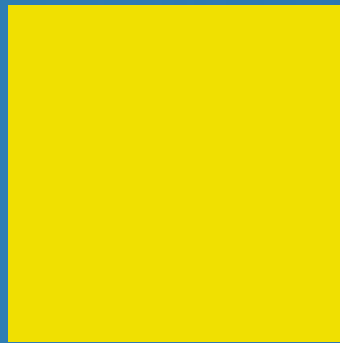


2



ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED
TEXTS: TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO

TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

This thematic module is part of the educational activities developed within the EDUC8 Project. It focuses on our encounters with and understanding of violence. Violence comes in many forms, and some of them are more easily recognizable than others. There are also various sources of violence. In what follows, this topic is presented through the lens of ethics. It particularly highlights moral emotions and attitudes that substantially influence how we act.



Figure 2.1
Video Clip

2.1 SCENARIO

In what follows is the text version of the scenario that you can look in the form of the animated video. It concerns the emotions or feelings of shame, guilt, pride, and what role they play in our lives. Feelings and emotions often impact both how we act as well as how we perceive the world around us.



Figure 2.2
(Un)covered
Source: © vika_hova /
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You can choose to read the scenario by yourself or watch the animated video. (If the teacher agrees and other pupils are ready to do so, you can also read it out loud with your classmates or even decide to (re)enact the scenario as a school- or class-play. You can also change aspects of how it develops or write different endings of the story).

The scenario features students at a school and also invokes two stories, one about Oedipus and the other about a famous warrior Ajax. After the script, you can find both stories briefly explained.

2.2 THE STORY OF OEDIPUS

The story of Oedipus comes from ancient Greece and its mythology. It is dramatically described in several plays by Sophocles, the famous writer of tragedy plays (born c. 496 BCE, Colonus, near Athens, Greece; died 406 BCE, Athens). His play *Oedipus the King* (*Oedipus Rex*) is perhaps the most well-known depiction of his story.

As said, there are several different variants of the story. According to one of them, Laius, the king of Thebes (a city in central Greece, northwest of Athens), was cautioned by an oracle that his son would kill him. Thus, after his wife Jocasta (also Iocaste or Epicaste) gave birth to their son, Laius has ordered that the baby-boy should be exposed in the wilderness in the mountains near the city and left to die there. But a shepherd found the baby, took pity, and saved him. Oedipus survived and was adopted by King Polybus of Corinth (an ancient city and a state in south-central Greece, in modern times, known for The Corinth Canal, i.e., a passage for voyages of ships between the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea) and his wife that took care of him as their own son. When growing up, Oedipus visited Delphi (a famous place that issues prophecies) and has learned that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother.

