

Cast Away with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Using Film to Teach Motivations Impacting Human Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The film, *Cast Away*, will be used to demonstrate the underlying concepts of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. *Objectives:* At the conclusion of this teaching idea, students will be able to describe the five levels present in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and analyze how the main character of *Cast Away* progressed through these levels. *Target Audience:* This lesson is intended for high school and/or undergraduate students participating in general health courses or those specifically aimed at mental health processes.

Key Words: Maslow, Hierarchy of Needs, Film, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Hunt, a proponent of using film as an instructional tool, contended that a struggle for many instructors is providing students with meaningful, concrete examples to demonstrate conceptual points they are trying to make.¹ Because films (i.e., movies) typically engage students, stimulate them emotionally and physiologically, as well as provide a visual medium, scholars contend that film may be useful in helping students make the conceptual link between course work and reality.² Moreover, films allow course content to become "immediate, relevant, and concrete."^{3(p155)} The use of film as a teaching tool is present in fields spanning health education,⁴ abnormal psychology,⁵⁻⁶ educational leadership,⁷ sociology,⁸ counseling,⁹ and science.¹⁰ Therefore, in order to capitalize on the merits of using film as a teaching tool, the movie, *Cast Away*,¹¹ will be used to demonstrate and explore the intricacies of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.¹²⁻¹⁴

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this teaching idea, students will be able to:

- (1) describe the five levels present in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs;¹²⁻¹⁴
- (2) analyze how the main character in *Cast Away* progressed through the levels of needs outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

MATERIALS

To implement this lesson, the following materials are required:

- A DVD or VHS copy of the film *Cast Away*, starring Tom Hanks;
- A DVD or VHS player, depending on the type of movie used;
- A compatible television; and
- Copies of Figure 2 for students.

TARGET POPULATION

This lesson is intended for high school students and/or college students at the undergraduate level. The topic is applicable to general health courses as well as those that are focused specifically on mental health processes, such as psychology, social work or counseling.

PROCEDURE

The three teaching steps of this lesson include a short class discussion on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,¹²⁻¹⁴ a viewing of portions of the film, and the assessment technique. These steps likely will span two 50-minute class sessions.

Step 1: Introduce Students to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This primer session about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs¹²⁻¹⁴ is intended to last approximately 20 minutes. Key concepts include Maslow's five overarching needs that motivate human behavior. These needs, in hierarchal order (from most imperative to least imperative regarding survival) include physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization.^{12, 15} Typically, the needs outlined by Maslow are depicted as a pyramid-shaped diagram (See Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

To understand the relative importance of each level of need in relation to the others, Maslow proposed the following rule of thumb: "The higher the need the less imperative it is for sheer survival, the longer gratification can be postponed..."^{13(p57)} Consequently, physiological needs are considered the "most potent of all needs."^{12(p373)} In other words, higher needs are not as immediately pressing for a person. A deficiency in higher needs, such as self-actualization and self-esteem, fails to create the urgency and defense reaction generated by a lack of lower level needs, such as food, water or safety. Furthermore, lower level needs are never truly eliminated for anyone. A need can be met (e.g., eating a sandwich to satiate hunger), which in turn causes that need to no longer be the central motivator; however, this need is always present and, therefore, typically continually impacts human behavior.

Step 2: View Cast Away

After concluding the introductory discussion of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and before beginning the film, students should be provided Figure 2, which contains the assessment strategy for the lesson. Providing the assessment questions before viewing the movie will assist students in note taking, documenting the different types of need portrayed in the film, and drawing connections between the film and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.¹²⁻¹⁴

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

The viewing of *Cast Away* will take approximately 60 minutes, spanning the second-half of the first session/class and the beginning half of the following session/class. To maximize instructional time and limit exposure to unnecessary portions of the film, instructors should start the film at the point in which the main character becomes stranded on the island (DVD = Chapter 9; VHS = 31 minute mark). The film should be stopped at the point where the main character departs the island (DVD = Chapter 23; VHS = 94 minute mark).

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

After the film has been stopped, the instructor should explain to students that they will be writing an essay about Chuck Noland's experiences on the island. More specifically, students will examine how Noland addressed his particular levels of needs and progressed through Maslow's proposed stages. This essay will be completed as a homework assignment. The questions and expectation outlined in Figure 2 (Assessment Strategy) will provide the structure for developing the essay. Students should use their notes from the *Cast Away* viewing as well as the class discussions to complete this assignment.

