

CHARACTER

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COURAGE

by Bernice Lerner, Ed.D.

In his *Essays in Faith and Morals*, William James quoted the following from *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* by James Fitzjames Stephen (London, 1874):

We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still, we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road, we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? Be strong and of good courage: Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. If death ends all, we cannot meet it better.

In June of 1944, my mother, then fourteen, was deported with her family, with all of the Jews from her hometown, Sighet, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Within weeks of her arrival she was "selected" for the gas chamber. As the killing machinery was overburdened, she and hundreds of doomed others awaited their fate in a cordoned-off barracks. Her sixteen-year-old sister, Elisabeth, "selected" to work, came to a barracks window to say good-bye to my mother. Sorrowful tears gave way to a plan. As Auschwitz law demanded that the "count" of inmates be exact, and as circumstances were such that two other sisters had also been separated in the last "selection," my aunt arranged to bring back into the barracks the pail (used for excrement) the other condemned sister brought out (to be emptied). In trading places,

my aunt chose to share my mother's destiny. *Be strong and of good courage: Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. If death ends all, we cannot meet it better.*

As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, my legacy includes numerous accounts of courage in extreme circumstances. My grandfather pointed out different types of cows as he and my mother peered through the slats of their cattle car, traveling through the countryside en route to Auschwitz. His last words to her were that he had confidence she would make it. My Aunt Esther scolded Hungarian Gendarmes when she saw them torturing my father in a river near their home. My Aunt Ratzi, who worked in the kitchen of the Christianstadt labor camp, smuggled food out to starving inmates. (When caught, an "X" was carved into her shaven head and she was put in a cellar, in knee-deep water.) My Uncle Irving risked his life to bring my father bread, when their Hungarian Labor Battalions crossed paths in Poland. My Uncle Hershu spoke on behalf of his tormented comrades, when they were imprisoned in Russia and in dire need of clothing and food. In acting humanely, in *acting for the best*, they each defied their oppressors.

When paralyzing fear, panic, and despair are all too real possibilities, our character is put to a harrowing test. Life and death situations cast into bold relief the fact that our actions are, existentially and morally, of consequence. We understandably hold as exemplars those who display courage in the face of dire circumstances.

In our times we are moved, for example, by individuals' deeds on September 11. Terri Tobin, a Police Department veteran, pulled three people out of the rubble. With concrete lodged in her skull, a shard of glass in her back, and multiple fractures, she gave up her spot on an ambulance for a photographer with multiple fractures. Kathy Mazza, a Port Authority police captain, blasted open glass walls at the World Trade Center allowing hundreds to escape before meeting her end in the inferno. While giving last rites to a victim, Reverend Mychal Judge was fatally injured. And Abe Zelmanowitz sacrificed his life by staying with his quadriplegic friend and colleague at Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Edward Beyea. In the annals of this terrible

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COURAGE (continued)

by Bernice Lerner, Ed.D.

day is, too, the heroism of Todd Beamer, one of the passengers aboard United Airlines Flight 93, who spoke words of prayer to a telephone operator before overpowering his plane's evil hijackers. It is not possible to reconstruct what happened in the final moments of the lives of every rescuer, flight passenger and worker who perished. We know only that courage — *to act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes* — is a virtue to which decent people aspire.

Though we may be fortunate enough not to stand at the crossroads of a treacherous mountain pass in the course of our daily lives, in normality, we must also make choices. We need to know when to be afraid, when to take decisive action, when to check personal tendencies toward recklessness or cowardice. We need to realize — as did L. Frank Baum's

Cowardly Lion — that we have within us the capacity for courage; the ability to wisely assess situations, to figure out what the right thing to do is, and to act accordingly.

Courage can be practiced. At almost any age one can develop the habit of speaking out against injustice, asking for help when it is needed, and meeting difficult challenges. It is important to note, too, that courage may look different depending upon individuals' inclinations and particular circumstances. For a teenager who longs to be accepted by his peers, it may take courage to abstain from a negative activity in which they invite him to participate; for a person suffering from depression, it may take courage to get out of bed in the morning, to face the day; for a shy person, it may take courage to attend a social gathering, to

strike up a conversation. For many of us, it takes courage to admit to having made a mistake, to forego or submit to medical procedures, or to make significant, called-for changes in our lives. We must summon what wisdom we possess to discern a right path, though as James Fitzjames Stephen said, we may *not certainly know whether there is any right one*. In thoughtfully considering each hour's demands, in acting courageously, we not only *cannot meet death better*, we give meaning to our lives. This holds for those whose days or minutes are numbered, for survivors of cataclysms who find the wherewithal to rebuild their shattered lives, for all who rise above adversity in its myriad incarnations.

Dr. Bernice Lerner is director of professional development at the CAEC.

EVOLVING PEG

by Margaret Sullivan

Editor's note: The CAEC would like to offer a tribute to an individual of courage whose daily contribution to Boston University's School of Education (SED) over the last fifteen years has left an indelible mark on our lives. Until her recent retirement, Peg House served as SED's Communications and Field Services Coordinator.

