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Name:

Date:

Class Per.:

## Pre-Reading Worksheet: The Ring of Gyges

**Directions:** Before reading the story the "Ring of Gyges," Watch the **following video** "The Myth of Gyges" < <https://youtu.be/4qjGp6TWqe4>>

What are THREE things you learned from this video?

1. *Write your responses here*
- 2.
- 3.

What are TWO important details you noticed in the video?

1. *Write your responses here*
- 2.

What is one question you still have?

1. *Write your response here.*

## “The Ring of Gyges” from Plato, *Republic* 359d-360c

Source: Reprinted from [Wofford College](#)

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*Glaucon disagrees with Socrates and insists that justice and virtue are not in fact desirable in and of themselves. In support of his claim, Glaucon offers the following story which suggests that the only reason people act morally is that they lack the power to behave otherwise. Take away the fear of punishment, and the "just" and the "unjust" person will both behave in the same way: unjustly, immorally.*

Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia; there was a great storm, and an earthquake made an opening in the earth at the place where he was feeding his flock. Amazed at the sight, he descended into the opening, where, among other marvels, he beheld a hollow brazen horse, having doors, at which he stooping and looking in saw a dead body of stature, as appeared to him, more than human, and having nothing on but a gold ring; this he took from the finger of the dead and reascended.

Now the shepherds met together, according to custom, that they might send their monthly report about the flocks to the king; into their assembly he came having the ring on his finger, and as he was sitting among them he chanced to turn the collet of the ring inside his hand, when instantly he became invisible to the rest of the company and they began to speak of him as if he were no longer present. He was astonished at this, and again touching the ring he turned the collet outwards and reappeared; he made several trials of the ring, and always with the same result-when he turned the collet inwards he became invisible, when outwards he reappeared. Whereupon he contrived to be chosen one of the messengers who were sent to the court; where as soon as he arrived he seduced the queen, and with her help conspired against the king and slew him, and took the kingdom.

Suppose now that there were two such magic rings, and the just put on one of them and the unjust the other; no man can be imagined to be of such an

iron nature that he would stand fast in justice. No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a God among men. Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point. And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever any one thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice, and he who argues as I have been supposing, will say that they are right.

If you could imagine anyone obtaining this power of becoming invisible, and never doing any wrong or touching what was another's, he would be thought by the lookers-on to be a most wretched idiot, although they would praise him to one another's faces, and keep up appearances with one another from a fear that they too might suffer injustice.

***After reading the story, write the gist of the story in the box below. The gist should be no more than four or five sentences. It should be a concise summary of the main points of the story.***

***Write the gist of the "The Ring of Gyges" here:***



**Figure 1. An anonymous artist's representation of Gyges finding the ring**

Source: The Ring of Gyges. Oil on wood, 89 × 89 cm, from the Ferrara school of the 16th century

Name:

Date:

Class Period:

## Reading Comprehension Questions: "The Ring of Gyges"

1. How does Glaucon disagree with Socrates?

*Write your response here*

2. What is the reason Glaucon recounts the "The Myth of Gyges" to Socrates?

*Write your response here*

3. What is the setting of the myth Glaucon tells?

*Write your responses here*

4. Who was Gyges at the beginning of the story?

*Write your responses here*

5. How does Gyges discover the ring?

*Write your responses here*

6. How does the ring make Gyges invisible?

*Write your responses here*

7. When does Gyges first use the ring?

*Write your responses here*

8. How does Gyges take over the kingdom of Lydia?

*Write your responses here*

9. How does Glaucon re-imagine the story of the ring?

*Write your responses here*

10. According to Glaucon, what would men do with the power of invisibility?

*Write your responses here*

11. According to Glaucon, what would a just person do with the ring?

*Write your responses here*

12. What is Glaucon's proof that men do not desire justice?

*Write your responses here*

13. According to Glaucon, what do all men believe in their hearts?

*Write your responses here*

14. What would people say in private about a person who obtained the ring and used it to do good?

*Write your responses here*

15. What would people say in public about a person who used the ring to do good?

*Write your responses here*

**Glaucon doesn't tell us what happens to Gyges at the end of the story. Based on what Glaucon has already told us about the ring, what is your prediction? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.**