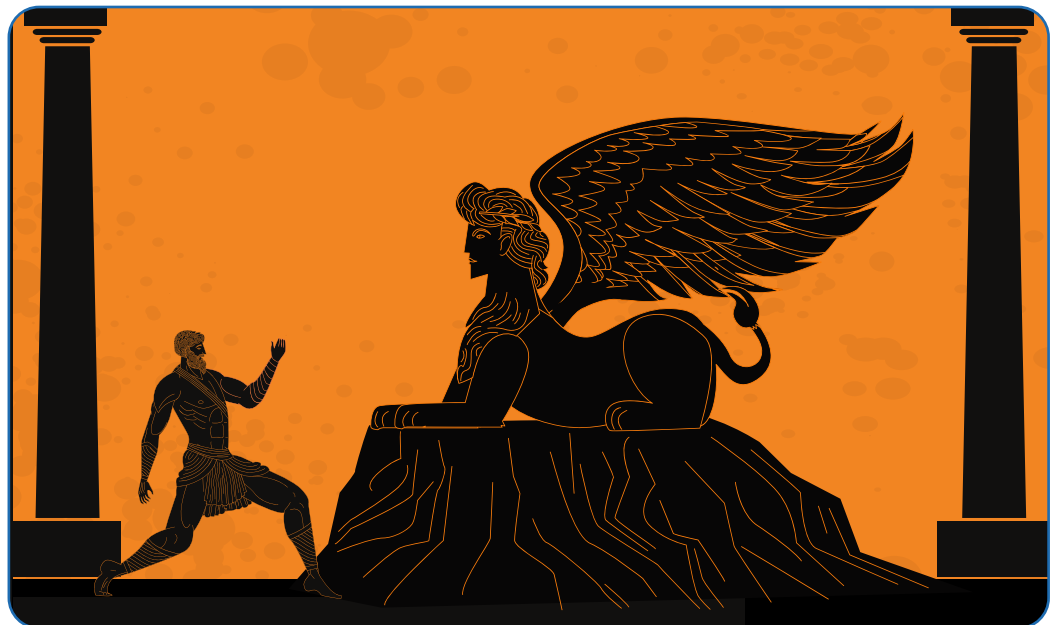


Figure 2.3
Oedipus and the sphinx
Source: @matiasdelcarmine
Adobe Stock

Fearing this fate, Oedipus never returned to Corinth as he saw would be the best means to avoid this dreadful fate (mistakenly thinking that Polybus is his father).¹ On his way to Thebes, he met Laius, his actual father, who provoked a quarrel, and Oedipus killed him (unknowing that he is his father) in the struggle between them. Arriving at Thebes later, he found out that the city is in need. Thebes were terrorized by Sphinx (a creature with the head of a woman, a body of a lion and wings of a bird; see image above) that posed riddles to people and those who could not answer them ended up killed by it.

Oedipus successfully solved the riddle, and as a reward, he received the throne of Thebes and the hand of the widowed queen, his actual mother, Jocasta. His fate was now completed, but he still did not know this. After learning the truth, Jocasta committed suicide, and Oedipus blinded himself and went into exile.²

¹Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. Oedipus.

²Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. Oedipus.

2.3 THE WORLD OF THE STORY

The story of Ajax also comes from Greek mythology and is depicted in by Sophocles in a play titled *Ajax*. According to the legend, Ajax (also “Ajax the Great” or “Enormous Ajax”) was a hero, a brave Greek warrior of great stature that fought with Hector (the chief warrior of Troy, a kingdom in western Anatolia that fought with the Greeks in the so-called Trojan wars) and he rescued the body of another hero, Achilles that was killed in battle. There was a dispute between him and Odysseus for the armor previously worn by Achilles, but Ajax lost the fight. He nonetheless believed that he has earned to have it and wear this armor, and this flamed another dispute.³



Figure 2.4
Dispute over the armor
of Achilles between Ajax
and Odysseus
Source: © Archivist /
Adobe Stock

According to the story, as described by Sophocles, Ajax attempted to assassinate Odysseus and the judges (Agamemnon and Menelaus) that were judging the fight between Odysseus and him. He set himself for this planned attack but was made confused by the goddess Athena. Due to this “blindness” caused by Athena, Ajax mistakenly slew the animals that his army has seized as the spoils of war and their keepers. Once realizing what he has done Ajax, feels shame. He feels humiliated and he fears that others will laugh at him for making such a foolish mistake (even though the mistake itself was not his fault but the working of Athena). After struggling with this, he decides to take his own life. Agamemnon and Menelaus order that Ajax’s corpse is left unburied as punishment. But the wise Odysseus persuades the commanders to relent and grant Ajax an honorable burial. In the end, Odysseus is the only person who seems truly aware of the changeability of humans.⁴

³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. Ajax.

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. Ajax.

Again, this story reveals that we react to actions that we have done and that it is important to us how others perceive us. In relation to shame, we talk about shaming and stigmatization.

Shaming occurs when we publicly expose somebody for their flaws, wrong actions or characteristics, direct attention to them and invite them to feel shame for these flaws. Beware, that we can also be wrong to see something as a flaw.

Stigmatization can be understood as marking somebody out for something that he or she is or has done, excluding the person from the others.



