

Christina Baulch-- Final Project for The Many and the One
July 2010

Teaching Context

I teach at Strath Haven High School, a public high school of approximately 1,200 students in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. The school is largely white, with a 10% African American population. According to the school website, “most of the residents hold professional, executive, or semi-managerial positions in nearby communities” and “the average income level is medium-high.” The school is religiously diverse; there is a significant Jewish population in the area, a small Muslim population, numerous Protestant denominations, Catholic students (a number come from parochial middle schools), and students who identify as humanist, agnostic, or atheist. The area and student body as a whole would be considered liberal and Democratic-leaning, but there are vocal students who identify as conservative. SHHS emphasizes school involvement, and a majority of students are involved in sports, musical organizations (our marching band boasts 400 members—one third of the school!), and clubs; the students are on friendly terms with most of their teachers and expect an engaging environment both in and outside the classroom.

Each day I teach three 80-minute blocks of 9th grade English, officially titled “Introduction to Literary Analysis and Academic Writing.” I typically have around sixty students total. The majority of classes at SHHS are semester-long courses, but 9th grade English is one of the few classes that is year-long. I teach at both the college prep (the default level) and honors level. This upcoming year will be my fourth year at SHHS and my fourth year teaching.

Within the 9th grade curriculum, I am required to teach four core works: *The Odyssey*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Inherit the Wind*. There are certain learning goals the 9th grade team has agreed upon for each of the core works, but I am still allowed considerable latitude in how I chose to conduct my classroom.

Project Overview

For the purpose of this project, I will be focusing on my unit for the play *Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. The play is a dramatization of the 1925 Scopes trial, but it was written in 1955 and was intended as a response to McCarthyism. The play borrows

many of the characters and events from the historic trial, but it is also clearly a work of fiction that uses drama to make a specific message. I typically allot about three weeks for the study of the play, including the introduction of background materials.

The 9th grade team has agreed upon learning goals for *Inherit the Wind*, which, among others, include the following essential questions:

- Can a single individual effect a change in his society's views or values?
- How can an unexamined set of beliefs limit a person?
- Can science and religion find common ground?
- What price should a person be willing to pay if he or she violates a family or societal expectation?
- What should be the guiding force in personal decision making—individual values or societal values?
- How is the right to think necessary for growth and yet also dangerous?
- What are the perils of developing opinions based on outward appearances and superficial assumptions?
- How are the conflicts in *Inherit the Wind* relevant today?

I believe incorporating nonfiction primary sources from the Institute will better allow me to address these central questions in my lessons. Because I am teaching *Inherit the Wind* as literature in an English classroom, I have not chosen to develop an entire unit. Instead, I have created two lessons to integrate into my existing curriculum. These lessons will utilize primary sources in order to better address *Inherit the Wind*'s place in American religious history while meeting the established learning goals.

Lesson One: Overview

My first lesson would most likely take place before reading the play but after students have learned the basic history surrounding the Scopes trial. The goal for this lesson is to address an aspect of the essential question, “What should be the guiding force in personal decision making?” through a debate on who should decide what is taught in school. I’ve initiated discussion on this question in the past, and, interestingly, students never suggest academics as an option for who should decide what is taught. I hope to bring that option more into the forefront.

Lesson One: Goals

- Students will be able to use primary texts to understand opposing arguments.
- Students will be able to defend an argument using specific, detailed supporting points.

<i>Activity for Honors 9th Grade English</i>	Time
<p><i>Primary Materials:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - William Jennings Bryan, "Who Shall Control Our Schools?" June 1925 (in <i>A Brief History with Documents</i>, p. 189) - R.S. Woodworth, "Tennessee Can Dictate Curriculum, Not Answers" August 29, 1925 (in <i>A Brief History with Documents</i>, p. 197) 	80 min block
<p>Think-Pair-Share for each of the following questions. Record answers on board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What issues come into play when deciding what to teach in public schools? (e.g: preparation for future; critical thinking; pursuit of knowledge; instruction of morality) • Who <i>could</i> decide what is taught? (e.g.: teachers, majority [of what?], parents, academics) • Who currently decides what is taught in this public school? 	20 min
<p>Introduce day's guiding question: Do schools exist to pass on the values of the local majority or do they exist to transmit to students the professional educators' regard for science and independent inquiry? (adapted from Moran, p. 60)</p> <p>For homework previously, students will have read the articles above. As a class, outline each author's primary arguments in regards to the question. Record on board.</p>	20 min
<p>Divide class in half; one side will argue that schools should transmit the "values of the local majority." The other will argue that schools should transmit "the professional educators' regard for science and independent inquiry." Students will develop an opening argument and at least three supporting points (to be recorded by group).</p>	20 min
<p>Whole-class debate will be held on the subject, followed by a "vote." This lesson would likely need to be continued on a second day.</p> <p>Potential follow-up lessons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students write a paragraph response for homework in which they argue for the argument they most agree with. - Once students have started <i>Inherit the Wind</i>, students write an argument from the point of view of one of the play's characters (Drummond [Darrow] would probably be a strong option). - After finishing reading the play, reconsider students' arguments from before reading. In what way has their original argument been changed and/or altered? 	20 min then cont. on next day

Lesson One: Problems and Areas of Further Inquiry

1. In my teaching environment, I think that most students will naturally gravitate towards the "professional educators" side of the argument. I'd like to utilize additional examples

where there might be a conflict between a local majority and professional educators.

