



Propaganda, Persuasion and Playwriting  
*Inherit the Wind* by  
Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee  
Conversation: **Lessons of History**



Includes links to Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

Though based on the famous Scopes "Monkey Trail" where William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow clashed over a teacher's right to teach evolution, this play addresses other issues of freedom of thought by students and teachers. See how the various characters use propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies to convince others to believe and do what they are told. Learn the value of challenging what you hear and of testing claims that may seem valid on the surface. See handout "To Convince and To Persuade".

**For the Teacher:** Students may connect with the conflict in the play in light of the recent high profile court cases about teaching intelligent design and creationism as part of high school science courses. Depending on the students' religious convictions, class members may take firm opposing positions to the issues raised when the lawyers use the Bible in the closing arguments.

Some students of history will recognize that this play about intellectual freedom was published around the McCarthy Era and that the Scopes trial was not mentioned in history books in American high schools and colleges until after publication of this play in which the authors mention the connection their play and that historical incident.

The students may be interested to know that the Scopes trial received the first on-the-scene mass communications coverage of a criminal trial." [Scopes Trial (4 February 2006) wikipedia.com]



- To **develop** understanding of ways one can use persuasive appeals to bring about change in thinking or behavior
- To **develop** understanding of ways literature reflects social, economic and political issues of the times.
- To **demonstrate** understanding of setting, conflict, and character in drama
- To **demonstrate** understanding of informative/persuasive writing
- To **practice** playwriting and/or digital media skills (option to submit copy of written script)
- To **practice** research skills while developing Student Congress Bill
- To **demonstrate** dramatic reading skills
- To **hone** collaboration skills by working in pairs, triads or small groups

### **Beginning the Conversation: Act I**

1. Do you believe the United States government has the right to legislate what is taught in public schools? Why? Why not?
2. After reading the opening paragraphs on page three, what do you infer will be the impact of the set design the authors Lawrence and Lee have described?
3. What do you learn about Rachel from reading the Italicized writing at the top of page five? What do suppose will be her role as the plot unfolds?
4. What do you learn about Bertram Cate's personality in the opening scene of this play?
5. Since stage curtains are not being used, what stage directions do the authors use to indicate the scene is shifting?
6. Why do you think the authors point out that the townspeople are not "caricatured rubes"? What hint to that comment is the presence of the lemonade and hot dog stands?
7. What do you think Rachel has told Brady that makes him feel so confident about winning his case?
8. Why do you think the authors, Lawrence and Lee, chose to have Henry Drummond's shadow appear on stage before the audience could see him?
9. From your experience, observation, or reading how common is the treatment Bertram Cate surprise receives from the town? Explain.
10. Do you agree with Drummond's comment, "...when you lose your power to laugh, you lose your power to think straight."? Why? Why not?
11. Is there anyone in your life that makes you feel the way Rachel feels about her father? If this feeling is something you can talk about, do so.

### **Continuing the Conversation: Act II**

12. Hornbeck declares, "I no reporter, Colonel. I'm a critic." What is the difference?
13. During the prayer meeting, what propaganda technique does Reverend Brown use to switch so smoothly from preaching about creation to castigating Henry Drummond?
14. Do you believe Brady is earnest when he cautions Brown about cursing Drummond? How does this action influence your opinion of Brady?
15. Do you see any difference between "truth" and "right" as Drummond tries to explain it? How would you explain the difference?
16. What do you think about Drummond's calling Matthew Harrison Brady to testify for the defense?
17. Compare the way Drummond is able swing public opinion to his side with the method used by Brown during the prayer meeting.

### **Tying It All Together: Act III**

18. What does Bertram Cates' posture in the opening scene suggest about his hopes for the outcome of the trial?
19. Can you identify with Drummond's experience with Golden Dancer? What do you think is the significance of that story to this play? To history?
20. In what ways do events in the dramatic closing scene teach or confirm what you know about human nature and historical events?





**Moving beyond the play:**

21. Peruse handouts on [Student Congress](#) (Parliamentary Debate) and [Playwriting](#)



22. Choose a topic of controversy that interests you and with a partner or small group, create a Student Congress Bill that proposes a solution to that problem raised or present a [speech](#) to convince or persuade on a topic of your choice and approved by the teacher. See [procon.org](#). Have [SPAR](#) to practice, then class choose topic for Parliamentary Debate.

23. Write a scene that includes one or two characters who survived in this play. What happens next? In five years? In a small group, decide among the individual scenes which one your group would like to polish, practice and present as a dramatic reading or create a video of group presentation.



**Grading Considerations:**

See [General Grading Guidelines](#)

See [Playwriting Check List](#)

See [Persuasive Speech Feedback Form](#)



**Potential to Demonstrate Common Core State Standards in ELA**

<p>Key Ideas and Details – <a href="#">RL 9-10.4,5 and 6</a>. <a href="#">RL 11-12, 1,2,3</a>.            Craft and Structure – <a href="#">RL 9-10, 4 and 5</a>. <a href="#">RL 11-12, 4,5,6</a>            Integration of Knowledge and Ideas – <a href="#">RL 9-10, 7 and 9</a>. <a href="#">RL 11-12, 7</a>            Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity – <a href="#">RL 9-10,4</a> <a href="#">RL 11-12, 10</a>            Knowledge of Language - <a href="#">RL 11-12, 3</a></p>	<p>Text Types and Purposes - <a href="#">W.9-10.3</a>, <a href="#">W.11-12.3</a>            Production and Distribution of Writing - <a href="#">W.9-10.4</a>, <a href="#">W.9-10.5</a>, <a href="#">W.9-10.6</a><a href="#">W.11-12.4</a>, <a href="#">W.11-12.5</a>, <a href="#">W.11-12.6</a></p> <div data-bbox="1003 1486 1187 1654" data-label="Image"> </div>
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