

# Decision Education Foundation English Curriculum

## “Shooting an Elephant”

by George Orwell

### Unit Snapshot

<b><i>Designed For</i></b>	High School Students
<b><i>Essential Questions</i></b>	What is the balance between thinking and feeling in decision making? How do environment, biases, and culture sometimes limit our ability to make good decisions? What makes personal writing powerful?
<b><i>Content and Skill Focus</i></b>	Decision Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• using head and heart in decision making</li><li>• building, evaluating, and improving decisions</li><li>• avoiding common decision traps</li></ul> English Topic Effective personal writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• balances showing and telling,</li><li>• describes real experience,</li><li>• uses reflection, metaphor, and detail,</li><li>• employs direct, simple language.</li></ul>
<b><i>Expected Outcomes</i></b>	Ability to employ both thinking and feeling in decision making  Ability to recognize and avoid common traps that derail good decision making  Improved personal writing skills
<b><i>Kinds of Assessment</i></b>	Personal (college application) decision essay Exercises on decision quality, use of head and heart, traps, frames, and personal strengths and weaknesses Journal entries about head and heart, showing vs. telling, metaphor, and reflection
<b><i>Time Required</i></b>	Seven class periods
<b><i>Comments</i></b>	Orwell’s autobiographical account of his encounter with an elephant gone wild and the powerful crowd that surrounded him provides an engaging model of personal writing as well as an in depth look at the author’s decision process.

(Version 7)

## Overview



**General Description:** This unit plan for high school level is designed to give students practice with the following decision topics and English skills:

- *Head* and *heart* in decision-making
- Steps in the decision process
- Decision traps
- Personal essay writing

Depending on the background of the students, teachers can use this unit as an introduction OR review of essential principles that govern good decision making. The culminating exercise is a personal essay that students can use for their college applications.

**Duration:** This unit plan is designed for seven class periods. However, teachers can easily lengthen or shorten the unit by adjusting the number of exercises assigned. To encourage draft discussion and rewriting, students should have at least two weeks to complete the personal essay.

**Summary and Decision Perspective:** George Orwell, whose given name was Eric Blair, lived from 1903-1950. Born in Bengal, he moved to England at a young age and was educated at Eton. From 1922-1927 Orwell served with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, and he recounts this part of his life in *Burmese Days*. Orwell wrote seven novels and is best known for *Animal Farm*, an attack on the aims and methods of communism, and *1984* (written in 1949), a critical look at totalitarianism.

“Shooting an Elephant” (from *A Collection of Essays*; Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; 1946; pages 148-156) is a personal essay that focuses on a specific incident from Orwell’s experience as a “sub-divisional police officer” in Burma. First appearing in 1936, the short piece explores the reasons and motivations for the narrator’s decision to shoot an elephant that was in heat (had gone “must”) and roamed unattended in the neighborhood.

While the essay is a powerful example of personal writing, it also offers us a look into an intriguing decision situation. Orwell provides a vivid description of his circumstances at the time, reviews his choice with a critical eye, and makes us look closely at his motivations and actions. This unit on “Shooting an Elephant” gives students the opportunity to consider the process, common traps, and important connection between *head* (reason) and *heart* (feeling) in making good decisions. As they approach the college application process, juniors and seniors in high school will find this essay to be a useful model for personal writing, and students will end this unit with a polished draft of an essay that explores a significant personal decision. The final product should be easily adaptable for the college application process.



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## 2. Learning Plan



## First Class: Introduction to Personal Writing and “Shooting an Elephant”

### Materials

Performance Task: A Personal Essay

### Procedure

- Introduce the unit by asking your students the following question:

*What makes a personal essay successful?*

- As you explore the nature of *personal writing* together, list students’ ideas on the board. Some topics to emphasize as they surface or towards the end of the conversation: *honesty, clarity, engaging content: it reveals character (who I am)-- includes specific examples-- can be about ordinary life experience (need not be sensational or exceptionally dramatic), writer’s natural voice.* (For more ideas on college application essays, see *College Essay Web Resources* at the end of the unit.)
- Introduce background and context of Orwell’s essay, “Shooting an Elephant.” See *Resources on the Web* (page 24) for more information about Orwell and the essay.
- Explain that Orwell’s essay is a powerful example of personal writing, and that as they study it students will 1) learn about how our head and heart as well as certain common traps affect our decision making; they will also practice their personal writing skills. The final goal is to end up with a sound draft of an essay about a specific personal decision (share the *Performance Task* with the class). Explain that students can use the essays they produce for the college application process.

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Read “Shooting an Elephant” and list unfamiliar words. Also, ask students to begin the **Performance Task ( Step 1 )** by starting a list of possible decisions they might choose for personal essay topics.

## Second Class: Orwell’s Decision

### Materials

Electronic version of the essay for projection



[http://www.george-orwell.org/Shooting\\_an\\_Elephant/0.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/Shooting_an_Elephant/0.html)

Dictionary

Handout 1—What is a good decision and how do we make them?

Handout 2—Orwell’s Decision: Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses

## Procedures

- Review the reading assignment.
  1. If possible, project the essay.
  2. Ask students to share words they found unfamiliar. Have volunteers read the words in context. Class defines the word together, and then another volunteer reads a dictionary definition.
  3. Discuss questions that arise about the basic plot issues.
- Ask students what they think of Orwell’s decision to shoot the elephant. Once discussion gains momentum, explain that you will review together some topics that will help them better understand Orwell’s (and their own) decision making.
- Use **Handout 1** to introduce or review the six elements of a good decision and the decision process.