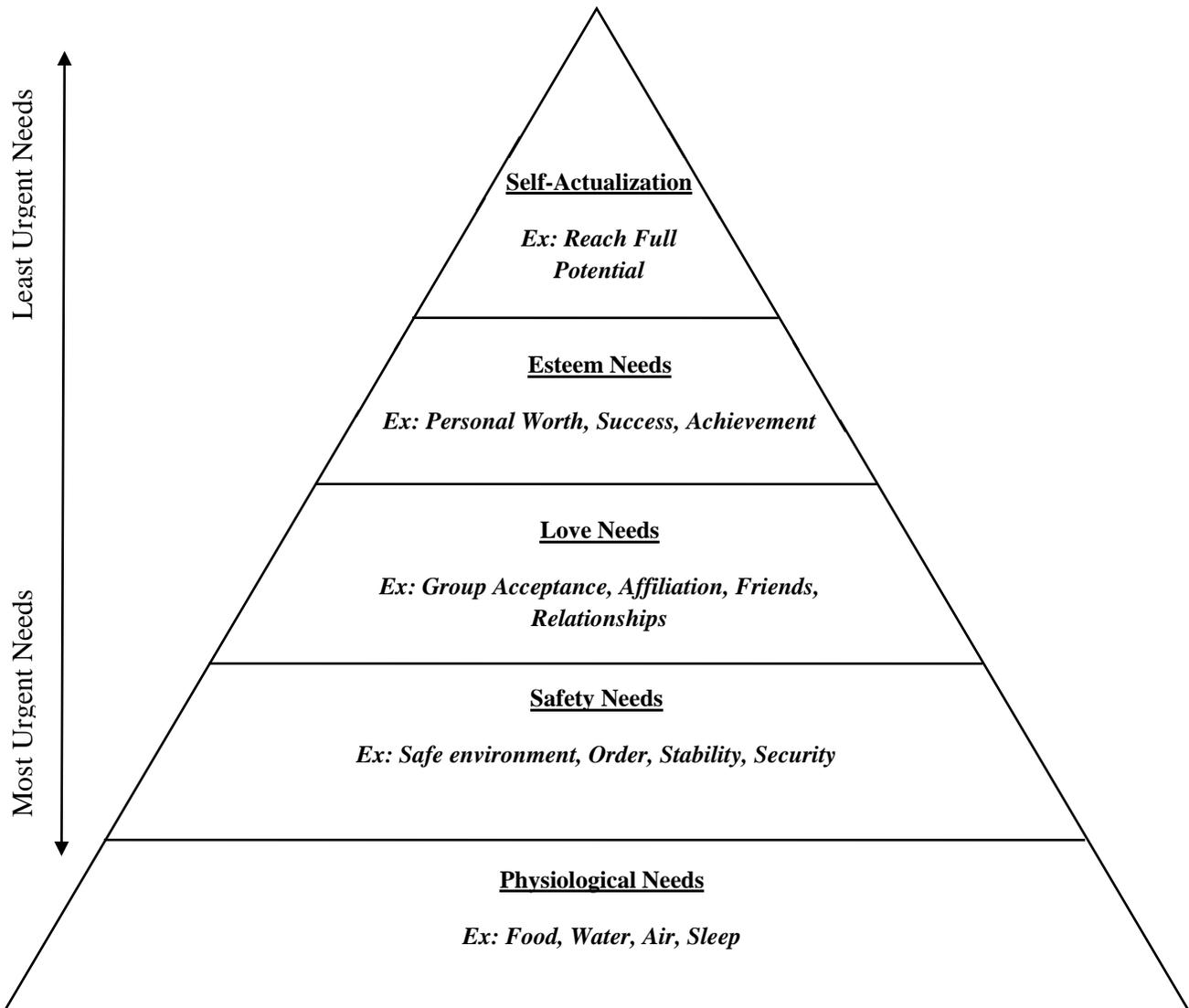
After outlining the assessment strategy, the remaining portion of class (roughly 20 minutes) should be used to further reinforce the key concepts of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how they were manifest in *Cast Away*. The discussion will assist students in forming their answers to the homework assignment and filling-in their notes from the viewing. The following questions, and accompanying potential answers, can be used to guide such a discussion:

