "introverted" end of the introversion-extraversion spectrum – after all, he *has* retired from society, preferring life alone in a cave to sharing community with the Who's down in Whoville. He shows little sign of being warm, affectionate and sociable, adjectives typically used (by advocates of *The Five Factor Model*, the dominant trait theory today) to describe an extravert. While a Trait Theorist might have difficulty *explaining* the Grinch's most consistent traits, she would work diligently to *describe* those qualities, which she might argue were simply innate, echoing the thoughts of those who emphasize genetic predispositions in the development of personality.

That idea of a genetic "push" in a certain direction could also be tied to **The Behavioral Perspective**, which emphasizes one's observable actions and the mechanisms that have reinforced such behaviors. If The Grinch were genetically nudged toward hostility, and he then *observed* regular hostility in his home, which was in turn *reinforced* when his parents "got what they wanted," he might essentially be trained to be aggressive.

Such a Behavioral scenario would be even more likely if The Grinch was also discovered to have *abnormally low levels of activity in the frontal lobes of his brain*. We all know his heart was a couple of sizes too small, but what of his head? *Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)* and *positron emission tomography (PET)* evidence is inconclusive in The Grinch's case, but they might serve as evidence for low baseline arousal levels in the important "judgment and command center" housed in the frontal section of his brain. This would make him more prone to poor social judgment and lack

of empathy for others, which would in turn make him more vulnerable to the “hostility training” described in the previous paragraph.

Advocates of **The Cognitive Perspective** would find it intriguing that The Grinch spent substantial amounts of time ruminating on the activities of the Whos down in Whoville. A Cognitive Theorist might suggest that The Grinch has essentially “thought himself into” an aggressive disposition. As we all know, he does indeed tend to *attribute* much of his unhappiness to The Whos’ happiness, and that is a rather dysfunctional cognitive tendency. The Grinch’s *distorted views of the world* and his place in it might trap him in a self-destructive cognitive spiral. A **Social-Cognitive Theorist** like Albert Bandura would argue there is a constant interplay between The Grinch’s behaviors, his thoughts about those behaviors and the environment. In this type of *reciprocal determinism*, each of those keeps impacting the others - it is not so much that personality results from a *combination* of those components as an *interaction amongst them*. In elementary school, The Grinch’s inclination toward surliness might have led him to choose certain playmates (does a Grinch *have* playmates?) over others. Those playmates might have been more likely to reward his surliness, which in turn would make the Grinch think of himself as surly. That in turn would lead him to choose some environments and interactions over others. Those would then reinforce his surliness, strengthening his view of himself as nasty and wasteful, and so on.

Sigmund Freud and other proponents of **The Psychoanalytic Perspective** would have a field day attempting to account for The Grinch’s personality. What’s with the *displaced aggression* towards poor Max, his innocent (and exceptionally cute) pet dog? And what do we make of The Grinch taking on the role of Santa Claus in order to carry out his nefarious plans for the ruination of Christmas in Whoville? Hmmmmmm *very* interesting, isn’t it? *Identifying* with a “heroic” type because of a basic sense of inferiority perhaps? The Grinch may also be losing the battle with his highly demanding *id*, which seeks pleasure for itself to the exclusion of all other considerations. If, as Freud himself might suggest, The Grinch has a *weak ego*, the *id* could be running the internal, unconscious show so to speak, since the ego needs to be strong in order to bring a *sense of reality* to the battle between the grasping *id* and the judgmental *superego*.

Maybe you noticed The Grinch’s *oral, anal and phallic fixations*. No? Well you may be in *denial* then. Maybe those observations would’ve hit a bit too close to home for you, and you therefore simply *project* them onto others, arguing, “Hey, it’s not me with the oral, anal and phallic fixations ... it’s all of you weirdo’s who are stuck in those childhood *psychosexual stages*!”

At this point it is possible Alfred Adler’s unconscious *inferiority complex* is rearing its ugly head within you. Yes, it’s OK, you can admit it. In fact, you **NEED** to admit it and bring it to the surface, or it will continue to hide deep in the iceberg of your psyche, wreaking havoc on your personality without your conscious awareness of its existence. What’s that? You don’t *have* a fundamental inferiority complex? Well, perhaps there’s a bit of denial there, huh? Now wait, stop banging the table in frustration – you’re merely displacing your aggression again, as the *table* has done nothing to hurt you, has it? No,

don't apologize ... besides, I recognize that your politeness is really an example of *reaction formation*, masking your unconscious animosity toward me by overcompensating in the opposite emotional direction.

Correct?

Anyway - back to The Grinch. While **Neo-Freudian** Karen Horney may contend that The Grinch is simply wrestling with the *basic anxiety* that we all have in us, Carl Jung might argue that The Grinch represents the archetypal "*shadow*" which we all recognize because of the shared human "*collective unconscious*." Happily, as The Grinch's plan to ruin Christmas for The Whos unravels, he gets in touch with the archetypal *anima*, and his heart bursts at the seams with the nurturance, gentleness and goodness of this "feminine" side of his maleness. Indeed, as his story comes to a close, The Grinch is depicted at a festive Who holiday celebration, slicing the roast beast. This might be a good thing, but it could also be a form of *sublimation* – cutting up a deceased beast to "serve" others as a socially appropriate substitute for his latent aggression!

But why be so negative about human and Grinch personality development? Let us end with a word or two from **The Humanistic Perspective**, which is based upon a *belief in human potential*, the value of love and support and the pursuit of *self-actualization*. A Humanist like Abraham Maslow or Carl Rogers might theorize that The Grinch has simply been denied *unconditional positive regard (UPR)* in his life. Acceptance and "love" from his Grinch-y parents was likely based on *conditions of worth* ("Son, we won't like you if you refuse to be mean"). Relationships built on such conditions ("Son, we'll only like you if your shoes are too tight and your head is not screwed on just right") will contribute to the individual's sense of hopelessness in an unfeeling world.

Importantly, even though The Grinch had plotted so cruelly to stop Christmas from coming to Whoville, The Whos loved him anyway, thus re-directing him on the path to *full functioning* and, perhaps even the mountaintop of *self-actualization*.