**Note:** Teachers should draw the process (how) diagram on the board and explain the different parts as they add them to the picture. Then hand out printed copies for students to keep.

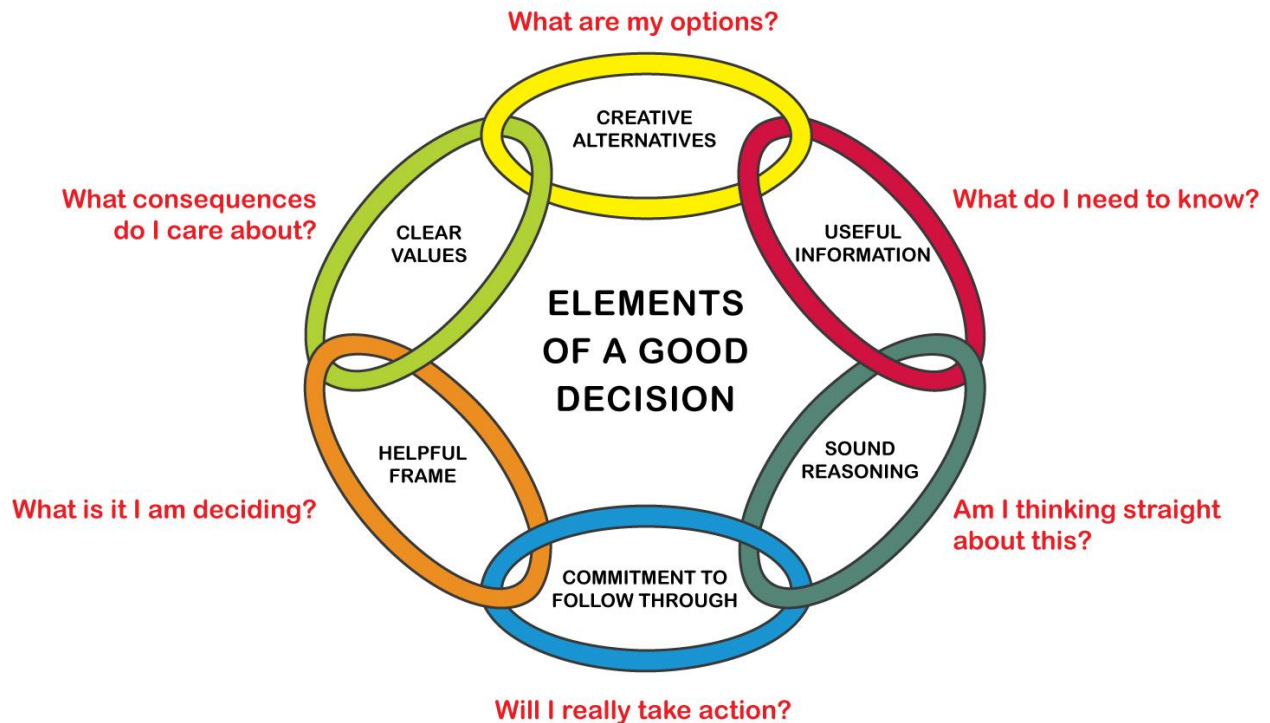
## Next Steps

**Homework or In-Class Assignment:** Give students **Handout 2**. Ask them to use both Handouts 1 and 2 to review the *what* and *how* of good decision making and to explore Orwell’s decision in greater detail.



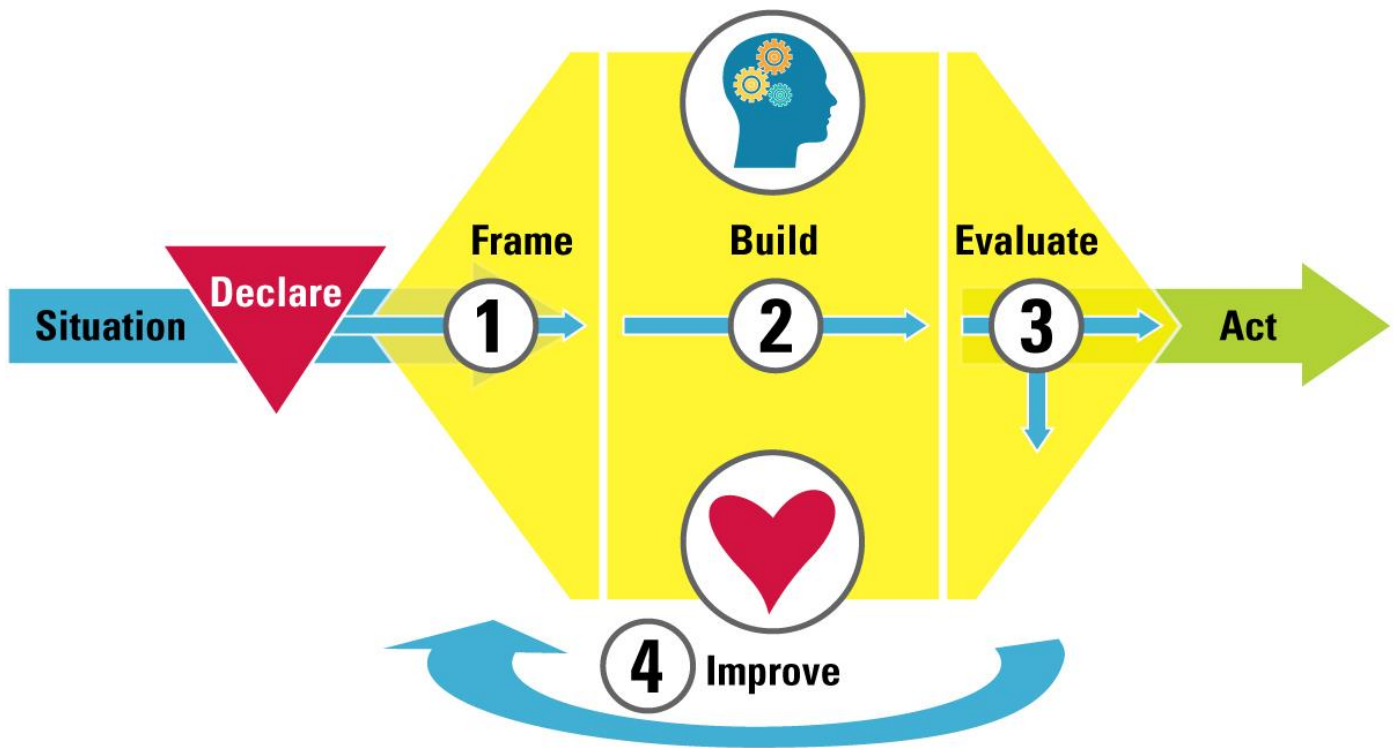
Handout 1—*What* is a good decision?—Six Elements  
*How* do we make them?—Four Step Process

