

## Lesson 5: The Power of Creativity

### PURPOSE

To help students appreciate art and creativity for their power of communicating the transcendent dimensions of reality.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand creativity as a specifically human power enabling people to move beyond themselves and shape the world in which they live.
2. Recognize that art and creativity help people transcend limits of human existence and personal circumstance.

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Viktor Frankl: Creativity in a Concentration Camp (excerpt from Man’s Search for Meaning)
- Picasso’s [painting](#) “Mother and Child”
- The Shawshank Redemption Opera [scene](#)
- [Video](#): You Can’t Quarantine Music
- Group Exercise: Erasure Poem Samples
- Interim Quiz 1

### VOCABULARY

- Creativity: the human power to use one’s imagination and ideas to shape the world.
- Transcendent: the intangible dimensions of reality, beyond the physical or material level
- Art: a means of communicating what would otherwise remain hidden; to reach beyond oneself towards the transcendent.

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1.** Review the previous lesson. Recall the definitions of freedom for excellence and freedom of indifference. Highlight the example of Harriet Tubman and how she used her freedom for excellence.

**Step 2.** In the previous lessons, we learned that humans possess two powers which are uniquely theirs and which no other living beings have. These are the powers to think and choose. These powers are closely related to another power which arises from them, creativity.

To begin the lesson, ask the students the following questions:

How would you define creativity? Is it the same as problem-solving?

Is creativity simply an emotional expression or it is connected to the power to think?

How is creativity related to freedom?

After listening to the students' comments, explain that human creativity can be expressed in problem-solving, but it is not restricted to it. For example, art is an important field of creative expression, but one would not say that art is primarily directed at solving problems (even though, as the class will see, it may help people overcome challenges in life).

We can see human creativity all around – in buildings, gardens, toys, technology, poetry, film, music, etc. Human creativity is indeed the world's greatest resource. Think about it: almost anything one can name has human creativity and the ingenuity of problem-solving behind it. Whether it is devising a way to water the plants more effectively (irrigation!) or expressing unspeakable happiness through instruments with strings (orchestra!), that's creativity at work.

While creativity as expressed in arts both expresses the emotion of an artist and stirs the emotions of other people, it is not limited to that. Artists need to think creatively about how to communicate meaning to those who engage with their art. If it did not convey some meaning or purpose, the art would cease to be art. In order to convey meaning, the artist needs to use their power to think. In the same way, those who enjoy the arts need to use the power to think in order to understand the meaning behind the artwork. Problem solving itself requires "thinking outside the box", which is another direct example of how creativity is connected to the power to think.

Now, to think "outside the box" people need to be free to "exit the box", so to speak. In order to do this, each person needs to be able to see reality from a perspective other than that which is immediately perceptible. The importance of depth and a critical analysis of reality for creativity is another example of how creativity is specifically a human power. While animals are constrained by their surroundings and can only engage with that which is immediately perceptible through their senses and instinct, humans are free to shape the world in a deeper way according to their ideas and imagination.

To finish, write the definition of creativity on the board:

**Creativity: the human power to use one's imagination and ideas to shape the world.**

As discussed, one of the most important expressions of creativity are the arts. Write the definition of art on the board:

Art: a means to communicate what would otherwise remain hidden; to reach beyond ourselves towards the transcendent.

To examine this definition, show Picasso's [painting](#) "Mother and Child" to students and ask them to share what they think the painting communicates.

After hearing the comments from students, explain that art has the special power to express those parts of reality which are almost impossible to express in words, definitions, theories and scientific formulas. For example, it is clear that this painting conveys gentleness and love between mother and a child. If one were to provide the dictionary definition of gentleness and motherly love, it would express a lot less than this painting shows us.

This painting itself is a visible expression of the freedom of an artist. The colors and shapes that Picasso used are different from those one would find in reality, but at the same time, it is precisely this freedom to portray reality in a different way that allows Picasso to creatively communicate a deeper meaning of reality. For example, the shape of the mother's clothes and the length of her arm are not necessarily realistic, but they convey a strong bond and deeper meaning behind the mother's embrace of her child as well as her protective, gentle love for him.