*Write your responses here*

Name:

Date:

Class Period:

## Discussion Questions: “The Ring of Gyges”

1. If the ring of invisibility existed today and someone found it how would they use it? Give examples.
2. Glaucon suggests that people are inherently weak and need authority to force them to act good. If you worked for a manager that had this belief what would working for him or her look like?
3. If Glaucon is right and the unjust profit, while the just don't, what does this say about society?
4. Is it true that a person is only good when others are watching?
5. Commentators have mentioned that the Ring of Gyges and J.R.R. Tolkien's novels *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* share a family resemblance. How is Tolkien's story different? How is it the same?
6. Read the following quote from Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Discuss.
7. Glaucon says that people praise the just in public but in private they laugh at their acts of justice. In what ways is Glaucon right? In what ways is Glaucon wrong? Discuss.
8. To act with impunity (to do something wrong and not get caught) is a powerful idea. Imagine being given a lot of power. What would it feel like to have this kind of power? Would you be able to resist the lure of power and use your position to do good? Explain.

9. Certainly one can find many examples in the news of corrupt politicians, powerful tyrants, despots, greedy tycoons, and other new stories you may have read. Is the myth of Gyges still relevant today? Why or why not.

10. Is might truly more valuable than right? Discuss.

**Further Notes:**

*Write your notes here.*

**Group:**

**Date:**

**Class Per.:**

### **Scenario #1: Ring of Gyges**

You wake up on a Saturday morning. No one is home (which is strange because someone's always home). You walk through the house and you find a note from your parents. It reads, "Take care of the house. We'll be back on Sunday." The fridge is filled with food. Wifi works. And the neighbors also seem to have left town. What do you do with this new-found (albeit, temporary) freedom?

**Generate a list with your group using the following chart:**

Innocent stuff	Good Stuff	Bad stuff

**Connections to the Ring of Gyges:**

*Write your response here*

**Group:**

**Date:**

**Class Per.:**

### Scenario #2: Ring of Gyges

Jorge is the class president. Students and teachers look up to him. He's handsome, makes good grades, and helps old ladies walk across the street. However, Jorge has a secret. No one knows about it, but he accidentally has gained access to the school's computer server. He can read private files about students, change grades on the school's electronic grade book, mark students as absent or present, impersonate others' via email, and basically wreak havoc on people's professional and private lives. Since Jorge is on the surface an upstanding guy what will this newfound power do to his moral fiber? (Think of the just man who has acquired the ring of invisibility).

**Use the chart to generate ideas from all members of your group:**

List ways access to the computer server can corrupt Jorge	List ways Jorge will resist doing wrong and instead do good things (while no one is looking).	Is submitting to his desires while hidden in of itself wrong? (Plato think so - but do you?). List your group members' different arguments.

### Connections to the Ring of Gyges

*Write your response here*

**Group:**

**Date:**

**Class Per.:**

**Scenario #3: Ring of Gyges**

Sara is the leader of her after-school youth group. She always speaks and acts morally - but only when adults are present. Since her peers think adults won't believe them if they speak out about her, Sara acts with impunity. She is a bully, she throws people under the bus (not literally), and she gets away with it. Laura, on the other hand, curses in front of adults, has a tattoo, and is dating someone two years older than her - but adults never notice that's she's actually a good person. She sticks up for her friends, she speaks out against bullies, and she's very concerned about doing the right thing.

**Use this chart to have a discussion with your group members:**

Why should Laura still do good even if she is not acknowledged publicly?	Is it better to be Sara? She gets away with her deceit and on top of it she's admired by adults!	Would Laura become Sara if the tables were turned (think of the myth of Gyges )?

**Connections to the Ring of Gyges**

**Group:**

**Date:**

**Class Per.:**

### Scenario #4: Ring of Gyges

Karen is sixteen and has created a YouTube account that hides her true identity. We can hear her voice, but we cannot see her face. She talks about topics she would never talk about with her friends, teachers, or families. How does Karen's "invisibility" make her more powerful? Is there a risk that's she split herself between the Karen who everyone sees and the Karen who's anonymous on the web? Discuss.