Once we have *declared a decision*, we can use the following **six elements** to help us pick the best course of *action*.



***How to tackle an important decision:*** The following pictures connect the elements above (WHAT) with the decision-making process (HOW).

Between the moment of declaring that a choice must be made and finally taking action, a rigorous decision process\* uses four steps:



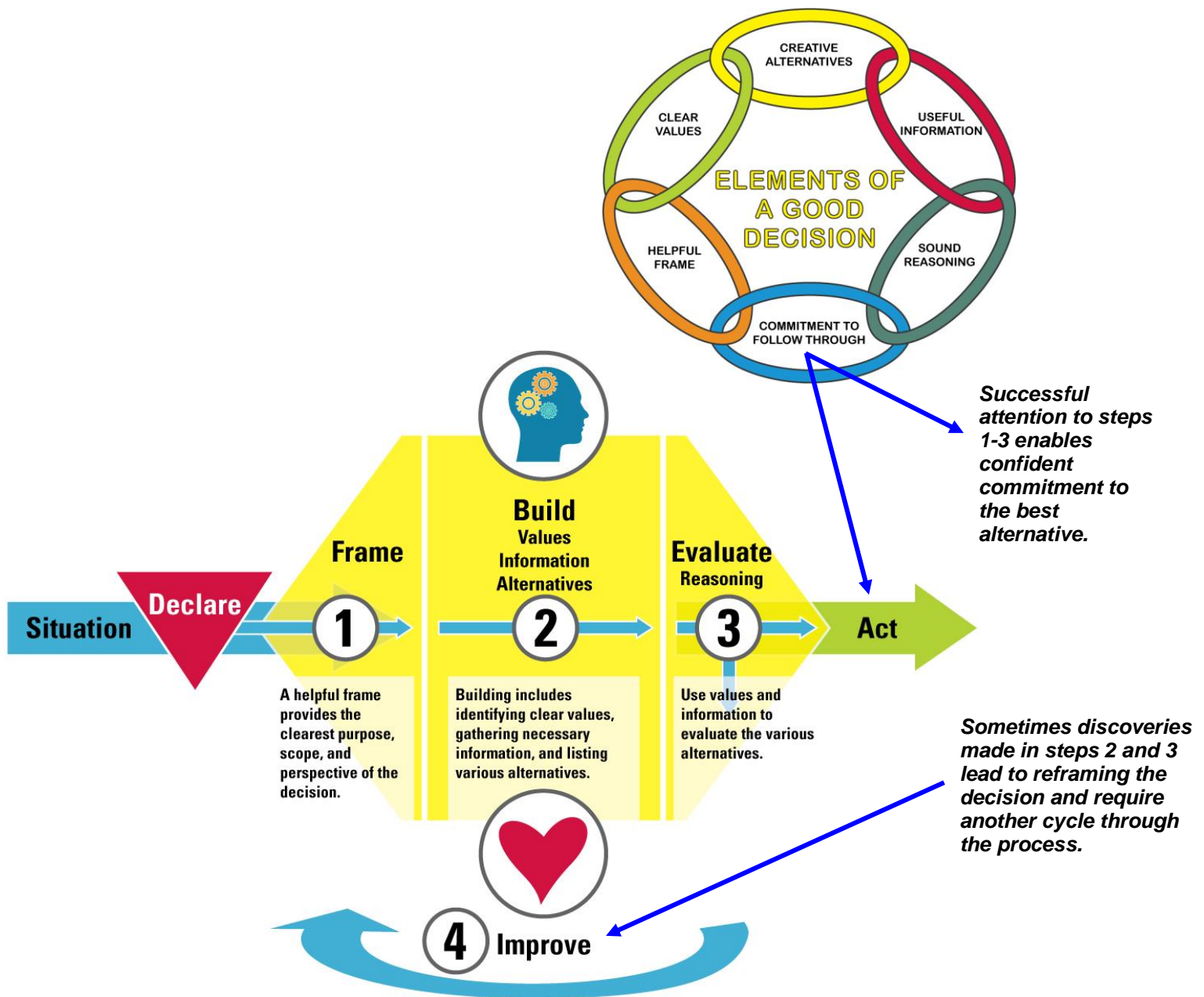
Good decisions **make sense** (head) and **feel right** (heart).

