

Grade level: 4-6
Famine curriculum

Lesson aim: Students will examine character and theme in "The Countess Kathleen O'Shea."

New York State Standard. Language Arts 2. Language for Literary Response and Expression. Students will present personal responses to literature that makes reference to the plot, characters, ideas, vocabulary and text structure.

Historical Background: This story is adapted from the text of "The Countess Cathleen O'Shea" that W.B. Yeats included in his Irish folklore collection Irish Fairy and Folktales. Later, Yeats turned the legend into his first play "The Countess Cathleen" (1892), a play that was criticized because of its unconventional theme. Instead of the usual Faustian treatment of one who sells her soul to the devil, the Countess is saved by the intervention of angels.

Yeats was criticized by the critics who were uncomfortable with the proposition that one could do something wrong for the right reason.

Lesson:

1. Read "The Countess Kathleen O'Shea." Why do the men with the gold think that they can buy souls in Ireland? What did the Countess Kathleen would think would happen to her soul if she sold it? Why does the Countess Kathleen lock herself in her room after she sells her soul? Why do the angels take her soul?
2. What words would you use to describe the Countess? Draw the scene when the Countess sells her soul to the men.
3. This is as story about people giving up precious things for others. Do you know anyone who has given up something precious for somebody else? Has someone ever given up something precious for you? Write something about someone who has given up something precious to help another. You might want to write a letter to that person.
4. Sometimes people use the expression, "I'd sell my soul for...."
They are not really serious, but what do they mean?
6. Does the Countess believe that she is really selling her soul? Does she think it is wrong to do it? Why does she do it? Do people ever do wrong things for the right reasons?