**Step 3:** To demonstrate the power of art and creativity to help people transcend their present circumstances, read aloud the text by [Viktor Frankl: Creativity in a Concentration Camp](#). One may not think of art or even humor as necessary. Sometimes art is described as frivolous, impractical or even useless! But that's not what Viktor Frankl, a holocaust survivor, wrote about the presence of art – even in a concentration camp.

If the time permits, discuss the questions related to the text from the Teacher's Answer Key provided.

Highlight Frankl's idea that creativity and art give people the "ability to rise above any situation". Ask the students to reflect on this idea while watching The Shawshank Redemption Opera [Scene](#). Explain that The Shawshank Redemption is the all-time number one movie on IMDB's list. The movie is about how "two imprisoned men bond over a number of years, finding solace and eventual redemption through acts of common decency." The opera which is played in the scene is a duet entitled "Sull'aria" from Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro".

After playing the video, ask the students to reflect on how the opera song helped the prisoners to rise above their situations.

After hearing the comments from students, explain that art has the power to elevate people above and beyond their immediate surroundings (in this case, the prison) and communicates a deeper and greater dimension of reality, which is difficult to reach otherwise. The narrator, Morgan Freeman, says in the scene that he liked to believe that the opera was about "something so beautiful which can't be expressed in words and makes your heart ache because of it".

This "something so beautiful" for the prisoners was freedom. Indeed, in prison it is almost impossible to feel free. Yet even though the prisoners were shackled from the outside, what the opera enabled them to experience is the deep truth that human beings always remain spiritually free regardless of outside circumstances. As the narrator says: "For the briefest of moments every man in Shawshank [the prison] felt free."

To describe the deeper and intangible dimensions of reality which art can convey, people use the word "transcendent". Write the definition on the board:

**Transcendent: the intangible dimensions of reality, beyond the physical or material level**

**Step 4:** Ask the class: *Is there a time when art helped you transcend a difficult situation in your life?* Maybe it was reading a certain book, hearing a song, or playing an instrument...

Have each student write one sentence in response to this question on a plain piece of paper. (Note to students that sentences will be respectfully shared.) Divide the class into three groups:

*Group 1:* Students will work together to combine their individual sentences into one group poem. Challenge them to try to make the text funny or humorous. Add words and sentences as needed to change the meaning of a particular sentence and connect ideas between sentences.

*Group 2:* Students will work together to combine their individual sentences into one group poem. Students will all need to copy this group poem on a piece of paper. On their own copy of the group poem, students can erase or black out/cover/cross out as many words as they like, creating a poem through only the words remaining. (See Examples of Erasure poetry in Materials).

*Group 3:* Students will share their sentences in the group and see if they can find a “thread” or single idea that links all of their sentences together. Is there one shared experience? For example, overcoming sadness, finding happiness, hope, etc. Use all of the pieces of paper to make a sculpture that represents the group’s chosen emotion. Students may crease, fold, crumple, rip, twist, stack, weave or tear parts as needed to represent their chosen emotion.

**Step 5:** Have the groups present their work. Ask the students the following questions:

Was it easy or hard to express yourself through words, using paper and pencil?

How did you feel when we read the poems?

Were you surprised with what you can do with words?

Was it easier or harder to work alone versus as a group?

Note that from this experiment, everyone’s individual creativity is evident. This creativity brings different ideas to the group and leads to collaborative problem solving. The purpose of this exercise is to see the “intangible dimensions of reality” as one transcends the space of the classroom by speaking about ideas, memories, and feelings, and trying to convey them through written words.

**Step 6:** Summarize. Recall the definitions of creativity and art, as well as their power to communicate the transcendent, intangible dimensions of reality. Highlight the examples of Picasso’s painting “Mother and Child” as well as the Shawshank Redemption opera scene, and how each communicates the deep meaning of compassion and the power to go beyond one’s present situation.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

Recall that in recent history, when many parts of society were shut down and people were asked to remain in their homes to lessen the spread of the virus COVID-19, humans creatively found a way to still play music together. Humans have a very real need for music and art to transcend our situation and relate to others also in need of the transcendent.