Therefore, through every stage of the process, it is important to balance **head** (what I think) and **heart** (what I feel).

*\*Note: All decisions are not alike—some require the hard work of a rigorous process (i.e. college decision), but most of them we make in the moment (i.e. choices for lunch). Building good habits helps us with all kinds of decision situations.*



## Elements to consider at each stage of the decision process...



**Important Note:** While the diagram above presents a series of steps, we can begin with any of the elements in 1 or 2 above.

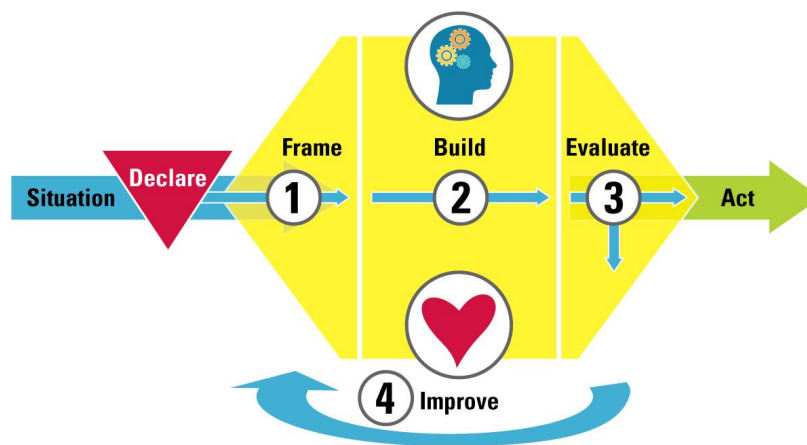


## Handout 2.

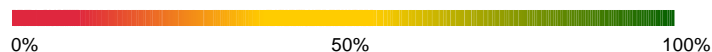
### Orwell's Decision: Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses

How well do you think Orwell considers the six elements of a good decision (the questions related to the links?) and the process described by the diagrams below? If he asked for your advice before he made his final decision, what would you tell him?

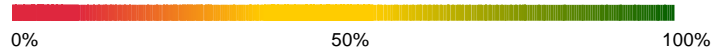
**Directions:** Mark the bar graphs below with percentages that represent how well you think Orwell considers each decision element. *A low percentage means you think he should explore the topic further; a high score indicates he has thoroughly considered the element.* Be ready to explain your opinions with evidence from the essay.



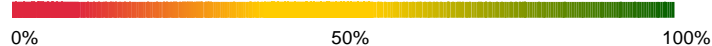
Helpful Frame



Creative Alternatives



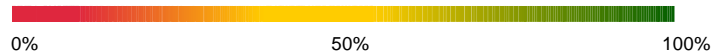
Useful Information



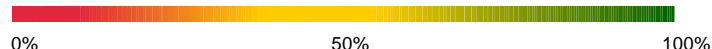
Clear Values



Sound Reasoning



Commitment To Follow Through



100% is the point at which additional effort is not worth it.

### Third Class: Head and Heart Analysis



## Materials

Handout 3—“Shooting an Elephant” Head and Heart Analysis

## Procedures

- Collect the **Orwell’s Decision (Handout 2)**. Students will need this handout again towards the end of the unit. Project the handout for discussion of student responses and for review of the six elements.
- In small groups (or individually) have students explore Orwell’s use of *head* and *heart* by reviewing the essay and completing **Handout 3**.

## Next Steps

**Homework:** (1) Finish **Handout 3** if not completed in class. (2) Complete **Step 2** of the **Performance Task**.



### Handout 3.

## “Shooting an Elephant” Head and Heart Analysis

**Directions:** Use the table below to record examples of how Orwell uses both his *head* (reasoning) and *heart* (feeling) in making his decision to shoot the elephant. First, reread the essay to find places where we see the author using logic: list page numbers and write a brief summary of each reference. Read the essay again, and do the same with examples of Orwell relying on his feelings.



<b>Example:</b> Page 148, par. 2: Orwell has “made up his mind” about Imperialism—it is evil (context for his decision)	Page 148, par. 2: mentions his “intolerable sense of guilt” about the dirty work of the Empire

## Sample responses for teachers

### “Shooting an Elephant” Head and Heart Analysis

**Directions:** Use the table below to record examples of how Orwell uses both his *head* (reasoning) and *heart* (feeling) in making his decision to shoot the elephant. First, reread the essay to find places where we see the author using logic: list page numbers and write a brief summary of each reference. Read the essay again, and do the same with examples of Orwell relying on his feelings.



Page 148, par. 2: Orwell has “made up his mind” about Imperialism—it is evil (context for his decision)	Page 148, par. 2: mentions his “intolerable sense of guilt” about the dirty work of the Empire
Page 149, par 2: “With one part of my mind...” While he mentions two parts of his mind, he clearly distinguishes the way he <i>thinks</i> about imperialism from the way he <i>feels</i> : he thinks British rule is an unbreakable tyranny of “prostrate people”-----→	←(same passage) his feelings—“I thought the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts. <i>Feelings</i> like these...” (Describing the by-products of imperialism which serve as the context for his decision to shoot the elephant. Great example of head and heart in one statement.)
Page 149, par. 3: “I thought the noise...” Reason for bringing a gun with him to inspect the situation.	Page 151, par. 5: “...and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I arched down the hill feeling a fool...”
Page 150-1, par. 4: new information of the Dravidian coolie’s death—sends for the elephant rifle. Page 152, par. 7: “I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle.”	Page 152-3, par 7: “And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all...I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward...And my whole life...was one long struggle not to be laughed at.”
Page 151, par 6: “As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him.” Attack of “must” wearing off. Decides to watch and then leave.	Page 153, par.8: “But I did not want to shoot the elephant.”
Page 153, par. 9: “It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do.” Orwell wrestles with what he knows is best (mind) and what he feels (heart) he must do.	Page 153-4, par.9: “And if that happened [Orwell died] it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative.”