*"Leap, and the net will appear."
— Julia Cameron*

This is the most prominent of several quotes jotted on Post-It notes hanging inside Peg House's front door. It steels her as she opens the door to a new day, new losses, and new adventures. It is easier to walk out the door now that a new leg brace has eliminated the

need for a crutch, leaving both hands free to handle the walker that also holds her oxygen tank. Peg's body and world are changing daily; her courage is displayed in the moment-to-moment strength she brings to a reality not of her choosing. As her voice fails her, she has taken to signing her notes "Evolving Peg."

Peg House took a medical leave from Boston University's School of Education last November when she was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), often called Lou Gehrig's disease. The disease leads to the weakening and eventual paralysis of all the body's voluntary muscles, while the mind and senses remain intact. As Peg explains, the course is "crutch, walker, wheelchair, bed." Peg's dignity

and humor impress even those of us who have grown accustomed to her grace in facing myriad difficulties.

Peg showed rare courage the day she arrived at Boston University, fifteen years ago. Her situation was dire. Because of a disability, she had been previously unable to work and was raising two children alone. One month the food stamps did not arrive in the mail. With a child in each hand, Peg took the bus to the welfare office. The family spent the entire day in a waiting room painted a particularly ugly shade of institutional green, with nothing for the children to read or do. The caseworkers never did find their error, so they determined that the problem must be with Peg. Without knowing

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From the **TRENCHES...**

COURAGE: an Integrated Unit for **GRADE 5**

by Valerie Nee & Bonnie O'Neill, Bourne Middle School, Bourne, MA

PROJECT FOCUS

Middle school students face many social and academic pressures. In order to flourish, they require the courage to face their fears and do what they know is right.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The purpose of this project is to help students internalize and practice courage. We want students to understand the different kinds of courage and what it means to be a courageous person. Throughout the unit the teacher should prompt discussion on the difference between courage and recklessness.

The entire project should take four to five weeks to complete. Students are expected to work individually and in pairs, small groups, and in whole-class activities. The projects involve reading fiction and nonfiction, listening to stories, drawing, discussing, writing, and performing. Activities will be appropriate for English, literature, and science classes. The lessons are designed to foster awareness, understanding, action, and reflection.

POETRY/WRITING

Awareness

- Have students complete the *Before* side of the Anticipation Guide (see next page) and discuss their answers.
- Display the words "courage" and "recklessness" on a chalkboard, overhead screen, or bulletin board. Ask students to list words or names that come to mind when they think of courage. Record the students' contributions beneath "courage" and repeat for "recklessness."

Understanding

- Using the introduction to the section on courage in *The Book of Virtues* by William Bennett as a guide, lead a discussion about the distinction between courage and recklessness. Explain to students the appropriateness of fear in situations requiring courage.
- Read the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling, and discuss its message about courage. It is also published in *The Book of Virtues*.

Action

- Ask students to create a list of situations faced by students that require courage.
- Invite them to set goals for acting with courage in the face of these situations.
- Ask students to look through newspapers or news magazines to find articles about individuals who are exemplars of courage as described in "If". Have students work in small groups to write letters to some of these individuals. The letters should refer to the poem and explain why the students believe the individuals' actions exemplify courage.

Reflection

- Ask students to consider how courage differs from recklessness. How would they help a younger child understand the distinction between the two?
- Have the students write original poems, using "If" as a model, that defines courage.

LITERATURE/DRAMA

Awareness

- Remind the students of the distinction between courage and recklessness. Ask students if they can recall any book characters who exemplify either of these qualities.

Understanding

- Have students read a novel about a character who is courageous. The following is a list of novels with courageous main characters:

Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry

Mafatu, a twelve-year-old boy who is stranded on an island, must overcome his fear of the sea in order to survive.

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen

Thirteen-year-old Brian spends 54 days alone in the wilderness after a plane crash.

Homecoming by Cynthia Voigt

Dacey, a thirteen-year-old girl, takes responsibility for her three younger siblings after they are abandoned by their mother.

Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George
A thirteen-year-old Eskimo girl named Miyax (Julie) is lost on the Alaskan tundra.

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Two girls, one who is Jewish, face many dangers from the Nazi soldiers.

Action

- Have the students choose a scene that they believe best illustrates courage. Students should write a brief skit (drawing from the text) and act it out for the class.

Reflection

- After watching the skits, the students will reflect upon the different incarnations of courage. Ask them to choose one character that they thought faced the most difficult challenge. Write a book review that focuses on the character's courage. Conclude the review with a statement regarding the lesson in courage that might be learned from reading the book.

MATHEMATICS/SCIENCE

This lesson on Galileo might also be used as part of a unit on the scientific method or astronomy.

Awareness

- Ask students to consider the connection between courage and the life of a scientist or mathematician.

Understanding

- Read the short biography of Galileo from the book *Historical Connections in Mathematics* by Wilbert and Lucida Reimer.
- List Galileo's most important discoveries. Ask students to work in pairs or groups of three to discuss and record those traits exhibited by Galileo such as courage, perseverance, patience, and respect (as he made each contribution).