Figure 2.5
Abusive words and
stigmatization
Source: © soupstock /
Adobe Stock

In the scenario in the animated video, Pieter-Jan is in danger of being excluded from his classmates since he is forced to wear special badges. People also often react violently to shaming and stigmatization in actions that can be additionally fueled by their feeling of powerlessness.

2.4 ASSIGNMENTS RELATED TO THE STORIES

Write down the assignments and answers to the questions below.



Figure 2.6
Writing a story
Source: © gerasimov174 /
Adobe Stock




Tell the stories of Oedipus and Ajax in your own words.



What are the similarities between the stories of Oedipus and Ajax and the scenario featuring Pieter-Jan and other students?



What are the differences between the stories of Oedipus and Ajax and the scenario featuring Pieter-Jan and other students?

 What would it be like if these two stories (Oedipus and Ajax) were happening not in ancient Greece, almost three millennia ago, but in present times? Write down, in brief, how would these stories played out if there were happening now, around you. You can choose to sketch both stories anew or only focus on one of them.

2.5 QUIZZES AND ASSIGNMENTS RELATED TO THEM

The assignments that follow are optional and can be completed if you are willing to discover more on these topics.

There are three quizzes with overall six questions related to the animated video and also to what was said above. Your assignment here is to answer these questions and briefly explain why you answered as you did. Please write down your thoughts below each question.

Question 1:

Is it fair that Pieter-Jan must wear the two mentioned badges? (You can choose more than one answer)

- Yes, it is fair since they are only stating what is the fact, what is true.
- Yes, since he deserved it, not doing his assignments and being behind with his work.
- No, because perhaps it is not his fault that this happened.
- No, because in this way, he is the only one singled out.
- Yes, because he was behaving badly towards some other classmates.
- Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?



Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?

 **Question 2:**

When do we feel shame? (You can choose more than one answer)

- When we disobey the rules.
- When we do something wrong.
- When others observe or come to know, that we have done something wrong.
- When we are disappointed about ourselves.
- When others exclude us from their company.



Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?

 **Question 3:**

Why do you think Oedipus was trying to hide himself before others and why he could not even stand his own look? (You can choose more than one answer)

- Because he has done something wrong.
- Because he did not want to be the person, he ended up being.
- Because others were angry at him.
- Because if he had known these things, he would not have done them.



Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?

? Question 4:

Why was Ajax ashamed? (You can choose more than one answer)

- Because he made a mistake.
- Because the goddess Athena put a spell on him and confused his perceptions.
- Because he failed to kill Odysseus, Menelaus, and Agamemnon.
- Because he was no longer seen as a great warrior.
- Because he killed the innocent animals.



Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?



Figure 2.7
Decision
Source: © Itummy /
Adobe Stock

 **Question 5:**

When and why do we feel pride? (You can choose more than one answer)

- When we are helping others.
- When we are better than others and excel in some aspect, e.g., win a medal.
- When others are respecting us.
- When others praise us and give us their attention.
- When we have done something that was hard for us to do, even if nobody noticed this.



Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?

 **Question 6:**

Had Pieter-Jan done something that merited others excluding him and avoiding him? (You can choose more than one answer)

- Yes, because he failed to complete his assignments.
- Yes, because he is doing worse than everybody else in the class.
- No, because he did not know what the right thing is to do.
- No, because by excluding him, he cannot get any help from them.
- No, because he is just a student, like all the rest of them (us).



Why did you choose the answer(s) you did?

2.6 ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

Bob Dylan: Hurricane

? Read and/or listen to the song Hurricane by a famous folk singer Bob Dylan. Did you hear it before? Do you know the story that it contains about a boxer named Rubin Carter?