Show [Video](#): You Can’t Quarantine Music to further reinforce this idea and ask the students to reflect on which deeper idea this playing of music in times of quarantine communicated.

After watching the video and hearing the reflections from students, propose that the music amidst the COVID quarantine communicated the idea of solidarity between all people. Even though people were physically apart, the music communicated that they all stand in solidarity with each other, and especially with those who are sick and are in the first line of defense against the virus (doctors, nurses, etc.). Music enabled people to move beyond their present situation and to shape the world in which they live in order to make it more humane and compassionate.

### **FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK**

ASK THE STUDENTS TO FILL IN [INTERIM QUIZ 1](#) AT HOME AND BRING IT TO THE NEXT CLASS. LET THEM KNOW THAT SOLVING THE INTERIM QUIZ WILL HELP THEM IN THE FINAL QUIZ WHICH WILL HAPPEN DURING THE LAST CLASS.

## Viktor Frankl: Creativity in a Concentration Camp<sup>11</sup>

Earlier, I mentioned art. Is there such a thing in a concentration camp? It rather depends on what one chooses to call art. A kind of cabaret was improvised from time to time. A hut was cleared temporarily, a few wooden benches were pushed or nailed together and a program was drawn up. In the evening those who had fairly good positions in camp—the Capos and the workers who did not have to leave camp on distant marches—assembled there. They came to have a few laughs or perhaps to cry a little; anyway, to forget. There were songs, poems, jokes, some with underlying satire regarding the camp. All were meant to help us forget, and they did help. The gatherings were so effective that a few ordinary prisoners went to see the cabaret in spite of their fatigue even though they missed their daily portion of food by going. During the half-hour lunch interval when soup (which the contractors paid for and for which they did not spend much, was labeled out at our work site, we were allowed to assemble in an unfinished engine room. On entering, everyone got a ladleful of the watery soup. While we sipped it greedily, a prisoner climbed onto a tub and sang Italian arias. We enjoyed the songs, and he was guaranteed a double helping of soup, straight “from the bottom”—that meant with peas!

To discover that there was any semblance of art in a concentration camp must be surprise enough for an outsider, but he may be even more astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humor there as well; of course, only the faint trace of one, and then only for a few seconds or minutes. Humor was another of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds. I practically trained a friend of mine who worked next to me on the building site to develop a sense of humor. I suggested to him that we would promise each other to invent at least one amusing story daily, about some incident that could happen one day after our liberation. [...]

Sometimes the other men invented amusing dreams about the future, such as forecasting that during a future dinner engagement they might forget themselves when the soup was served and beg the hostess to ladle it “from the bottom.” The attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent.

### QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:

How was human creativity manifested in the concentration camp?

What was the function of art and humor in a concentration camp? Why did prisoners practice it?

<sup>11</sup> Viktor E. Frankl: A Man’s Search for Meaning, 1946.

**Answer Key for the teacher**

1. **How was human creativity manifested in the concentration camp?** Human creativity was manifested in the concentration camp through art and humor. Frankl explains how

“[...] a kind of cabaret was improvised from time to time. A hut was cleared temporarily, a few wooden benches were pushed or nailed together and a program was drawn up. In the evening those who had fairly good positions in camp—the Capos and the workers who did not have to leave camp on distant marches—assembled there. [...] During the half-hour lunch interval when soup (which the contractors paid for and for which they did not spend much, was labeled out at our work site, we were allowed to assemble in an unfinished engine room. On entering, everyone got a ladleful of the watery soup. While we sipped it greedily, a prisoner climbed onto a tub and sang Italian arias.”