FROM THE TRENCHES

(continued)

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

What do you think about **COURAGE**?

- Ask students to identify times when Galileo displayed courage, citing details from his biography. Was Galileo ever reckless?

Action

- Ask students to consider the importance of courage for someone engaged in scientific inquiry.
- Have students working in groups of three or four write a Courage Contract to be used during scientific inquiry. The Contract will list maxims they believe are required of ethical scientists. For example, "I will remain true to the data I gather and will resist the temptation to make the results fit my expectations."

Reflection

- Remind students that when we think of courageous individuals, scientists do not often come to mind. Ask the students to consider the role of courage in other less-than-obvious careers.
- Ask students to consider when they are required to be courageous and how these situations are similar to or different from those faced by Galileo.

PROJECT EVALUATION

At the end of the unit, it is our hope that students will understand what courage looks like in action. Students will be asked to complete the *After* side of the Anticipation Guide they filled out before the unit. Hopefully, their responses will reflect a greater awareness of what it means to act with courage. Although many great heroes are indeed courageous, our goal is that students understand that courage isn't simply for extraordinary heroes. We envision that they see the value in practicing courage in their daily lives.

This unit is organized around the Internalizing Virtue Framework developed by K. Bohlin, D. Farmer, and K. Ryan.

Agree	Disagree	Unsure	COURAGE	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
			If you have courage, you are not afraid.			
			There is only one kind of courage.			
			Going off a jump the first time you ride on a skateboard shows courage.			
			You can't practice courage. You either have it or you don't.			
			You need to have wisdom in order to have true courage.			

from the
e x e c u t i v e **DIRECTOR** ...Karen E. Bohlin, Ed.D.

Some Thoughts on **SUCCESS**

I was invited to a luncheon with a number of recent college graduates in the throes of their first job. Most of them were involved in either business or education and expressed a deep sense of concern about whether or not they were on "the right track" to success and career fulfillment. They had been led to believe that "making it" is all about "who you know" and how much prestige is attached to their alma mater. They were eager to learn from their guest presenters to whom and to what they should commit themselves in order to get ahead.

I wonder if we as a society have misled these sharp, attractive, high-energy folks, so eager for practical career advice. I wonder if anyone in their educational experience had challenged them to explore deeper questions related to success or "making it": Why do I want to pursue this particular line of work or field of study? What can I learn, and how can I contribute? What does it really mean to have integrity in the workplace? Perhaps we need to explore success and its allure with our students.

As educators what kinds of success do we generally prepare our students to pursue? The success of men and women who possess business savvy and buying power but fail at personal responsibility and integrity? Those who dazzle

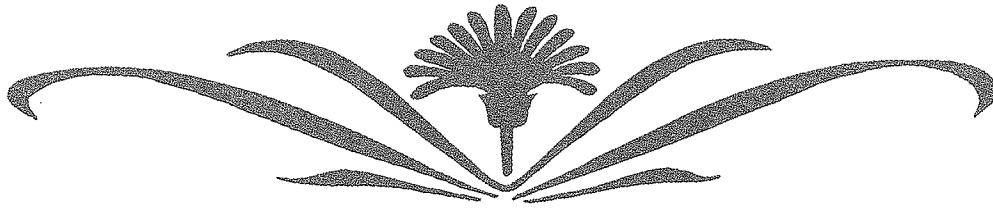
and persuade an audience but have no regard for the truth? Those who are highly cultivated in athletics, the arts, and music, but who crumble in the face of failure?

Our students in high school and college are keen to walk the practical road to success. They are eager to become doctors, teachers, scientists, MBAs or CEOs, but they are not always so sure why, or their reasons are still somewhat superficial. The fast track to success and self-realization so prevalent in our culture can deceive students, as well as professionals, into believing that as soon as they earn a degree and secure "the right job," then they will be happy. This practical pursuit of success is perhaps instigated and sustained by a culture of test prep, college application consultants and an emphasis on resume-building that begins as early as elementary school.

Since antiquity, however, it has been commonplace for wise persons to observe that popular notions of the good life as devoted to the accumulation of wealth, honors, power, or as given over to the pursuit of pleasure are misguided. Lust for power, for example, drove Macbeth to kill King Duncan. After assuming the throne, however, his ambitions are quickly laid

waste by guilt and misery. Blind desire drove Jay Gatsby to engage in wide scale corruption and build an empire to woo Daisy Buchanan. His romantic dream likewise ends in a tragic nightmare.

Human beings are more likely to flourish – that is, to be truly happy – if they attend to those internal characteristics that define who they are themselves, rather than focusing on life's external trappings of success. Can we make provisions in our classrooms to challenge students to distinguish between success and happiness, between impulse and intelligent choice, between friendship and exploitation, between healthy self-respect and self-aggrandizement, between treating others as colleagues and treating them as stepping-stones? With the Enron scandal and others looming large in our collective memory, our students need more than fair warning about shady dealings in the workplace. They need not simply to steer clear of corruption but to become agents of change in the professional world. In this way they can walk confidently along the road to success *and* to genuine happiness.



