

Open Your Class With This Tomorrow Beat Boredom: Engaging Tuned-Out Teenagers

Storytelling and Lawrence Kohlberg

Directions: Before having students practice with Kohlberg's theory of moral development provide a biographical introduction and pause to ask questions. The information for this introduction is based on Morton Hunt's *The Story of Psychology* which provides interesting and detailed biographical backstories on the most influential thinkers related to the scientific field of psychology, as well as excellent summaries of their key theories and ideas. This book can be used to build engagement through storytelling in many other areas of the psychology curriculum.

Hunt, M. M. (2007). *The story of psychology*. New York: Anchor Books.

Lawrence Kohlberg who was born in 1927 was the son of a wealthy Jewish businessman who grew up in a wealthy New York suburb and attended high school at the prestigious Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. Phillips Academy was founded in 1778 and has numerous famous alumni including two U.S. presidents (George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush) as well as three Nobel Prize winners and six Medal of Honor recipients.

- Ask students to consider what was happening in the world in 1945 when young Lawrence was finishing high school at Phillips Academy in Andover and how this might impact Lawrence Kohlberg at age 18?

Lawrence Kohlberg was highly gifted and ready to attend college, but instead, he decided to delay college for a few years to join a project that would involve breaking the law. Imagine how his parents might have reacted to his decision to take a few "gap year." The project he joined involved illegally smuggling boatloads of Eastern European Jews into what was then called British Palestine (modern day Israel) past a British blockade. Kohlberg felt that the law was unjust and that it was his duty to disobey. During his years working with the project, Kohlberg was captured by the British and briefly held at a detention camp in Cyprus from which he escaped. Kohlberg also contracted a parasitic infection while at the camp that caused him continued problems throughout his life. Kohlberg was in Palestine during the fighting in 1948 but only participated by using non-violent activism and returned to the United States during that same year when he entered college at the University of Chicago. Kohlberg would eventually earn his doctoral degree in psychology from the University of Chicago and would be influenced by Jean Piaget.

- Ask students to consider how Kohlberg's personal life might have influenced his research and theories. Which level of moral development do you feel best explains Kohlberg's reasoning for going to Europe to take part in smuggling refugees?
- Ask students to consider how Kohlberg's theory relates to the work of Jean Piaget.