Frankl explains how, in addition to art, there was a sense of humor as well. He suggested to a friend that they should:

“[...] promise each other to invent at least one amusing story daily, about some incident that could happen one day after our liberation. [...] Sometimes the other men invented amusing dreams about the future, such as forecasting that during a future dinner engagement they might forget themselves when the soup was served and beg the hostess to ladle it `from the bottom.’”

2. **What was the function of art and humor in a concentration camp? Why did prisoners practice it?**

Frankl explains why people came to see the cabarets:

“They came to have a few laughs or perhaps to cry a little; anyway, to forget. There were songs, poems, jokes, some with underlying satire regarding the camp. All were meant to help us forget, and they did help.”

This statement describes how art in the concentration camp helped people to go beyond their immediate suffering and ease it, if only just a bit. This was indeed so effective that

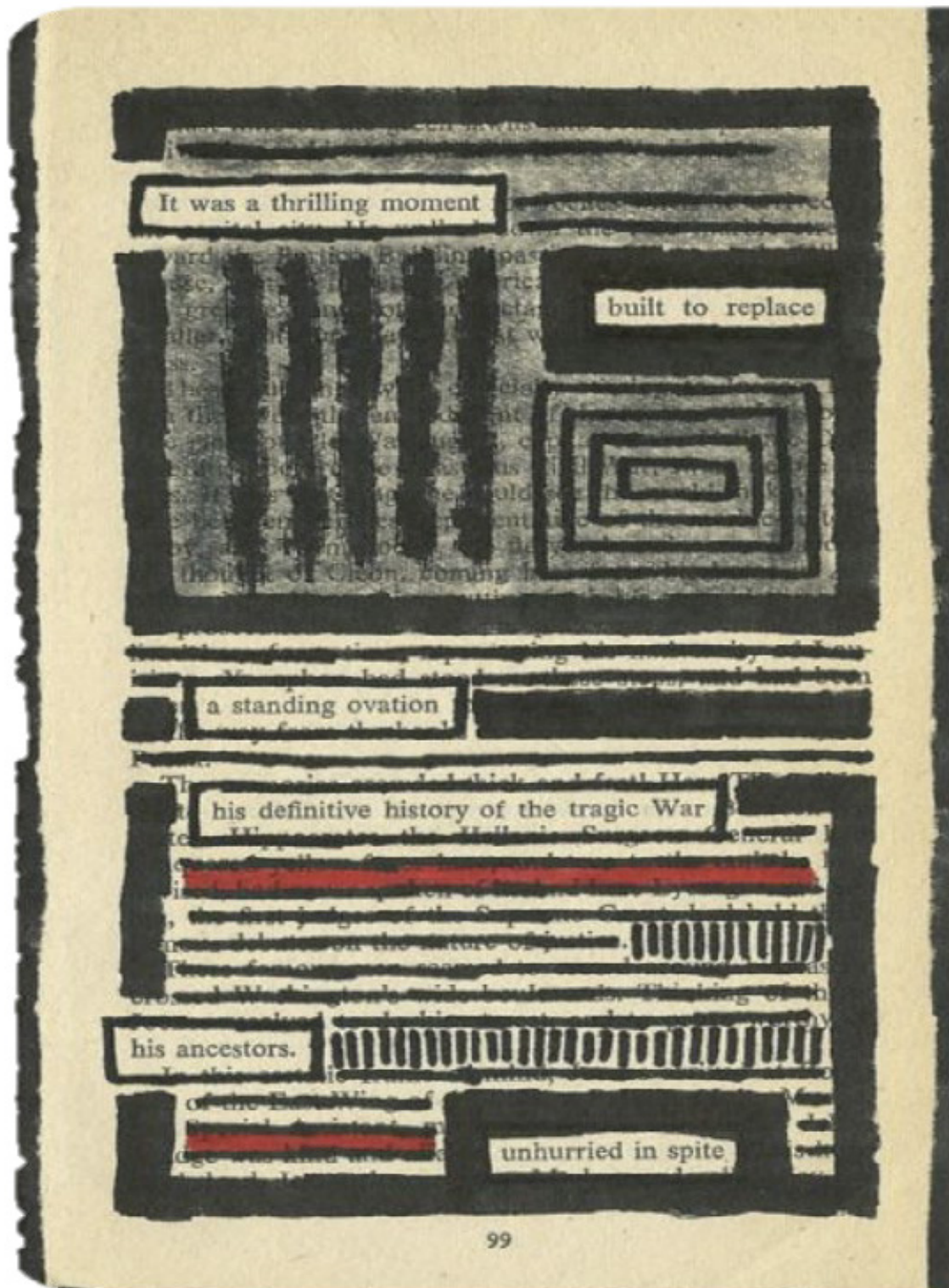
“[...] a few ordinary prisoners went to see the cabaret in spite of their fatigue even though they missed their daily portion of food by going.”