Potential areas might include:

- a. Environmentalism
 - b. Sex education
 - c. “Perfection” narrative of “American heroes”
 - d. Contemporary conflicts over evolution/creationism in the classroom
 - e. Immigration
 - f. Textbook adoption
 - g. Standardized testing
2. Although I like the article by Bryan mentioned above, as it does a good job of outlining an argument for why a local majority should choose what is taught, I don’t think the second article is as successful in arguing the counter viewpoint. I hope to find another article, preferably from the time period, that effectively and succinctly makes that argument.

Lesson Two: Overview

My second lesson would take place after the beginning of Act 2, Scene 2 of *Inherit the Wind*. During this scene, Brady [Bryan] questions several of Cates’ [Scopes’] students about the effects the teaching of evolution had on their lives, arguing that evolutionists are “brewers of poison” and that students who learn evolution “will become one of a generation, shorn of its faith by the teachings of Godless science” (Lawrence and Lee 70). Drummond [Darrow] then cross-examines, making the point that “anyone... has the right to think” and that learning about evolution has not made the boys commit sinful acts (L&L 71). Again, I think my students and I, on average, would tend to dismiss Brady’s arguments, but this lesson is designed to consider whether learning can affect religion, and whether or not such learning constitutes a necessary risk. The primary question guiding this argument is “Is there danger in knowledge?”, which speaks to the essential question, “How is the right to think necessary for growth and yet dangerous?”

Lesson Two: Goals

- Students will be able to use a primary source to understand a character’s motivation.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast opposing arguments.

- Students will be able to make connections between themes of the play and their own lives.

<i>Activity for Honors 9th Grade English</i>	Time
<p><i>Primary Materials:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "What College Did to My Religion" by Philip Wentworth - <i>Inherit the Wind</i> by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee 	80 min block
<p>In pairs, students create a chart on large paper examining what Wentworth “lost” through his college experience and what he “gained.”</p> <p>Share out results as a class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a class, discuss how Brady would respond to Wentworth’s piece. 	20 min
<p>Read Drummond’s speech on p. 93 of <i>Inherit the Wind</i> (*see speech at end the end of this paper)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think-Pair-Share: How is Drummond’s argument similar to Wentworth’s experience? How would Drummond respond to what happened to Wentworth? 	20 min
<p>Individual response: Both Wentworth and Drummond seem to recognize that the gain of knowledge may mean giving up something else. Give an example of when learning something meant you had to give up something else. In what way was the loss worth or not worth the gain?</p>	30 min

Lesson Two: Problems and Areas of Further Inquiry

1. This lesson, perhaps more than the previous one, may illicit strong reactions from students who consider themselves religious or students who will argue that people can “have it both ways” (these students may be tempted to dismiss Wentworth because he wrote so long ago). It will be important to guide the work constructively as a way of understanding the tensions in *Inherit the Wind* without making students feel defensive.
2. It could be interesting to pair the Wentworth piece with other texts. These could potentially include:
 - a. Pieces by Fundamentalist Gretchen Machen
 - b. Articles on contemporary conflicts over Google in China

**excerpt from p. 93 of Inherit the Wind by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee*

Brady

Is it possible that something *is* holy to the celebrated agnostic?

Drummond

Yes! (His voice drops, intensely) The individual human mind. In a child's power to master the multiplication table there is more sanctity than in all your shouted "Amens!", "Holy, Holies!" and "Hosannahs!" An idea is a greater monument than a cathedral. And the advance of man's knowledge is more of a miracle than any sticks turned to snakes, or the parting of waters! But are we now to halt the march of progress because Mr. Brady frightens us with a fable? *(Turning to the jury, reasonably)* Gentlemen, progress has never been a bargain. You've got to pay for it. Sometimes I think there's a man behind a counter who says, "All right, you can have a telephone; but you'll have to give up privacy, the charm of distance. Madam, you may vote; but at a price; you lose the right to retreat behind a powder-puff or a petticoat. Mister, you may conquer the air; but the birds will lose their wonder, and the clouds will smell of gasoline! *(Thoughtfully, seeming to look beyond the courtroom)* Darwin moved us forward to a hilltop, where we could look back and see the way from which we came. But for this view, this insight, this knowledge, we must abandon our faith in the pleasant poetry of Genesis.