



# Teaching Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* with Toy Story 4

## Overview & Purpose

To teach students about absurdism, how to use critical thinking and find textual evidence to back up their claim.

## Objectives

1. Students will use close reading techniques.
2. Students will use textual evidence to write a persuasive essay.

## Standards

- ★ Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
  - a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  - b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns

- c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
  - d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
  - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented
- ★ Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

## Materials Needed

1. *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus. Depending on the audience, you may want to pre-select certain passages to use for this assignment and provide a general overview of the text (see “Resources” below)
2. Select video clips from the *Toy Story* films, but primarily *Toy Story 4*

## Evidence

1. Students will write a brief essay explaining whether or not Woody is an “absurd hero” using textual evidence.

## Activity

1. Teachers may prepare topic questions appropriate for the age group before beginning this lesson (see “Resources” below).
2. Give a brief introduction to Albert Camus, existentialism, and absurdism. Explain that *The Myth of Sisyphus* was written during World War II and why that is important to creating *The Myth of Sisyphus* (See Resources below).
3. Conduct a close reading of *The Myth of Sisyphus*.
4. Ask the students to think about the following questions:
  - a. What is an absurd hero?
  - b. What task must Sisyphus continuously repeat?

- c. What question does Camus think is the only question that matters? What conclusion does he come to regarding the most important question? Do you agree with him?
  - d. Why does Camus imagine Sisyphus being happy with his eternal task?
5. Select clips from Toy Story films that are relevant to the assignment. Scenes where Forky tries to throw himself in the trash and Woody struggles with saving toys...again are ideal for this assignment..
6. After viewing, ask the students whether or not they notice similarities in Woody's absurd task and that of Sisyphus. Some possible questions to ask:
  - a. Is Woody an absurd hero? If so, what makes him an absurd hero?
  - b. Why does Forky want to throw himself in the trash? What would Camus say to Forky?
7. Inform the students that they will write a persuasive essay arguing whether or not Woody is an absurd hero. The first part of the essay should include a summary of The Myth of Sisyphus along with an overview of Camus' major ideas and conclusions. The second part of the essay should consist of a close examination of Woody and his continuous task to save toys. I would allow students to bring in evidence from all four films if it would help them prove their claim. The essay should have a clearly stated claim and at least three textual evidence to support their claim.

## Resources

*The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus (full text):

<https://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil360/16.%20Myth%20of%20Sisyphus.pdf>

Edsitement: Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*: A Close Reading of the Absurd:

<https://edsitement.neh.gov/student-activities/camus-myth-sisyphus-close-reading-absurd>

*Toy Story 1-4* clips