Humor had a similar effect in the camp. It helped prisoners to survive their difficult circumstances and rise above the situation in which they found themselves:

“Humor was another of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.”

Erasure Poem Samples



why the nervous system after a certain time is in tune with the vibrations of the subtlest music and is eventually somehow lastingly modified by it. Above all we must agree that acting is a delirium like the plague, and is communicable.

The mind believes what it sees and does what it believes; that is the secret of fascination. And in his book, St. Augustine does not doubt the reality of this fascination for one moment.

Yet conditions must be found to give birth to a spectacle that fascinate the mind, it is not just a matter of art.

For if theatre is like the plague, this is not just because it acts on large groups and disturbs them in one and the same way. There is both something victorious and vengeful in theatre just as in the plague, for we clearly feel that spontaneous fire the plague lights as it passes by is nothing but a gigantic liquidation,

Such a complete social disaster, such organic disorder overwhelmed with vice, this kind of wholesale exorcism constricting the soul, driving it to the limit indicates the presence of a condition which is extreme force. In such times all the powers of nature are newly rediscovered the instant something fundamental is about to be accomplished.

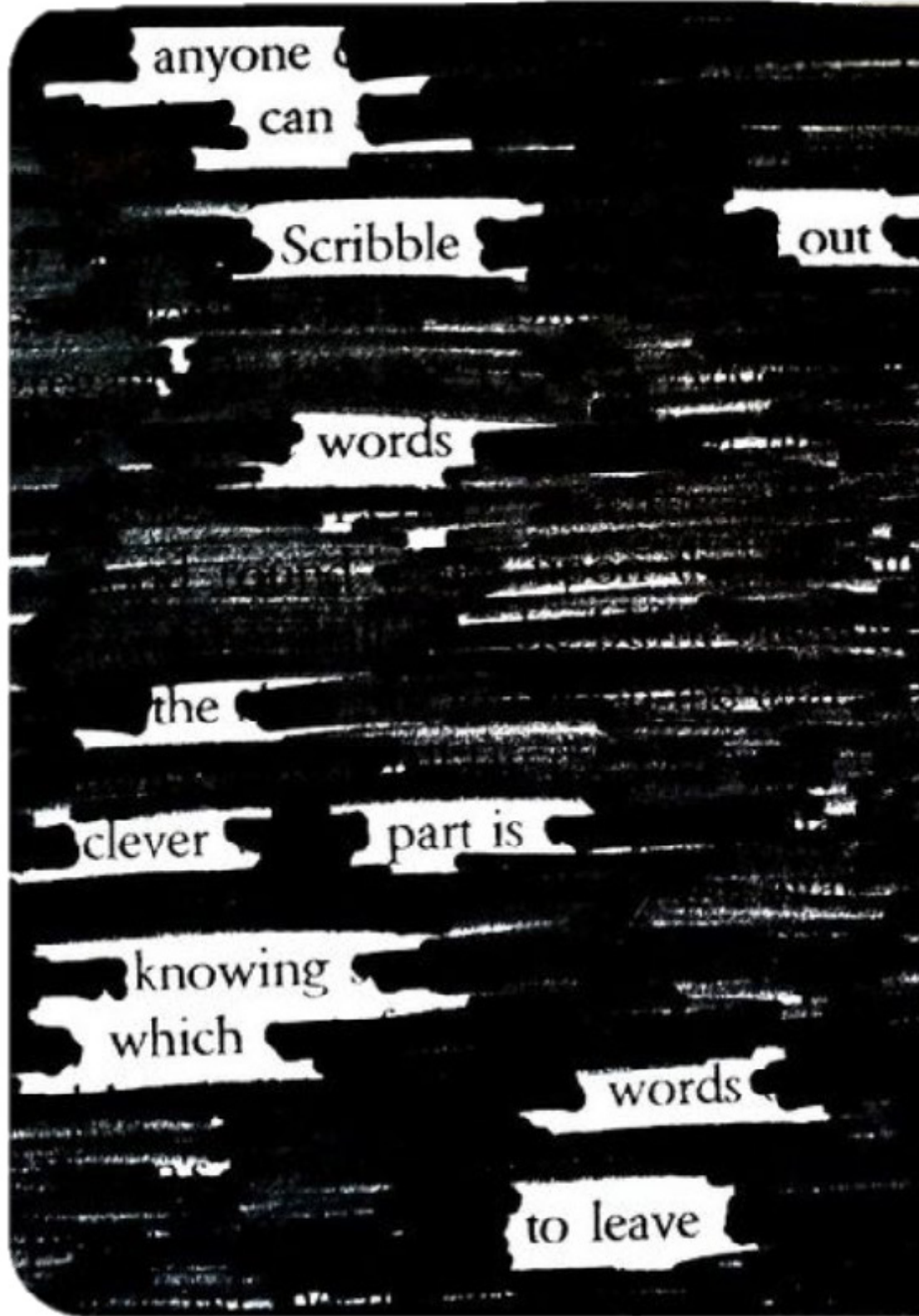
The plague takes dormant images, latent disorders and suddenly carries them to the point of the extreme gestures. Theatre also takes gestures and develops them to the limit. Just like the plague, it reforges the links between what does and does not exist in material nature. It rediscovered the idea of figures, the archetypal symbols which act like sudden silences, fermata, heart stops, adrenalin calls, images arising in our abruptly woken minds. It restores all our dormant conflicts and their powers, giving these powers names we acknowledge as signs. Here a bit of an idea of symbols which play before our eyes, one against the other in an inconceivable way. For theatre can only happen the moment the inconceivable really begins, where poetry taking place through symbols which have been created symbols.