**Use this chart to have a discussion with your group members.**

How does Karen's apparent invisibility make her more powerful, or influential (or both)?	List Ways Karen can use her anonymity to cause harm	Consequences for Karen if she's found out. N.B. List both positive and negative consequences.

Poll: Is Karen wrong for submitting to her desire to act out anonymously?

**Number Yes**

**Number No**

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**Connections to the Ring of Gyges**

<i>Write your response here</i>
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**Group:**

**Date:**

**Class Per.:**

**Scenario #5: Ring of Gyges**

Bobby is Barbara's boyfriend. Barbara has a brother named Billy. One night Bobby and his friends toilet paper roll a neighbor's house. It just so happens that Billy catches Bobby and his friends in the act of rolling the house. Billy chases the boys to catch them, but Billy slips and cracks his skull. The boys approach Billy's presumably dead body but notice he's breathing. They leave the scene. The next morning Barbara calls Bobby in tears that her brother was found dead. The police think he was drunk and fell. The coroner declares that Billy's death was accidental. Bobby and his friends have acted with impunity. Discuss the consequences of hiding this truth.

**Use this chart to discuss the scenario with your group members:**

Considering Bobby is a good person what will hiding this truth do to Bobby and his relationship to Barbara over time?	Does hiding what happened make his relationship to Barbara good or bad?	If Bobby became closer to Barbara because of her brother's death what are the ethical implications of this withholding of truth.

Is Bobby responsible for Billy's death? Even if he's not responsible do you thinking not telling anyone the truth was morally the right thing to do?

*Write your response here*

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## Suggested Lesson for the Ring of Gyges

Essential Question: Am I a good person only when I know others are watching?

Time Duration: 2 or 3 Class Periods (45 minutes each - if you have the students read the story ahead of time and do the pre-reading worksheet at home then you can shave off about 45 minutes to this lesson).

Materials:

Ring of Gyges Pre-Reading Worksheet

The text of the “Ring of Gyges” by Plato

Reading Comprehension Questions for the “Ring of Gyges” by Plato

Discussion Questions

Five Scenarios for Group Work

Document Camera or SmartBoard

Optional: Scissors (to cut the discussion questions into slips of paper)

Academic Vocabulary: Myth, impunity

Historical Persons: Plato, Socrates, Glaucon

Primary Source: *The Republic of Plato*

Suggested Use: This is an excellent lesson for:

1. English Language Arts
2. Humanities Course on Ancient Greece
3. World History Course on the History of Ideas
4. Literature Course
5. Ethics Course
6. Introduction to Philosophy Course
7. Student Advisory Course
8. A Lesson on Truth
9. A Lesson on Appearance and Reality

## Steps for a Teacher to Follow

Note: These are suggested steps you can use to execute this lesson. I recommend you take three full days to work on the story. You can also do it in one day (if you have the students do all of the reading, video watching, and answering of comprehension questions at home.

### Pre-Lesson

1. It's best that students do the Pre-Reading worksheet the day before this lesson is scheduled. Students watch the video and respond to it using the Pre-Reading worksheet. The video will help students digest the story with an ethical view in mind. You can also screen the video with your students in class and have them do the questions for homework.

### Day One

2. Do Now: Write the essential question on the board: "Am I a good person only when I know others are watching?" Students can share out answers or they can complete a 3-minute freewrite. It's up to you!
3. Provide every student with a copy of the story "The Myth of Gyges". Students can either read the story before class or read the story together in class. Explain to students that the writer of the story is Plato and it is an excerpt from his book *The Republic*. If you have already used [my lesson](#) on Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, you can remind students this story is also written by Plato and it is from the same book. Also, explain that while Plato is the author, the story centers around a discussion between Socrates and his pupil, Glaucon. Plato often includes Socrates in his books as a mouthpiece for Plato's own philosophical views
4. Have students give you the gist of the story. They can write this down on the worksheet provided above. The gist should contain the basic elements of the story. For example, *Man will do immoral things that will benefit him if he sees an opportunity with no consequences or punishments. The ring Gyges found allowed him to become invisible and he used that to become the king of Lydia. This interesting myth comes from the second book from Plato's Republic.*

5. Break students into pairs and have them comb the text for the answers to the reading comprehension questions. I would model the first answer for the students using a document camera. Show students how to find answers to text-based questions.
6. Collect student work or check for understanding that students are on target with the story and what is going on in the story. Students may get caught up in the details (especially the mechanics of how the fire casts shadows on the wall and so on).
7. I included a prediction question at the end of the reading comprehension worksheet. This can be homework for the end of the first session.