EVOLVING PEG (continued)

her medical condition, they began to question her motives and eligibility. Peg decided that she and her children would never be subject to such demeaning treatment again. She underwent surgery and six months of rehabilitation so that she could physically work. She then had to organize childcare for her son and daughter. Peg's first paycheck was less than the disability check she had received while staying home.

While working at BU, Peg pursued her long-deferred dream of earning a college degree. A wordsmith, by day, she would edit dry academic text, and at night read great authors. During the years Peg juggled life as a worker, mother, and English major, she also honed her skills as a poet. *Nulla dies sine linea* is her motto, loosely translated to, "never a day without writing." Her work deals with love and loss, determination, the unfairness of life and the grace needed to face misfortune. She has had several poems published in university literary magazines and has been invited to read publicly.

Several years ago, doctors diagnosed Peg's difficulty breathing as emphysema. More recent walking difficulties were attributed to small strokes. When it seemed each part of Peg was being treated, or mistreated, by a different spe-

cialist, Peg began her own research. Her approach to life and her illnesses furnished clues. "I have pseudo bulbar palsy, which means my emotions are more labile and I laugh and cry more easily. In my case, there is more laughing than crying." It was an Australian ALS website that connected Peg's laughter and various medical symptoms with ALS. She took the information to her doctors, who conducted tests to confirm the diagnosis.

Peg has always been a spiritual person and believes that years of faith and searching have better prepared her to handle ALS. She has been a Unitarian, Baptist, Buddhist, Christian Scientist, and is now Unitarian again, having come full circle. "At first, I wanted to take the rap. When I learned that I had ALS, I thought all these thoughts. Maybe I did something wrong in this life or in a past life. Maybe I ate the wrong things, or thought bad thoughts, or stepped on too many cracks in the sidewalk. But none of these things is true. It sounds corny, but I do believe God doesn't give us more than we can handle. I know God is not a punishing god. I also like the saying 'stay in the day.'"

"Every minute we are alive we are also dying" is another meaningful statement for Peg. She has cousins in Nova Scotia who live simply, close to the land and the sea. While still young, they buy grave plots and erect headstones engraved with their name, year of birth, and a dash-year of death to be filled in later. Every day is lived with an awareness of death. Perhaps this results in lives lived more thoughtfully.

As a student of poetry, Peg learns from writers of every age. Beloved children's books collected over a lifetime are now re-read with new insight. Her current favorite line from E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* is "SOME PIG," not a bad ending for a little runt. She has replaced her childhood version of Margaret Wise Brown's *The Little Fur Family*. "When I was young, the book's cover had real fur. Now it comes with politically correct fur." Other precious childhood favorites are Collodi's *Pinocchio* that she enjoyed sharing with her young son when he forgot to tell the truth, and her mother's own girlhood volume of *The Complete Mother Goose*. Peg's mother was a strong and accomplished woman who died tragically. "I can still hear my mother calling from the bottom of the stairs, 'Pull your socks up and get going': I try to do that." Today, Peg's reading choice is poetry. Poet laureate Billy Collins "has a lot of torque," Peg explains, and shares a poem she has written in response to Collin's response to W.H. Auden. "Collins starts by observing something mundane, then lets his mind wander. He has some kind of epiphany in the middle or end of the poem." Peg's most recent epiphany took place in a doctor's waiting room. "It's not how fast I get there, but that I do arrive." She wrote a small poem of acceptance during the years her breath and limbs started to fail her.

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On the **H O M E F R O N T**

T E N T I P S for Raising **C H I L D R E N O F C H A R A C T E R**

by Kevin Ryan, Ph.D.

It is one of those essential facts of life that raising good children – children of character – demands time and attention. While having children may be “doing what comes naturally,” being a good parent is much more complicated. Here are ten tips to help your children build sturdy characters:

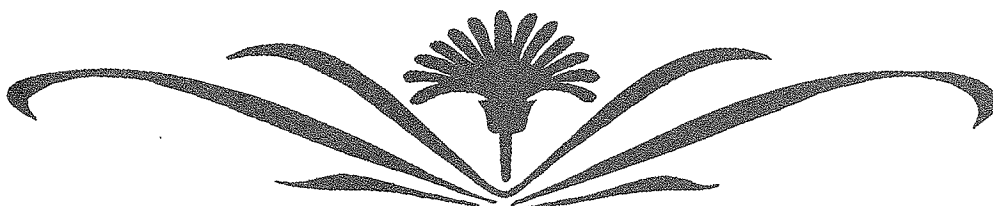
1. *Put parenting first.* This is hard to do in a world with so many competing demands. Good parents consciously plan and devote time to parenting. They make developing their children’s character their top priority.
2. *Review how you spend the hours and days of your week.* Think about the amount of time your children spend with you. Plan how you can weave your children into your social life and knit yourself into their lives.
3. *Be a good example.* Face it: human beings learn primarily through modeling. In fact, you can’t avoid being an example to your children, whether good or bad. Being a good example, then, is probably your most important job.
4. *Develop an ear and an eye for what your children are absorbing.* Children are like sponges. Much of what they take in has to do with moral values and character. Books, songs, TV, the Internet, and films are continually delivering messages “moral and immoral” to our children. As parents we must control the flow of ideas and images that are influencing our children.
5. *Use the language of character.* Children cannot develop a moral compass unless people around them use the clear, sharp language of right and wrong.
6. *Punish with a loving heart.* Today, punishment has a bad reputation. The results are guilt-ridden parents and self-indulgent, out-of-control children. Children need limits. They will ignore these limits on occasion. Reasonable punishment is one of the ways human beings have always learned. Children must understand what punishment is for and know that its source is parental love.
7. *Learn to listen to your children.* It is easy for us to tune out the talk of our children. One of the greatest things we can do for them is to take them seriously and set aside time to listen.
8. *Get deeply involved in your child’s school life.* School is the main event in the lives of our children. Their experience there is a mixed bag of triumphs and disappointments. How they deal with them will influence the course of their lives. Helping our children become good students is another name for helping them acquire strong character.
9. *Make a big deal out of the family meal.* One of the most dangerous trends in America is the dying of the family meal. The dinner table is not only a place of sustenance and family business but also a place for the teaching and passing on of our values. Manners and rules are subtly