1. According to Maslow, what needs are most urgent? (*Physiological*)
 - a. What needs appeared to be most urgent to Chuck Noland? Did his actions agree with Maslow's Hierarchy? (Yes; *once on the island, he immediately sought food*)
2. What were some of the items already present on the island that Chuck used to meet one of his needs? (*Coconuts, Rocks, Sticks, Palmetto Leaves*).
 - a. What need(s) did these items meet? (*Physiological, Safety*)
3. What were some of the items from the FedEx boxes that Chuck used? (*Ice Skates, Clothing, Volley Ball, VHS Tapes*)
 - a. What need(s) did these items meet? (*Physiological, Love*)
4. During his stay on the island, what need(s) required the majority of Chuck Noland's time/energy/effort? (*Physiological*)
5. In comparison to his first few days on the island, what differences did you notice in Chuck Noland after he resided there for four years? (*He became self-sufficient, using natural resources to meet his need (i.e., He was able to fish with a spear, predict weather with homemade calendar, and build fire at will)*)

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Figure 1 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: Maslow AH. *Motivation and Personality*. 3rd ed. Addison-Wesley Longman, Inc. 1954

Figure 2 – Assessment Strategy

Directions: Write about Chuck Noland’s experiences while he was stranded on the island. More specifically, describe how Chuck met his needs (e.g., physiological, safety, love, esteem, and actualization) and progressed through the stages of need outlined by Maslow. The following questions and expectations are intended to guide you through the writing process by providing key content to include in your essay. Use examples from class discussion and the film *Cast Away* to support your answers. Please make sure to write in complete sentences and use appropriate grammar. Essays should range between 3-5 pages.

<u>Question</u>	<u>Expectations</u>	<u>Scoring</u>
1. Describe the five levels present in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	- Describe each level, including at least two examples of each	- 2 pts: Describes each level; includes two examples for each - 1pt: Describes each level; includes fewer than two examples for each - 0 pts: Does not describe all five levels
2. Which need(s) does Maslow contend is most urgent/necessary? Why?	- Identify one level of need. - Provide one reason why this need is most urgent.	- 2 pts: Identifies correct level; includes supporting rationale - 1 pt: Identifies correct level; lacks supporting rationale - 0 pts: Does not identify correct level
3. Which needs did Chuck Noland first try to address when he arrived on the island? How did he accomplish meeting these needs?	- Identify two levels of need. - Provide at least one supporting example for each level of need.	- 2 pts: Correctly identifies two levels; provides one example of each - 1 pt: Correctly identifies one level; provides one example - 0 pts: Does not identify any correct levels
4. What items from the FedEx boxes did Chuck Noland use? What need(s) did each of these items meet?	- Identify three FedEx box items used. - Identify how each item was used to meet at least one level of need.	- 2 pts: Correctly identifies three items; describes how each item was used - 1 pt: Correctly identifies one or two items; describes how each item was used - 0 pts: Does not correctly identify any items
5. How did Chuck meet his Safety need?	- Identify how the environment was used or altered to meet his need for safety.	- 2 pts: Correctly identifies how the environment was either used or altered to meet the safety need - 0 pts: Does not identify how the environment was used or altered
6. How did Chuck meet his Love need?	- Identify any relationships he had on the island that met his need for love.	- 2 pts: Correctly identifies an island relationship meeting the love need - 0 pts: Does not identify an island relationship
7. In comparison to his first few days on the island, what differences did you notice in Chuck Noland after residing there for four years?	- Identify three specific, observable differences/changes.	- 2 pts: Identifies three specific changes - 1 pt: Identifies one or two specific changes - 0 pts: Does not identify any specific changes
8. In your opinion, did Chuck Noland ever meet his need for self-actualization during his stay on the island? Why or why not?	- Explain why you believe his full potential was either met or not met. - Provide at least one supporting example.	- 2 pts: Provides rationale for opinion; includes at least one supporting example - 1 pt: Provides rationale for opinion; does not include a supporting example - 0 pts: Does not provide a rationale for opinion
9. Did Chuck progress through Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in the order proposed by Maslow? In other words, did Chuck address his lower-level needs before his higher-level needs?	- Identify the order in which he progressed through Maslow’s stages. - Provide at least one supportive example for each level, in chronological order.	- 2 pts: Correctly identifies progression through stages; includes an example of each level - 1 pt: Correctly identifies progression through stages; does not include examples - 0 pts: Does not correctly identify progression through stages