### **Day Two**

8. You don't have to use all of the discussion questions - but I have designed the items to be used with the teacher as a guide. If you prefer to have students work together in small groups give each group one question and do a carousel style discussion.
  - a. Tell students that they only have six minutes to discuss the questions and when the timer goes off they must record their observations on a sheet of paper that they leave at their desk for the next group to come and discuss and add to the sheet.
  - b. You can have as many rounds of the carousel that you wish and you use as many questions as you like.
  - c. It's a good idea to keep one questions per group per round so you can have them focus on that group - and thus get a better result from their discussions.
  - d. At the end of the activity collect all of the responses on the sheet and call out a few examples that really struck you as exceptional. Students love to be praised for excellent work so this is a good opportunity to do that for
  - e. You can end up with a reflection session with the entire class.

### **Day Three**

9. I have provided five scenarios that you can use as a final activity to do with your students. Feel free to come up with your own or have your students

create some! The scenarios I have written are all quite different so I would read them before you use them in a classroom. You can determine for yourself what scenarios will work for your specific class.

10. The scenario worksheets provided above are meant for group work.
  - a. Students should choose a group leader (or you can choose one).
  - b. Groups should be no more than four students. But five can work. No more than that.
  - c. The group leader's job is to read the scenario and at the end of the activity he or she must report back to the class their group's findings.
  - d. One student should be the notetaker.
  - e. One student should have the text of the Ring of Gyges and direct his or her group to support their answers from the story (and to help complete the connections to the Ring of Gyges section of the worksheet).
  - f. Finally, one student act as devil's advocate. This student's job is to always give an opposing argument to whatever is being discussed. If this proves to make your groups too argumentative then you can scrap this role (but I find some kids like to play both sides - especially if they are into speech and debate).
11. As a closing activity, staple each group's work on the individual scenarios to a copy of the Ring of Gyges and display their work in the classroom or in the school. Also keep in mind, that students should be told that they are not "call out" other students in their written work or in their discussions. Sometimes, and it doesn't happen often, students use other students' as examples (e.g., Well, so-and-so stole money from so-and-so and didn't get caught ...). Tell students that this activity is not a gossip session and they'll get the idea.
12. Celebrate with your class that they have done a good job dissecting a really important problem in moral philosophy!

**Side notes:**

1. I use Google Forms in my classroom. Here are the links to three assessments I use [#1](#), [#2](#), [#3](#). You may want to have the Pre-Reading

worksheet as a Google Form so you can collect everyone's observations about the myth and even share out some of the best examples.

2. It's important that while students are discussing these questions, you lay down ground rules for how classroom discussion should go. I keep the rules simple: 1. Be nice 2. Keep your examples YOUR examples 3. Let everyone share 4. And the most important: listen.

## Answer Key for “The Ring of Gyges” Reading Comprehension Questions

1. How does Glaucon disagree with Socrates? *Glaucon puts pressure on Socrates as to why any person should be just at all. Glaucon argues that justice and virtue are not worthwhile in and of themselves.*
2. What is the reason Glaucon recounts the “Myth of Gyges”? *The myth is used to illustrate Glaucon's argument against justice. People only act just and good because they fear punishment.*
3. What is the setting of the myth Glaucon tells? *The setting is the ancient kingdom of Lydia.*
4. Who was Gyges at the beginning of the story? *Gyges was a shepherd and he worked for the king of Lydia.*
5. How does Gyges discover the ring? *An earthquake creates a hole in the ground. Gyges descends into the pit and finds a hollowed out horse with doors. Gyges finds a corpse inside who is wearing the ring. Gyges takes the ring and climbs out of the hole.*
6. How does the ring make Gyges invisible? *When Gyges turns the ring on his finger inward he becomes invisible. When he turns the ring outward he returns to normal.*
7. When does Gyges first use the ring? *Gyges takes the ring with him to a monthly meeting of shepherds who work for the king. At the meeting, he accidentally turns the ring and becomes invisible and is surprised that no one notices him. He then uses his power to convince the assembled group of shepherds to send him as an emissary to the king.*
8. How does Gyges take over the kingdom? *He goes to the court of the king as a messenger of the shepherds; he seduces the king's wife, and convinces her to help him to conspire against the king. They both kill the king. Gyges becomes king. He takes over the kingdom.*
9. How does Glaucon re-imagine the story of the ring? *He re-imagines the story and wonders if there were two rings instead of one; an unjust*

