

# Lesson Plan: The Wheel of Fortune from Boethius's Prison to Elizabeth's Court

## Materials Needed:

- A copy of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, specifically Book 2, Prose 2 and Meter 2 (where Lady Philosophy describes the Wheel of Fortune). An online version like the Project Gutenberg translation is perfect.
  - A copy of Queen Elizabeth I's translation of the same sections. This can be found in scholarly collections or online archives (search for "Queen Elizabeth I Boethius translation Meter 2 Book 2").
  - A clear image of the "Wheel of Fortune" card from a standard Rider-Waite tarot deck.
  - Notebook or journal and a pen.
  - Art supplies for the final project: large sheet of paper or cardstock, colored pencils, markers, pens, collage materials (magazines, scissors, glue), or digital art software if preferred.
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## Lesson Details

**Subject:** Interdisciplinary (Philosophy, Literature, History, Art)

**Topic:** The "Wheel of Fortune" Metaphor: Analyzing its philosophical origins, historical resonance, and modern interpretation.

**Time Allotment:** 90-120 minutes

## Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze the philosophical argument Boethius makes about fortune and happiness using the "Wheel of Fortune" metaphor.
  - Compare and contrast the tone, style, and word choice between a standard modern translation of Boethius and Queen Elizabeth I's 16th-century translation.
  - Connect Boethius's philosophical concept to its symbolic representation in the tarot.
  - Synthesize these ideas by creating a personal, modern artistic interpretation of the Wheel of Fortune that reflects contemporary anxieties and aspirations.
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## Lesson Procedure

### Part 1: The Hook - What Governs Our Lives? (10 minutes)

1. **Opening Discussion:** Begin with a broad question. "When things go really well or really badly in life, what do you tend to blame or credit? Is it luck, fate, God, your own choices, or something else?"
  2. **Introduce the Concept:** Explain that this is one of humanity's oldest questions. A Roman philosopher named Boethius, writing in a prison cell around 524 AD while awaiting execution, tried to answer it. His answer was a powerful image: the Wheel of Fortune.
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**Part 2: The Source - Hearing from Lady Philosophy (25 minutes)**

1. **Context:** Briefly explain the setup of *The Consolation of Philosophy*: Boethius is at his lowest point, and a divine figure, Lady Philosophy, appears to console him. She explains that he shouldn't be surprised by his fall from grace, because he put his faith in Fortune, who is by nature fickle.
2. **Guided Reading:** Read aloud the description of the Wheel of Fortune from Book 2, Prose 2 and Meter 2 of a standard modern English translation. As you read, pause to discuss:
  - How does Lady Philosophy describe Fortune? What are her characteristics? (Cruel, deceptive, inconsistent).
  - What does it mean to be on Fortune's wheel? What happens when it turns?
  - According to Boethius, what is the *\*only\** thing that can't be taken away by Fortune? (The self, virtue, things that are truly one's own).
  - How is this idea meant to be a "consolation" or comfort?
3. **Journal Prompt:** Take 5 minutes to write a short reflection. "Does this idea of Fortune's Wheel feel true to life? Is it comforting or terrifying? Why?"

**Part 3: The Royal Translation - Elizabeth's Wheel (20 minutes)**

1. **Context:** Introduce the fascinating historical fact that Queen Elizabeth I, one of the most powerful monarchs in English history, translated this very text in 1593. Ask the student: "Why would a queen at the height of her power, who had faced countless plots and dangers, be so interested in this particular text about the rise and fall of fortune?"
2. **Comparative Analysis:** Create a simple T-chart in the notebook. Label one side "Modern Translation" and the other "Elizabeth I's Translation."
  - Read Elizabeth I's translation of the same passages aloud (Book 2, Meter 2).
  - As you read, fill in the chart by comparing specific words and phrases. How does Elizabeth's language feel different? Is it more forceful, more poetic, more personal? Does her word choice change the meaning or the feeling of the text?
  - **Discussion:** Does it sound like a philosopher or a ruler wrote this? Does her status as a monarch who lived and died by political fortune color her interpretation?

**Part 4: The Mystic Symbol - The Tarot Connection (10 minutes)**

1. **Visual Analysis:** Present the image of the Rider-Waite "Wheel of Fortune" tarot card.
2. **Connect the Concepts:** Discuss the imagery on the card.
  - Where do you see the Boethian idea of rising and falling? (Figures on the wheel).
  - What is at the center of the wheel? (Often symbols of stability or law, suggesting a calm center in the chaos).
  - What is going on in the corners? (Often the four fixed signs of the zodiac or four evangelists, representing the stability of the universe around the turning wheel of earthly life).
  - How does the tarot card both represent and perhaps *\*add to\** Boethius's original idea? (It adds elements of destiny, cycles, and karmic patterns).

**Part 5: Creative Synthesis - Design Your Modern Wheel (30 minutes)**

1. **The Task:** "Your task is to create your own, 21st-century 'Wheel of Fortune.' It can be a drawing, a collage, a digital image, or even just a detailed concept map."
2. **Guiding Questions for Creation:**
  - What represents the "highs" on your wheel? (e.g., viral fame, financial success, perfect grades, social influence).
  - What represents the "lows"? (e.g., getting 'cancelled,' economic hardship, personal failure, loneliness).
  - Who or what is turning the wheel in today's world? (e.g., algorithms, public opinion, economic trends, random chance).

- Most importantly, following Boethius, what is in the calm, unmoving center of *\*your\** wheel? What are the things that provide true stability and happiness, which cannot be given or taken away by the turning of the wheel?
3. **Creative Work Time:** Allow dedicated time for the student to design and create their wheel.

## Part 6: Reflection and Wrap-Up (5-10 minutes)

1. **Share and Explain:** The student presents their modern Wheel of Fortune, explaining their symbolic choices and how their design connects back to the ideas of Boethius, Elizabeth I, and the tarot.
2. **Final Thought:** Conclude by asking, "After exploring this idea for over 1500 years, from a prison cell to a royal court to a deck of cards, has your own view of luck and fortune changed at all?"

## Assessment

- **Formative (Informal):** Quality of participation in discussions; thoughtfulness of journal entry and T-chart comparisons.
- **Summative (Creative Project):** The Modern Wheel of Fortune artwork will be assessed based on:
  - **Conceptual Clarity:** How well does the artwork represent the core themes of fortune, flux, and stability?
  - **Synthesis of Ideas:** Does the accompanying explanation successfully connect the artwork's symbolism to the concepts from Boethius and Elizabeth I?
  - **Creativity and Personal Voice:** Does the project reflect original thought and a modern, personal perspective?

## Extension & Differentiation

- **For Deeper Inquiry:** Research the specific historical context of Elizabeth I's translation in 1593. What was happening in her life and in England that year? Write a one-page paper arguing how those events might have influenced her work.
- **For a Broader View:** Compare the Boethian Wheel of Fortune to a similar concept in another philosophy or religion (e.g., the Buddhist Wheel of Dharma or the Hindu concept of Samsara).
- **Support:** Provide a pre-filled T-chart with some examples to get the comparison started. Offer a template for the wheel design with designated spaces for "highs," "lows," and the "center."