#### Fourth Class: More on Head and Heart



## Materials

Handout 3—Head and Heart Analysis  
Assessment Evidence—Journal Entry 1: Head and Heart  
Journal Entry 2: Showing vs. Telling

## Procedures

- Class discussion of the *Head and Heart Analysis* (**Handout 3**. See sample responses). Fill in responses on board as students discuss their work.
- In class writing assignment: 20 minutes. Students complete **Journal Entry 1**:

*How well does Orwell balance his “head” and his “heart” in making the decision to shoot the elephant? Use the information you gathered from Handout 3 to respond to this question.*

- Collect to check student understanding.
- Hand out **Journal Entry 2**:

*Showing vs. Telling*: Consider the following examples.

A. *Telling*: “That teacher is so mean I get scared every time he is around me.”

B. *Showing*: “When I heard the click of his hard shoes in the hallway, I felt my stomach tighten and my knees go rubbery.”

A general guideline for personal writing is to strike an effective balance between “showing” and “telling.” Long passages that *tell facts* can quickly bore your reader.

**Exercise:** Write a paragraph in which you only tell facts. (You may have to use some descriptive language, but use as little as possible. For example, you can say “the money,” but not “the roll of crisp twenties in my back pocket.”) Your piece can be about any subject, real or fictional. Then rewrite the paragraph and avoid all telling—only show as in example B above.

## Next Steps

**Homework:** (1) Begin working on **Step 3** of the **Performance Task**. (2) Complete **Journal Entry 2**

## Fifth Class: Decision Traps



## Materials

Handout 4—Decision Traps

Handout 5—Gather Information for your Personal Essay

## Procedures

- Review the homework assignment by asking a few students to read their journal entries. Discuss showing vs. telling.
- Use **Handout 4** to introduce *Decision Traps*. Provide a few examples and ask students to share their own illustrations of the various traps.
- Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 students and have them work on the Orwell *Weakness and Strength* table (**Handout 4**) together. One member from each group should report on their findings before the end of class. Alternate ways to check group understanding:
  1. Assign one person to turn in a written record of the discussion.
  2. Ask each group to choose one “best” idea from their discussion.
- Give students **Handout 5**. Explain that the purpose of the assignment is to help them gather information that they can use in their personal essay.

## Next Steps

**Homework:** Students continue working on personal essays by completing **Handout 5** (*Gather Information for your Personal Essay*).



## Handout 4. **Decision Traps**

To make good decisions, we need

- to be aware of our own **strengths** and **weaknesses**, and
- to have the courage to **learn from past mistakes**.

In “Shooting an Elephant” Orwell looks closely at a past decision he has made, and one of the main sources of the essay’s power is the author’s honesty about his mixed motives and mistakes in this decision. Because we are imperfect decision makers living in an imperfect world, we can benefit from understanding decision traps.

**decision traps**—habits of thinking and feeling that can keep us from making the best decisions.



**Directions:** On the next page is a list of common **decision traps**.

1. Read through the list with your group.
2. **Consider Orwell’s weaknesses:** Decide which traps you think “snare” Orwell as he makes his decision to shoot the elephant.
3. Record your findings in the table that follows the list, and be ready to explain your ideas to the class.
4. **Consider Orwell’s strengths:** Which traps would be least likely to catch him? Record your thoughts in the table.

**Five Common Behaviors Describe Most Decision Traps**



## Comfort Zone Biases



**Dragging a problem into our comfort zone and resisting change is a common bias.**

People...

- do what comes naturally rather than what is important.
- become attached to the status quo and continue what they have been doing.
- hang on to false beliefs and fail to learn even with strong evidence.

## Motivational Biases



**Motivations can distort judgments and beliefs.**

People...

- distort their judgments to look good and get ahead.
- escalate commitment irrationally to protect their earlier choices, "Throw good money after bad."
- exhibit wishful thinking and undue optimism.
- seek confirmatory evidence while avoiding contradicting information.

## Biases in Perception



**Perceptions are distorted because of the way the brain senses and processes information.**

People:

- anchor judgments on the information that is easiest to recall (dramatic information, recent information, official information).
- make insufficient adjustments from their initial anchors.
- overestimate what they know.
- give different answers to the same question presented in different ways.

## Fallacies in Reasoning



**We often reach incorrect conclusions using casual reasoning.**

People...

- apply inappropriate mental guidelines.
  - substitute relative comparisons for absolute measures
  - simplify inappropriately
- have almost no ability to reason casually about uncertainty.
  - form false beliefs based on random effects
  - cannot solve the simplest probabilistic problems in their head—even experts

## Groupthink



**Groups combine individual distortions and add additional group dynamic distortions.**

People...

- either jump to conclusions or get bogged down.
- are reluctant to voice dissenting opinions.
- believe falsely that everyone agrees with the group decision.
- create cultures that institutionalize distortions.

**Orwell's weaknesses**  
(Traps that catch him)

**Evidence and Reasoning**

<b>Orwell's Strengths</b> (Traps that don't catch him)	<b>Evidence and Reasoning</b>

**Sample Responses for Teachers (benchmarks)**

Orwell's **weaknesses** are in red and strengths in **blue**.