absorbed over the table. Family mealtime should communicate and sustain ideals that children will draw on throughout their lives.

10. *Do not reduce character education to words alone.* We gain virtue through practice. Parents should help children by promoting moral action through self-discipline, good work habits, kind and considerate behavior to others, and community service. The bottom line in character development is behavior – their behavior.

As parents, we want our children to be the architects of their own character, while we accept the responsibility to be architects of the environment – physical and moral. We need to create an environment in which our children can develop habits of honesty, generosity, and a sense of justice. For most of us, the greatest opportunity we personally have to deepen our own character is through the daily blood, sweat and tears of struggling to be good parents.

Kevin Ryan is the founder and director emeritus of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character. A version of this piece can be found in the appendices of Building Character in Schools, a book he co-authored with Karen E. Bohlin (Jossey-Bass, 1999).



Making Room for **MORAL QUESTIONS** in the **CLASSROOM**

by Katherine Simon

In one of my first years of high school teaching, I asked my students to memorize and recite lines from *Macbeth*, which we were studying. On the day the memorization assignment was due, one of the students called out the following lines from her seat:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.*

I then did what I understood to be my job as an English teacher: I helped the students understand the definitions of the words "struts," "frets," and "signifying." I asked them to comment on the central metaphor, in which "life" is compared to an actor. We pounded out the rhythm of the lines on our desks, noting that the first, fourth, and fifth lines do not fall neatly into iambic pentameter and discussing why Shakespeare might have departed from his norm for these lines. We had a passably interesting discussion about the meter and the words.

Neither I nor my students, however, thought to discuss the heart of the passage, the real questions being raised here: What are we to make of human pain and suffering? What meaning does life have? I knew that English teachers were supposed to teach about figures of speech and vocabulary, and I knew how to do that. I was neither equipped nor expected to explore what it means to be human. And so our discussion stayed safely out of the realm of meaning and morality. Focusing on the play's external structures rather than on its existential core, I unfortunately ignored the very elements of the play that I myself find most important and exciting and that I believe might have held most interest for my students.

The approach that I took to teaching *Macbeth* – "teaching" the technical aspects of the subject rather than exploring its significance for me and my students – is all too familiar to anyone who has spent time in middle and high school classes. What John Goodlad reported over a decade ago remains true: the preponderance of classroom activity involves "listening, reading textbooks, completing workbooks and worksheets, and taking quizzes – not discussing important issues. Across the curriculum, students are graded on the recall and feedback of memorized information.

As we attempt to make sense of and respond to the tragedies of September 11 and the current war in Afghanistan, we see more clearly how much we value the ability to think deeply about moral and existential questions. We see more clearly the importance of our children having the tools to grapple with the questions that occupy us now – and that have always formed the core of the subject matter we teach. But though we cherish the ability to deliberate thoughtfully, most teachers, myself included, have not conceived of our role as "facilitators of explorations of moral and existential questions."

We have not seen ourselves in this way partly because it is not immediately obvious that big, morally-charged questions *do* form the core of the subjects we teach. Indeed, much of the context of schooling promotes the idea that school subjects are essentially lists of things-to-know. As Arthur Applebee asserts in his critique of the current curriculum, curriculum planning usually begins "with an inventory of important skills and concepts." In this model, teachers must be deliverers of information, focused on "covering" material, focused on particular facts and skills. In the past few years, teachers have been pressed to deliver the information ever more quickly and efficiently, to help students pass ubiquitous and fateful standardized tests.

But if it is true, as so many have said, that everything is different now, then let us use this moment to reflect on what constitutes a meaningful education, on what it means to be an educated person. The truth is that the most important intellectual and moral achievements require the development of habits of mind – such as empathizing with people whose experience differs from our own, seeking out multiple strategies to resolve conflict, the ability to collaborate, knowing where to find more information, asking original questions, reflecting on and learning from experience – which are not fostered by the rush to cover the contents of our textbooks and syllabi.