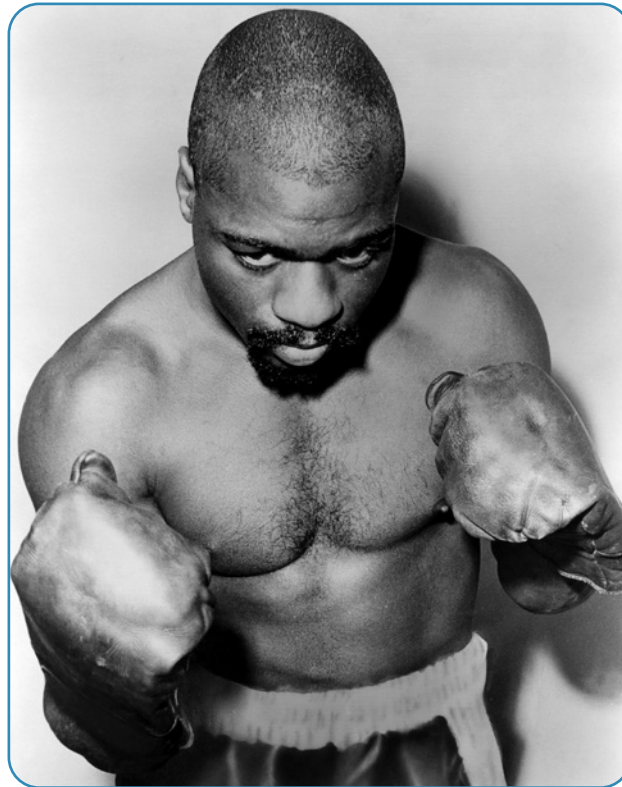


Figure 2.8
Rubin “Hurricane”
Carter, 1964.
Source: © CSU Archives /
Adobe Stock

Here is a brief version of the story. Rubin Carter, a boxer with the nickname “Hurricane” because of his swift boxing moves, was falsely accused of a triple murder that happened on June 17, 1966, in a town called Paterson in New Jersey (US). Two men entered a bar, started shooting, and three people ended up dead. Ten minutes after this shooting took place, the police stopped the car in which Rubin was traveling with two of his friends. The witnesses at the scene of murder reported that they saw two black men entering the bar and described a car

that was similar to the one that Carter was stopped in. However, none of these reports were particularly reliable. There was no evidence that Rubin was guilty of the murder, and it turned out that some of the evidence was framed and that the witnesses were forced or solicited to accuse Carter falsely. Later that night, Carter’s car was stopped again by the police, which ended up in the arrest. The charge for Carter was triple murder. There was no evidence that Rubin was guilty of the murder. It also turned out that some of the evidence was framed and that the witnesses were forced or solicited to incriminate and accuse Carter falsely. After several trials, the court and the jury found Rubin guilty and sentenced him to life imprisonment. It was only in 1985 that after several appeals, Rubin Carter was released from prison, and the initial indictment was dismissed. After being released, Rubin Carter was, among other things, executive director of the *Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted* and motivational speaker. His story was portrayed several times in books and movies. It shows how quickly one can be judged by the colour of their skin and how certain groups are highly stigmatized. Back to Dylan’s song “Hurricane.” In the song, Bon Dylan sings “Couldn’t help but make me feel ashamed to live in a land ... Where justice is a game”.



How do you understand this verse after knowing the story?



Why would somebody feel shame for something that his or her country has done in the past or is doing in this moment?



Do you know some other similar examples?



Figure 2.9
Henri Vidal, Cain
Source: © Renáta
Sedmáková /
Adobe Stock

Images and expressions of shame


There are numerous depictions and other artistic expressions of the feelings of shame and guilt. One of the most famous ones is the statue of Cain by Henri Vidal (1864 - 1918), the French sculptor. It depicts Cain after murdering its brother in rivalry as described in the Bible and in the Quran. The statue is in Paris.



Figure 2.10
Ashes by Edvard Munch
(1895)
Source: National Gallery
of Norway via
Wikimedia Commons

Another depiction used here is the one by Edvard Munch, a picture titled “Ashes” (1895).

Take a few moments to look at the statue of Cain and to the painting Ashes and complete the assignments below.

 What emotions does the statue of Cain express? How are these emotions expressed in the posture of the body? Try to point out as many details as possible.



Looking at the picture “Ashes”, how would you describe it to somebody who cannot see it? Write this description down.