**Important note:** Responses may vary, and as long as students use evidence from the essay, allow them to challenge responses below and defend different views.

**WEAKNESSES→ Motivational Bias and Groupthink:** Orwell states that an important motive for the choice he makes is his desire to avoid shame—to make sure no one laughs at him. While he takes on the responsibility of making a conscious choice, he allows fear of failure and criticism to limit his options. At the time of the incident he allows “others [the crowd] to decide for him,” and later, at the time of writing the essay, he admits the masses had power over him. Yes, he does consider more than one course of action once he has all the information about the situation, but he states that he had only one alternative: he frames the decision too narrowly out of his fear of ridicule. Orwell accepts the conditions established by British rule as well as the crowd’s response to that rule, and he feels he is a puppet with no choice. His feelings about his own immediate situation override his concerns for the elephant and its owner.

*More specific descriptions of the traps that catch Orwell...*

- Reacting unconsciously out of guilt, hate, shame, revenge, or love (relying too much on my heart)
- Avoiding conscious choice (or being artificially limited) because of fear of failure, criticism, ambiguity, peer pressure, lack of resources, loss of face
- Unwittingly letting others decide for me
- Framing the problem too narrowly to bring it into my comfort zone...
- Accepting unnecessary limits to my alternatives or assuming I have no alternatives
- Forgetting the “Do Nothing” alternative
- Assuming the future will be just like the past
- Thinking only of the short-term
- Thinking only of me
- Doing what I know how to do and ignoring something difficult but important

**STRENGTHS→ Reasoning and Perception:** While much of Orwell’s reasoning in the essay is the product of hindsight, he uses his mind well. Though he limits his work on some of the links (alternatives in particular), he considers each one, and he looks at the situation carefully by considering all of the pertinent information (destruction the elephant has caused, whereabouts of his mahout, death of the “coolie,” the fact that the animal is in heat, the value of the elephant, attitude of the crowd). He considers risks when he chooses to take a gun in the first place and to have someone fetch his larger rifle later when he nears the animal. Although he rejects “do nothing” as an alternative, he does consider that option. Once he chooses his alternative, Orwell does not flinch from commitment to follow through. His willingness and ability to take a critical look at his decision and to make important distinctions between his thoughts and feelings are impressive. It is his honest, objective self-criticism that gives the essay much of its power.

*More specific descriptions of the traps that Orwell avoids...*

- Reacting to situations without thinking (not using my head)
- Forgetting a good decision link
- Laziness or reluctance to find out needed information
- Avoiding uncertainty
- Ignoring risks
- Making a “mental commitment”, but separately deciding not to really put forth the necessary effort to follow through
- Not dealing with obstacles that get in the way
- Procrastination
- Halfhearted commitment

## Handout 5. Gather Information for Your Personal Essay

**Directions:** Use the table below to assess your own strengths and weaknesses as a decision maker. Review the list as you did for Orwell, and note the traps that challenge you the most. Then consider your strengths by listing the traps least likely to give you trouble. This exercise will



provide you with specific examples to explore in your personal essay.

<b>My Weaknesses</b> (Traps likely to catch me)	<b>Evidence and Reasoning</b>
<b>My Strengths</b> (Traps least likely to give me trouble)	<b>Evidence and Reasoning</b>



## Sixth Class: Description and Metaphor in Personal Writing

### Materials

Handout 6—Metaphors in “Shooting an Elephant”  
Journal Entry 3—Description and Metaphor

### Procedures

- Discuss any questions students have about the homework (**Handout 5**).
- Write the question, “What is a metaphor?” on the board. Ask for examples from the class, and review the definition as the group discusses examples.
- Use **Handout 6** to explore Orwell’s use of metaphors in the essay. Students can complete this exercise individually or in groups.
- Students complete **Journal Entry 3** in class:

*Choose one passage of description OR one metaphor from the essay, and discuss how Orwell uses it to accomplish his goals in “Shooting an Elephant.”*

- Collect responses to check student understanding.
- Review and explain directions for **Journal Entry 4** (homework).

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Students complete **Journal Entry 4**:

**Description and Reflection:** *Notice how Orwell combines description and reflection in the first two paragraphs of the essay. These paragraphs serve as background or context for the main focus of his piece—shooting the elephant. Pick a recent incident in your life (it need not be a dramatic or sensational one); describe it clearly; then add some reflection on the incident. Questions you can ask yourself to help with the reflection: What did you think about the incident at the time? Has your view changed since then? How did and do you now feel about it? What did others think and/or feel?*

## Handout 6. Metaphors in “Shooting an Elephant”



**Definition of a metaphor:** *A comparison which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first one or more qualities of the second.*

(adapted from *A Handbook to Literature*, Thrall/Hibbard/Hollman, Odyssey Press, New York, 1960, page 281)

**Directions:** One purpose of metaphors in personal writing is to clarify ideas with engaging images. Explore in context Orwell's metaphors listed below. What is the "object" the metaphor identifies? What point or suggestion does the author make through the use of each comparison? (Note: In this lesson plan we will consider *similes* and *personification* as specific kinds of metaphors.)