We need not continue to conceive of our curriculum as a long list and of the role of teachers as the couriers of the list. Applebee suggests conceiving of curriculum as conversation; Dewey urged us to connect the record of humanity's great inquiries – the curriculum – to the curiosities of the child. I would put our challenge this way: *For every subject we teach, we must continually search for how it matters in our lives, how it links to the questions of morality and meaning that students, like all human beings, perennially ask.* Many of these are the same questions of morality and meaning that have taken on special poignancy and urgency in these grief-filled days, and are questions that should guide our class discussions. As horrific and shocking as the events of September 11 were, the questions they raise should always have been explored as a part of education for a democracy. As justified and inevitable as the American response seems to many, it too, raises questions that all American citizens should explore in depth as part of their education.

Now, when things don't seem as certain as they once did, we have an opportunity to create a different kind of curriculum built around

questions that would simultaneously promote rigorous intellectual work and the ability to grapple with moral issues. Questions like these could frame our curriculum: Is killing justified when the killer believes he/she is pursuing a higher good? What is the difference between "war" and "terrorism"? What is race and how does it matter in our society and in the world? What are the tensions between freedom and security? Are there scientific advances that are simply too dangerous for us as a society to pursue? Investigations of such questions might include very wide-ranging content, from history, literature, and science.

Whatever the particular sets of content studied under such overarching questions, these explorations would demand careful garnering of evidence and would provide practice in its interpretation. They would help students come to see the difference between having an opinion and having an informed opinion – and the difference between learning history, literature, and science and learning *from* history, literature and science. We have an opportunity to think about all of our teaching – far beyond conversations about the current crisis – as the way in which our society helps young people deepen their understanding of themselves as human beings and develops their capacity for moral deliberation and action.

I am not making an argument in favor of relevance over content knowledge, nor about merely providing room for students to express their feelings and opinions about these events, as important as that is. I am arguing that we have operated in schools under the illusion that we can separate out neutral, academic, intellectual content from controversial, complex, morally-charged questions about life. And this separation doesn't work – it undercuts the intellectual life of schools even as it leaves us ill-equipped to deliberate about moral issues.

Educators have spent so much time in recent years working on curriculum standards, in many cases laboring over exactly which topics are worthy of being covered by everyone. Certainly, in the textbooks written from now on, the attacks of September 11 will be included. But if they are taught as most of our history is taught, students of the future will memorize the date, the number of people who died, the names of the attackers, and perhaps the name of the president in office in 2001.

Using what Ted Sizer has called "essential questions" to frame courses is not a new idea. But what seems more clear than ever is that the questions essential to an understanding of the subjects we teach are largely moral and existential questions. This means that teachers must be ready and willing to delve into moral matters, far more than I was when I taught *Macbeth*. A brief story highlights the point:

In a ninth grade English class I visited, the students were studying Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a memoir of the author's experience in a Nazi concentration camp. A student, Gary, raised his hand to ask, "How can Wiesel still believe? How is it possible for anyone to believe in God after the Holocaust?" The teacher told him that it was a very important question – and he should bring it up with his clergy person. The teacher went on to point out symbolism in Wiesel's work. The class had a few minutes at the end of the period to continue reading.

The emphasis in this literature class was clearly on recognizing and being able to name themes from the text, not on grappling personally with those themes. The teacher did not see it as her role to discuss in a more personal way Gary's and Wiesel's implied questions – Why do human beings hurt and kill one another? What does this imply about God? What does it mean for me, as I witness cruelty and suffering? What does it mean for me as I grapple with understanding my own connection, if any,

with my "enemies" and with God? English class has been the forum for analyzing literature, not for examining one's own beliefs.

Teachers are not clergy – they neither have special training nor generally consider themselves experts in the problem of suffering in the world or in other moral questions. It is not surprising that teachers would be reluctant to tread this ground – especially in the public sphere, and especially when there are tests to prepare for. But if we care about supporting students to use their minds *well*, we must face the irony of avoiding hard questions and sticking only to the facts at school. Our task is to find a way to conceive of subject areas so that teachers – in their capacity as thinking, feeling human beings with a love and understanding of their disciplines – feel comfortable engaging themselves and their students in these questions. It is a moment for us to get more serious about what education means. We – all teachers, students, citizens – want to understand this wrenching, frightening, beautiful, awe-inspiring world. School could be a place where, wrestling with questions that matter, we begin to make sense of our lives.

A version of this article appeared in Education Week and has been reprinted with the author's permission.

Katherine G. Simon is Director of Research at the Coalition of Essential Schools, where she leads seminars for educators in "Essential Moral Questions." She is also the author of Moral Questions in the Classroom: How to Get Kids to Think Deeply About Real Life and Their Schoolwork, published in November, 2001, by Yale University Press. She can be reached via www.essentialschools.org.