*person found one ring, and a just person the other. Glaucon asks would the just and the unjust person act the same.*

10. According to Glaucon, what would men do with the power of invisibility? *Men would steal , enter houses without permission, kill, release criminals from prison, and act like "a God among men".*
11. According to Glaucon, what would a just person do with the ring? *The just man would act the same way as the unjust man if he were allowed to wear the ring. They both would act unjustly.*
12. What is Glaucon's proof that men do not desire justice? *Men are not just willingly. Men do not think justice is good for them individually, "but of necessity". If a man thinks he can get away with injustice, he will be unjust.*
13. According to Glaucon, what do all men believe in their hearts? *All men believe that being unjust (and getting away with it) is more profitable than being just.*
14. What would people say in private about a person who obtained the ring and used it to do good? *They would think he was a "wretched idiot".*
15. What would people say in public about a person who used the ring to do good? *They would "praise him to one another's faces" but in secret they would laugh at him.*

## Discussion Questions Answer Key: The Ring of Gyges

1. If the ring of invisibility existed today and someone found it how would they use it? Give examples. *Answers will vary but keep in mind that your students will be able to list many mischievous things that one could do with a ring of invisibility. Recommend that your students read the Robert Cormier novel Fade. It is a Young Adult novel that follows the logic of the Ring of Gyges - a boy receives the power to be invisible which ultimately tests his moral fiber.*
2. Glaucon suggests that people are inherently weak and need authority to force them to act good. If you worked for a manager that had this belief what would working for him or her look like? *A possible answer could be: A manager would punish severely and he would also micromanage his employees. He also would have difficulty trusting them (because he doesn't believe people act justly unless they are under surveillance).*
3. If Glaucon is right and the unjust profit, while the just don't, what does this say about society? *Glaucon's view of society is that people would only value that which is profitable. Guide students to think about whether or not we live in a society that values profit or does it value intrinsic reward.*
4. Is it true that a person is only good when others are watching? *Answers will vary.*
5. Commentators have mentioned that the Ring of Gyges and J.R.R. Tolkien's novels *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* share a family resemblance. How is Tolkien's story different? How is it the same? *In Tolkien story, the ring corrupts the person who wears it over time while also granting invisibility. In the myth, the ring only grants invisibility. Glaucon says the person who wears would become corrupt simply because he is rendered invisible (and hence no one can see him).*
6. Read the following quote from Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Discuss. *Students tend to agree with*

*this quote. Have students give examples. In addition, what does Lord Acton mean by “absolute power”?*

7. Glaucon says that people praise the just in public but in private they laugh at their acts of justice. In what ways is Glaucon right? In what ways is Glaucon wrong? Discuss. *This question resonates with people because we all would like to be acknowledged for the good things we do. Make the discussion go deeper by having students think about whether or not we just value the superficial appearance of doing good or do we really value justice in of itself. Also, if Glaucon is right and we laugh at others for acting justly (and not profiting) what does this say about human nature?*
8. To act with impunity (to do something wrong and not get caught) is a powerful idea. Imagine being given a lot of power. What would it feel like to have this kind of power? Would you be able to resist the lure of power and use your position to do good? Explain. *Answers will vary.*
9. Certainly one can find many examples in the news of corrupt politicians, powerful tyrants, despots, greedy tycoons, and other new stories you may have read. Is the myth of Gyges still relevant today? Why or why not. *Answers will vary. The teacher can also provide examples from current events.*
10. Is might truly more valuable than right? Discuss. *Answers will vary.*