METAPHOR	OBJECT	POINT
"sea of yellow faces" (par. 7)	Example: <i>Crowd following Orwell</i>	<i>suggests the impersonality of the crowd as well as the power it holds because of its size (sea)</i>
"a conjurer about to perform a trick" (par. 7)		
"seemingly the leading actor of the piece" (par 7)		
"a sort of hollow, posing dummy" (par. 7)		
"He wears a mask" (par. 7)		
"as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last" (par. 10)		

## **Seventh Class: The Beginning and Ending of "Shooting an Elephant"**

### **Materials**



Handout 2—Orwell’s Decision (already completed)  
Handout 7—Concluding Exercise: the Last Paragraph  
Handout 8—Personal Essay Checklist

## Procedures

- Discuss student responses to **Journal Entry 4**. Ask for volunteers to read their entries. (Note Orwell’s effective opening sentence.)
- In small groups or a whole class situation, complete **Handout 7**. Hand students back the worksheets they completed at the beginning of the unit (**Handout 2**) so they can track if and how their views have changed.
- Give students **Handout 8**. Review the list with the class and discuss any questions that arise. Explain the time line for completion of the **Performance Task**.

## Next Steps

**Homework:** Give students an appropriate amount of time to complete *Steps 4, 5, & 6* of the *Performance Task*. Include time for them to share drafts with various people and to rewrite. It is important for students to understand that revising and rewriting are key ingredients to achieving power and clarity in their writing. Teachers should schedule specific deadlines for each stage (and class time for questions and discussion) to help students complete this task.





## Handout 7. Concluding Exercise: *The Last Paragraph*

1. In the final paragraph of the essay, Orwell looks at the incident from a number of different perspectives (frames). List the different perspectives he mentions.



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2. Do you consider any of the frames (perspectives) as more important than the others in the context of Orwell's decision to shoot the elephant? Explain.

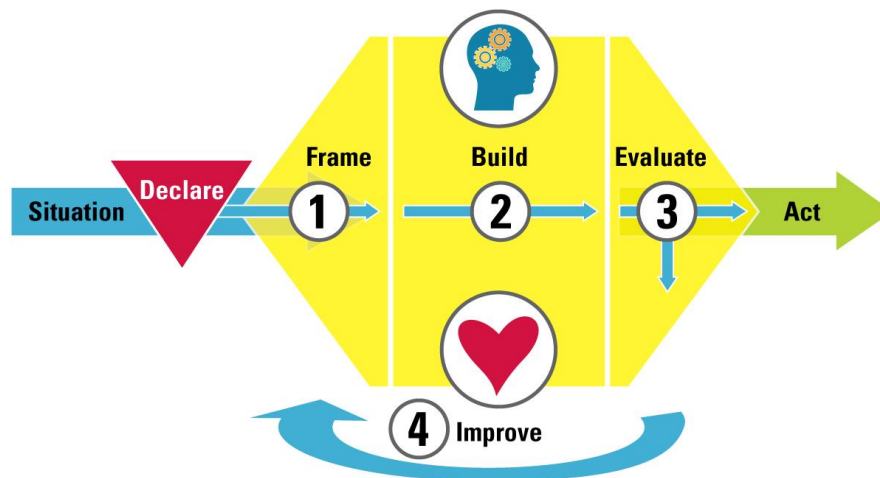
3. What do you think of Orwell's frame as he describes it in this paragraph? Explain.

4. On the next page is a new copy of the *Decision Worksheet (Learning Resource b)* you filled out at the beginning of this unit. Have your opinions about the quality of Orwell's decision changed since then? Record your current assessment—and any changes—on the new worksheet.

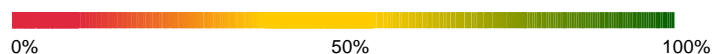
# Decision Worksheet: A Second Assessment of Orwell's Decision

*Now that you have considered the role of head/heart and traps in making choices, has your assessment of Orwell's decision changed? If he asked for your advice now before he made his final decision, what would you tell him?*

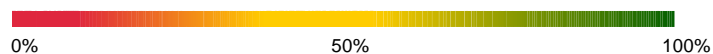
**Directions:** Mark the bar graphs below with percentages that represent how well you think Orwell considers each decision element. *A low percentage means you think he should explore the topic further; a high score indicates he has thoroughly considered the element.* Be ready to explain your opinions with evidence from the essay.



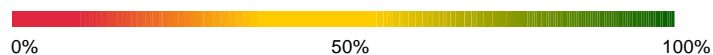
Helpful Frame



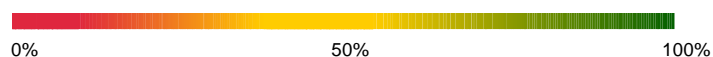
Creative Alternatives



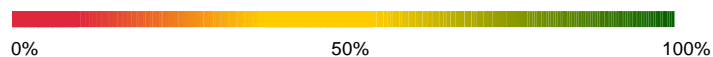
Useful Information



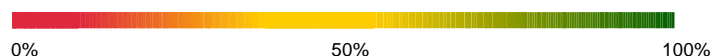
Clear Values



Sound Reasoning



Commitment To Follow Through



100% is the point at which additional effort is not worth it.

## Handout 8. Personal Essay Checklist



Consider all of the following topics carefully. When you are satisfied that you have fulfilled an item, check the box. Turn this sheet in with your final draft.

## Content

- ☐ The purpose of the essay is clear.
- ☐ I have addressed the assigned topic.

### I have included

- ☐ specific examples to illustrate what I reveal about myself.
- ☐ an effective balance between **SHOWING** and **TELLING**.
- ☐ original, helpful metaphors (avoided clichés).
- ☐ description and reflection.

## Execution

- ☐ Interesting opening sentence that grabs the reader's attention
- ☐ Transitions between paragraphs
- ☐ Each paragraph focused on **ONE** topic
- ☐ The essay has an ending

## REVISION

### I have attacked all errors in style and grammar ensuring

- ☐ subject verb agreement.
- ☐ active voice.
- ☐ consistent tense.