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a thin blue border, intended for writing a description.



The final assignment for this section is for you to take a piece of blank paper or use the blank space below and draw the emotion of shame. You are free to do this in any way you like.

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a thin blue border, intended for drawing the emotion of shame.

2.7 GLOSSARY

Common Humanity: an ethical ideal according to which we are all equal in our moral status as human beings and which requires treatment of all others, regardless of their race, color, social status, religion, gender, age, language etc., as equals.

Guilt: a painful feeling that we have when we realize that we have done something wrong, for example, harm someone.

Humiliation: pointing out someone's mistakes in front of everyone else, reducing one's status and causing embarrassment.

Prejudice(s): preconceived and unfounded beliefs and attitudes towards individuals, groups, activities or ideas. They often include evaluation or classification of another person based for example, on gender, values, social class, religion, race, etc.

Reactive Attitudes: attitudes that we form in our relationships with others and in response to the actions of others, for example, resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, spite, love, contempt.

Shame: our sense of excessive exposure, of not being covered, or being powerless in relation to the other(s). Moral shame is a sense of weakness and powerlessness that we feel about our moral wrongdoings or not living up to the ideals we have set for ourselves.

Shaming: enticing people to feel shame while publicly exposing their flaws, wrong actions, characteristics, etc.

Stigmatization: calling notice to a characteristic, trait or misdeed of someone or some group with the intention of excluding them. It is often connected with negative attitudes, prejudices and ignorance.

2.8 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1. EXT PLAYGROUND SCHOOL

We see 3 students, David, Sarah and Lindsay talking to each other.

David: Did you see Pieter-Jan?

Lindsay: No, I did not. Where is he?

2. INT CLASSROOM DAY

We see Mr Roberts, the teacher, giving 2 badges to Pieter-Jan, who looks sad...

David: He was forced to wear two badges for the rest of the week by Mr. Roberts.

We see the badges on Pieter-Jan. First a yellow one and then a Red one.

David: The yellow one is for not using his time wisely.. He didn't get his tasks done this week. And the red one is because he was last in class.

3. EXT PLAYGROUND SCHOOL

Lindsay: Huhhh!

Sarah: Well, he deserved it. He has been a total jerk. And everything these badges say is actually true. So, he should be ashamed of himself and wear them, proudly. (laughs a bit)

Lindsay: It's true that he has been slacking lately. But a lot of us are not doing our best and he was the only one singled out. It doesn't seem fair.

David: I saw him punching a wall a few times, saying "I hate you all!!!" and look at him now ... with his face down, ...

We see Pieter-Jan in a corner being sad, with his hands in front of his face listening to music.

Sarah: Yeah.... at least he can now think about what he has done! If the best students are awarded medals and distinctions of recognition at the end of the year, why wouldn't we also use distinctions for those that are doing the worst among us?

Lindsay: I do not know what to say. I feel sorry for him. He is now certainly hiding from the rest of us.

David: I just hope that he will get back on track.

Lindsay: If this would be me, I would just want to vanish and never return. Do you remember the story of Oedipus that we choose for our school play last month?

Transition to ... school play 'The Story of Oedipus and Ajax'



4. INT SCHOOL STAGE DAY

We see a stage with Sarah on the left side dressed in an ancient Greek gown.

There is a Greek temple background in a schoolplay. They are re-enacting the story.

Sarah as a narrator on stage while we see other students play the scenes: Oedipus was subject to a terrible prophecy, that that he would end up killing his father, marrying his mother and bringing vast disaster and plague to the city and his family. His father, the king of Thebes ordered a shepherd to take Oedipus to the wilderness and leave him there to die in order to circumvent the terrible prophecy. But due to the peculiar turn of events Oedipus survived and the prophecy became a reality, without him knowing anything about it. After recognizing what he has done, he is very ashamed and in agony. He says that he cannot bear the looks of others...

Oedipus: "I am dirty", ... "unpleasant and disagreeable even to the goods." "O, I adjure you, hide me anywhere, far from this land, or slay me straight, or cast me, down to the depths of ocean out of sight."