These symbols are symbols of full-blown powers held in bond.

## EXPERIENCE.

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succession of moods or objects. Gladly would we anchor,  
 but the anchorage is quicksand. The onward tick of  
 nature is too strong for us. *Pero si muove.* When, at  
 night, I look at the moon and stars, I seem stationary and  
 they to hurry. Our love of the real draws us to perma-  
 nence, but health of body consists in circulation, and  
 sanity of mind in variety of faculty of association. We  
 need change of objects, and fixation to one thought  
 quickly eludes us. We look at the same and must humor  
 them, than you yet. One I took such care  
 to keep in my sight that I thought I should not need any  
 other book; before that, in books read; then in Plutarch;  
 then in Plinius; all one name in the room; afterward in  
 books; even in Belina; but now I turn the pages of  
 them as their languish, while I will cherish their genius  
 with my eyes; each will bear an emphasis of attention  
 which I cannot retain, though we in a world con-  
 stant to be pleased in that manner. How strongly I have  
 lost of pictures, that when you have seen one well, you  
 must take your leave of it; you shall never see it again. I  
 have had good lessons from pictures, which I have since seen  
 without emotion or reward. A deduction must be made  
 from the opinion, which even the wife express of a new  
 book or occurrence. The opinion gives me a glimpse  
 of their mood, and some vague guess at the new fact, but  
 is not to be trusted as the lasting relation between the  
 intellect and that thing. The child asks, "Mamma, why  
 don't I like the story as well as when you told it me?"