### I have eliminated

- ☐ uses of "this" and "you."
- ☐ run-on sentences.
- ☐ sentence fragments.

- ☐ I have combined and cut wherever possible; deleted all vague and unnecessary language; joined short, related sentences.
- ☐ I have focused on the topic and made clear connections between my ideas.
- ☐ I have reorganized paragraphs that were incoherent.
- ☐ I have checked my language: it is lively, direct, and clear.
- ☐ I have checked my spelling and punctuation.
- ☐ I have an engaging title.

- ☐ **Final proofreading:** I have reread my essay one more time *after* I printed it.

## 2. Assessment Evidence



## Performance Task: A Personal Essay

**Step 1—Brainstorm:** Make a list of at least ten significant decisions you have made in your life. Avoid limiting your thought to only recent decisions—begin with your earliest memories. Remember, *significant* does not necessarily mean dramatic, sensational, or even life-changing. For now, simply consider decisions that stick out in your mind for whatever reason.

**Step 2—Explore:** On separate sheets of paper answer the following questions for each decision you listed (one decision per page):

- a. What, exactly, did you decide to do, and how did you decide? Briefly describe the situation.
- b. Were you happy about the outcome? Why or why not?
- c. What does the decision reveal about your values (what you care about)?
- d. What did you learn about yourself or others or life through this decision? (Consider personal strengths *and* weaknesses here.)

**Step 3—Choose:** 1) Narrow your list of decisions to the top three or four by asking yourself the question, “Which of these situations do I find interesting and engaging?” Pick the decisions you enjoyed writing about the most. (A helpful observation from *My Essay* on writing for the college application process: “It is the depth of character you convey, not the intensity of your topic, that matters; some of the most successful essays are written about the most mundane of things and events.”) 2) Share your top choices with someone who knows you well and whom you trust to give you an objective, helpful opinion (close friends, family members, teacher, college counselor). With that objective advice in mind, select one of the decision situations to be the topic for your essay.

**Step 4—Write:** Using the material you produced in Step 2, write a draft of your essay.

**Step 5—Revise:** After reading and considering *A Personal Writing Checklist* (**Handout 8**), revise your essay as needed; then write a second draft.

**Step 6—Rewrite:** Successful writing takes time: show your current draft to a variety of people (friends, teachers, college counselor, family) and ask for their feedback. Here are three essential questions to ask yourself about your personal essay—especially one you would like to use for the college application process:

- a. Does the piece reveal enough about who I am?
- b. Is the essay interesting to read?
- c. Have I made my writing clear and error-free?

## 2. Assessment Evidence (continued)

### Journal Entries



**1. How well does Orwell balance his “head” and his “heart” in making the decision to shoot the elephant? Use the information you gathered from Handout 3 to respond to this question.**

**2. Showing vs. Telling:** Consider the following examples.

**A. Telling:** “That teacher is so mean I get scared every time he is around me.”

**B. Showing:** “When I heard the click of his hard shoes in the hallway, I felt my stomach tighten and my knees go rubbery.

**A general guideline for personal writing is to strike an effective balance between “showing” and “telling.” Long passages that *tell facts* can quickly bore your reader.**

**Exercise:** *Write a paragraph in which you only tell facts. (You may have to use some descriptive language, but use as little as possible. For example, you can say “the money,” but not “the roll of crisp twenties in my back pocket.”) Your piece can be about any subject, real or fictional. Then rewrite the paragraph and avoid all telling—only show as in example B above.*

**3. Choose one passage of description OR one metaphor from the essay, and discuss how Orwell uses it to accomplish his goals in “Shooting an Elephant.”**

**4. Description and Reflection:** Notice how Orwell combines description and reflection in the first two paragraphs of the essay. These paragraphs serve as background or context for the main focus of his piece—shooting the elephant. Pick a recent incident in your life (it need not be a dramatic or sensational one); describe it clearly; then add some reflection on the incident. Questions you can ask yourself to help with the reflection: What did you think about the incident at the time? Has your view changed since then? How did and do you now feel about it? What did others think and/or feel?

## **Evidence of Decision Skill Mastery**

1. Facility in the personal essay with the following decision vocabulary: frame, values, alternatives.
2. Ability to recognize at least two different frames in Handout 8.
3. Recognition in the personal essay that a successful decision includes commitment to follow through with an alternative.
4. Clear reflection on decision traps in Handout 5 and in the personal essay.
5. A willingness and ability to discuss feelings as well as thinking in decision situations.

## **3. Resources on the Web**

### **Complete Works of George Orwell**



[http://www.george-orwell.org/Shooting\\_an\\_Elephant/0.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/Shooting_an_Elephant/0.html)

Electronic version of the essay.

[http://www.george-orwell.org/1\\_biography.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/1_biography.html)

Biography of George Orwell

[http://www.george-orwell.org/1\\_quotes.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/1_quotes.html)

Quotations from George Orwell (Useful topics for writing)

## **National Endowment for the Humanities: EDSITEment**

[http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=606#05](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=606#05)

NEH lesson plan on the essay. Useful background information and discussion questions.

## **College Essay Resources**

<http://www.myessay.com/ugrad/topten.php>

Because advertisements for essay writing services and free essays litter this site, I recommend that you not share it with your students. However this link to the top ten mistakes in college essay writing is worth reviewing with your students apart from the site.

<http://www.myessay.com/ugrad/dodont.php>

Same comment above applies here. Dos and Don'ts of college essay writing are worth sharing with students apart from the site.