COURAGE quotes

"Without courage, you cannot practice any of the other virtues." – Maya Angelou

"Courage is a special kind of knowledge: the knowledge of how to fear what ought to be feared and how not to fear what ought not to be feared." – David Ben-Gurion

"It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be who you really are." – e.e.cummings

"Without belittling the courage with which men have died, we should not forget those acts of courage with which men have lived. The courage of life is often a less dramatic spectacle than the courage of the final moment; but it is no less a magnificent mixture of triumph and tragedy." – John F. Kennedy

"You have to accept whatever comes, and the only important thing is that you meet it with courage and with the best that you have to give." – Eleanor Roosevelt

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope." – Robert F. Kennedy

"To see what is right and not to do it is want of courage." – Confucius

BOOKS that bring COURAGE to life

John Blair and the Great Hinckley Fire,
Josephine Nobisso

Young Peoples' Stories of Courage,
Henry and Melissa Billings

Brave Irene, William Steig

Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie,
Peter and Connie Roop

Madeline, Ludwig Bemelmans

How Many Days to America? A Thanksgiving Story, Eve Bunting

Island of the Blue Dolphins, Scott O'Dell
The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,
C.S. Lewis

A Wrinkle in Time, Madeleine L'Engle
Souder, William Armstrong

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,
Mildred Taylor

Hatchet, Gary Paulsen

Red Badge of Courage, Stephen Crane

MOVIE moments: COURAGE

The Rescuers (1977; Rated G) K-4

Two mice respond to a message in a bottle from an orphan girl being held by the evil Medusa. They set out alone to rescue her, encountering many perils along the way.

Mulan (1998; Rated G) K-6

A young Chinese girl disguises herself as a male soldier to take her father's place in war.

A Man For All Seasons

(1966; Rated G) Grades 5-12

Sir Thomas More refuses to renounce his faith and acknowledge Henry VIII as Head of the

Church. He is imprisoned and beheaded for treason. Based on a true story.

Gallipoli (1981; Rated PG) Grades 7-12

Two young Australian men fighting in the first World War go into battle under hopeless circumstances. Based on a true story.

Apollo 13 (1995; Rated PG-13) Grades 7-12

In their mission to the moon, three astronauts battle for survival in their fatally flawed spacecraft. Based on a true story.

Upcoming EVENTS in CHARACTER EDUCATION

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development conducts regional institutes offering information, awareness and training on issues for K-college educators. The following institutes, held prior to ASCD's national conference, may be of interest to you. For more information, call ASCD toll free at 800.933.2723, then press 2.

March 19 – 20, 2002

Hudson Valley Community Colleges Third Annual Northeastern United States Conference on Character Education. Location is the Academy for Character Education at Hudson Valley Community College.

Contact Mel Horowitz,
Associate Coordinator, HVCC
80 Vandenberg Avenue
Troy, NY 12180

Telephone 518.629.7512/Fax 518.629.7515

Conference

information www.hvcc.edu/k-12/charatered2002.pdf

May 1 – 2, 2002

Waterbury, CT.

Fourth Annual Connecticut Assets-Based Character Education Conference.

Contact The School for
Ethical Education (SEE)
440 Wheelers Farms Road
Milford, CT 06460

Telephone 203.783.4438 /Fax 203.783.4473

Website www.ethicsed.org

June 28 – 30, 2002

Dallas, TX.

Community of Caring: An Invitation to Character.

Contact Community of Caring
1325 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Telephone 202.393.1251

Fax 202.824.0351

Website www.communityofcaring.org

MEMBERSHIP Form

Note: \$40 of each Friend of the CAEC membership is tax-deductible. We are a non-profit organization that relies on grants and the generosity of its members. Any additional tax-deductible contribution you make to the CAEC is both needed and greatly appreciated.

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CAEC
621 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215

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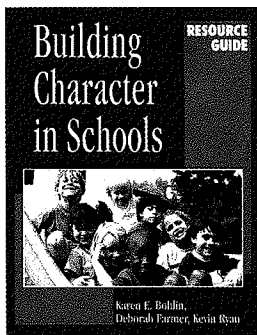
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ing character education. They clarify what is often a fuzzy topic by offering examples of both effective and "miss the mark" character education. They illustrate the differences between values, virtues, and points of view. And, they present guidelines for designing effective lessons, units, assessments, and classroom activities.

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– Parker J. Palmer, author, *Let Your Life Speak* and *The Courage to Teach*

Upcoming EVENTS in CHARACTER EDUCATION

(continued)

July 1 – 3, 2002

Cortland, NY.

Annual Summer Institute in Character Education. The Center for the Fourth and Fifth Rs is also offering a high school conference as well as a one-day conference, which will be held on July 2. Registration deadline for all programs is June 17, or earlier if filled. Space is limited; early registration is encouraged.

Contact Center for the Fourth and Fifth Rs
SUNY Cortland
PO Box 2000
Cortland, NY 13045

Telephone 607.753.2455

E-mail c4n5rs@cortland.edu

Website www.cortland.edu/www/c4n5rs/

Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin will lead high school seminar on July 2nd.

July 18 – 20, 2002

St. Louis, MO.

8th Annual Character Education Conference.

Contact Jerry Corley
CharacterPLUS
Cooperating School Districts
8225 Florissant Road
St. Louis, MO 63121

Telephone 314.516.4526/Fax 314.516.4599

Conference <http://info.csd.org>

information <http://info.csd.org/staffdev/chared/Conf/cec.html>

SPOTLIGHT ON...