## Interim Quiz 1

**A. True/false questions**

1. T/F True freedom means being able to do what you want.
2. T/F Animals and humans do not differ in any significant way.
3. T/F “Intrinsic” means that human dignity is within us and it is with us our entire life.
4. T/F Creativity is the power to use imagination and ideas to shape the world, shared by both animals and humans.
5. T/F Socrates developed a five filter test.
6. T/F Harriet Tubman was fighting for the rights of indigenous people in Latin America.

**B. Essay questions**

7. What is the difference between freedom for excellence and freedom of indifference?

**C. For each answer, make a correct question.**

*For example, if the answer is “The first letter of the alphabet”, the question is “What is the letter A?”. Or, if the answer is “A paste or gel used in conjunction with a toothbrush to help clean and maintain the aesthetics and health of teeth”, the correct question is “What is toothpaste?”*

8. The human ability to knowingly select between options.
9. To eat, grow, and reproduce.
10. A means to communicate what would otherwise remain hidden; to reach beyond ourselves towards the transcendent.
11. A network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid-19th century, and used by enslaved African-Americans to escape into free states and Canada.
12. The characteristic of human dignity is that it cannot be given to us or taken away from us.

13. Being consistent in your positions, being curious, open-minded, accepting valid criticism or listening to different points of view.

**D. Multiple choice questions**

14. Something we use to achieve an end is called:  
a) Achievers  
b) Means  
c) Subjects  
d) Non-ends
15. Transcendent dimensions of reality are:  
a) Intangible  
b) Beyond physical level  
c) Not easily visible  
d) Not accessible at all
16. We violate human dignity, when:  
a) We use a person merely as an object.  
b) When we don't sacrifice an older person in order to save a younger one.  
c) When we treat a person as means.  
d) When we refuse giving money to a beggar.
17. Which of the following are habits of excellent thinking?  
a) Rushing to conclusion  
b) Seeking advice from wise people  
c) Considering other viewpoints  
d) Gathering enough evidence
18. Universal means that:  
a) All persons have dignity  
b) No one can take dignity away from us  
c) Dignity is with us our entire life  
d) Dignity is not earned
19. Art and creativity have the power to:  
a) Help us go beyond our present situation.  
b) Communicate intangible dimensions of reality.  
c) Stir up our emotions.  
d) Convey some deeper meaning.
20. Which of the following questions is not a part of Socrates triple filter test:  
a) Is what I want to say good?  
b) Is there financial interest in it?  
c) Is it helpful?  
d) Is it true?
21. The "I have a dream" speech was given by:  
a) Mahatma Gandhi  
b) Stephen Covey  
c) John Lennon  
d) Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Interim Quiz 1 - Answer Key**

1. F – true freedom means doing what is excellent.
2. F – humans differ from animals in having the powers to think and choose.
3. T
4. F – creativity is specifically human power.
5. F – he developed a three filter test.
6. F - Harriet Tubman fought for the rights of slaves in the USA.
7. Freedom for indifference says that to be free means simply that we can choose whatever we want. Which choice we make does not really make any difference. We are truly indifferent to which choice we will make as long as we can make the choice. Freedom is equated with the mere capacity to choose. Choice can be anything, good or bad, excellent or non-excellent. While freedom of indifference claims that we are free if we can choose whichever option, freedom for excellence says that we will be truly free only if we always choose what is excellent. Freedom for excellence is the capacity to choose wisely and to act well as a matter of habit. Freedom is the means by which, exercising both our reason and our will, we act on the natural longing for truth, for goodness, and for happiness that is built into us as human beings. This means that we can be truly free only when we constantly choose that which is true and good.
8. What is the power to choose?
9. What powers do all living beings share?
10. What is art?
11. What is the Underground Railroad?
12. What is inviolable?
13. What are habits of excellent thinking?
14. b
15. d - they are accessible, and one means to access them is art.
16. a and c
17. b, c, d
18. a
19. a, b, c and d
20. b
21. d