Back to the Playground:

David: Oedipus ended up taking his own eyes out, since he could not even bear looking at himself. He then begged to get exiled from Thebes.

5. INT SCHOOL HALLWAY DAY

The 3 students are now in the School hallway and continue their conversation.

Lindsay: I can imagine Pieter-Jan feeling like that at the moment...

Sarah: Well that's his own mistake... If he would just get his act together.

David: But what if he did his best but just didn't make it? Then it would be a bit like Ajax, not getting what he thinks he deserves...like we did in the other play about the story of Ajax.

6. INT SCHOOL STAGE DAY

We see a stage with Lindsay on the left side dressed in an ancient Greek gown.

Lindsay as a narrator: And Ajax, he was a great and proud warrior. Nonetheless, he decided to kill Odysseus, Menelay, and Agamemnon out of revenge and retaliation because he - as the greatest of the Greek warriors - was not given Achilles' armor. In relation to this intent, the goddess Athena baffles him in a way that he thinks he has indeed killed them, but in reality, he slayed the animals that his army has seized as the spoils of war and their keepers. When he realized his mistake, Ajax was ashamed to be seen in such a light, unworthy of a famous warrior, and he wandered off by himself to an isolated place. There he took his own life by throwing himself on his sword.

David: "O darkness, now my daylight, O gloom of Erebus, for me the brightest light there is, take me, take me now to live with you. Take me, a man no longer worthy to seek help from families of gods or men, those creatures of a day."

7. INT SCHOOL HALLWAY DAY

The students are continuing the discussion. The school is in the background and the school motto is clearly visible: **"Be proud!"**

Lindsay: I remember him having a big discussion with the teacher about this story. He had a very interesting point of view....

We see Pieter-Jan walking out of the classroom with his backpack and books in his hands.

Lindsay: Look, there he goes. He seems to be carrying all of his stuff. Is he going home?

Sarah: Well, I am sure I do not want him around me. I do not want to be seen with him. My mum always says that I should not be around losers and failures if I want to succeed. (Goes away.)

Lindsay: We must convince him not to go home this early and missing more classes.

Lindsay and David walk towards Pieter-Jan.

David: Hi, Pieter-Jan.

Pieter-Jan: Aaaah..., hi. I really do not want to talk to anybody right now.

Lindsay: I get that. We understand that it's rough baring those badges... But I also remember you saying something interesting about our school play on the story of Ajax.

Pieter-Jan: What? I do not recall discussing all that much.

Lindsay: Remember when we have read the story of Ajax? You were the only one saying about him, that he sure was not a brave, proud and honored warrior to begin with if he decided to murder other people just because he was not awarded with Achilles' armor.

Pieter-Jan: Yes, and I still think so. The teacher kept insisting that it was all Athena's fault and that she tricked him. But it was him. Of course, things can go wrong for anybody, but it is important to have good intentions.

Lindsay: I agree. I guess it's a bit like you at the moment... I'm sure there is a reason why school isn't working out at the moment.

Pieter-Jan: yeah... I was really trying hard to complete the assignments, but we were forced to move from our apartment this week and go live with our grandfather in his tiny studio. That is why I am late with everything.

David: I did not know that. Do you need some help with the assignments? Maybe I can help.

Pieter-Jan: No, I will manage to complete them. I have them designed in my mind already. I just want this week to pass. I know that I am not the best in class. These badges they made me wear do not mean anything to me. They do hurt me, though...

Lindsay: But I think others can hurt you, Pieter-Jan, even though the badges themselves wont. I think it is not fair that the school decided to handle things this way. Here, I will make you another badge that you can wear, saying "A friend." And this one you can keep even after he end of this week.

2.9 REFERENCES

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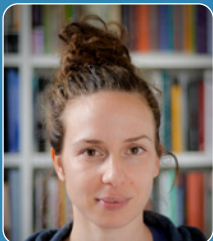
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DUC8 Consortium



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