The Foundation for **MORAL COURAGE**

By Sy Rotter

For most of us the Holocaust is synonymous with the murder of six million innocent Jews by the German Third Reich. However, few of us know of the efforts of some European non-Jews who risked their lives and those of their families in trying to save the lives of some of the intended victims. While it is impossible to state with precision the number of such individuals as no such records were maintained, it is estimated by the Yad Vashem organization in Israel, a historical and documentary museum focused on the Holocaust, that between 50,000 to 500,000 non-Jews were involved in such rescue efforts. Indeed, Yad Vashem, after detailed and intensive research and verification, has formally honored approximately 20,000 rescuers.

The Foundation for Moral Courage based in Washington, D.C. has been working in collaboration with Yad Vashem and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in the production of a ser-

ies of educational television documentaries on the inspiring stories of specific rescuers from Germany, Poland, Italy, Greece, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. These 30-minute films tell these stories through the memories of the rescuers themselves as well as their children and, in some cases, by those who were rescued. The stories presented describe not only what the rescuers did, but also why they did so, and what they believe was accomplished.

The aim of our Foundation is not just to share with high school students the moral courage of rescuers set against the historical backdrop of the Holocaust, but also to encourage the students who view these films to realize that each of us has the capacity to reach out to help others in need. It is this capacity for empathy, transformed into lifesaving action without regard for compensation or any recognition, which we refer to as moral courage. This mes-

sage is in turn reinforced in the teachers' Discussion Guides prepared by FMC and enclosed in each tape cassette. Discussion Guides for these films are also available on the website of South Carolina Educational Television (a PBS affiliate), which satellite broadcasts the films to high schools in that state.

For further information on obtaining program cassettes, please visit the FMC website at www.moralcourage.org (site is currently under construction).

Sy Rotter has served as president of the Foundation of Moral Courage since its inception in 1991. He serves as a volunteer in this capacity as well as in the writing, producing, and directing of the foundation's educational television programs.

VISAS for **LIFE**:

The Righteous and Honorable Diplomats

Many people have heard of the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg and of Chuine Sugihara of Japan, who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Few know that diplomatic rescue was carried out by representatives of 25 countries. This fall, the CAEC will co-sponsor, with other Boston area organizations, including the Greater Boston Chapter of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Boston Public Schools, the Visas for Life Project. Educational events will complement an exhibit comprised of photo-

graphic and text panels telling the stories of twenty diplomats who saved over 250,000 lives. Risking their careers, and often their own lives, these heroic individuals exemplify moral courage. The project aims not only to provide the historical context of the Nazi persecution of Jews and Christians during World War II, but to convey an inspirational, universal message to members of all religious, racial and ethnic communities.

VISAs for **LIFE**:

September 19 to November 7, 2002

at Boston University

REFLECTIONS from a High School Teacher

William Morris is a science teacher at Allendale-Fairfax High School in South Carolina. He was a participant in one of our summer 2001 Teachers' Academies in South Carolina. He is currently piloting the following lessons that he created using the Internalizing Virtue Framework in his science classes:

- *Biotechnology and Responsibility*
- *Cloning and Respect*
- *Laws of Motion and Wisdom*
- *Scientific Explanations and Honesty*
- *Symbiosis and Friendship*
- *Light Bulbs and Diligence*

"The impact that the CAEC's Teachers Academy had on my teaching is that it gave me a heightened awareness of the need to nurture my students. My students are students who have failed

the course before and are at risk of dropping out of school. They have a very low sense of self-worth and feel that no one cares if they fail or succeed. My major emphasis this fall has been to help these students discover that they have value and that they have untapped abilities that will allow them to succeed if they put forth the effort to develop these abilities. Most of all I want the students to know that I care about them, regardless of whether they succeed or fail. We are fellow human beings with common problems and concerns and we need to care for each other. The Center's Teachers Academy crystallized this concern for me and has helped me put it into practice."

To our READERS

We want to hear from you!

The strength of this newsletter depends on the active contribution of its readers. Our readers need to hear what is happening in your school or community (That's what our "From the Trenches" and "On the Homefront" sections are all about.)

We welcome submissions of any kind: letters, articles, anecdotes. What has worked in your classroom, home, or school? What has inspired your dedication to character education? We also encourage recommendations for our Selected Bibliography and Character Quotes.

The spring issue will spotlight **HONESTY**. The deadline for our spring issue is April 19, 2002. Please address all correspondence to:

Newsletter Managing Editor
Center for the Advancement
of Ethics and Character
621 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215

Visit our website!

www.bu.edu/education/caec. Or email us
at **caec@bu.edu**. Our upgraded website will
be up and running by March 20th!

EVOLVING PEG (continued)

Moderation

Inch by inch

*The periwinkle circumnavigates its rock.
Why should I go faster?*

"I have a lot of work to do poem-wise," declares Peg, looking at the file cabinet holding her life's work. Peg continues to take English classes, and her latest syllabus would daunt most undergraduates. This week's challenge — how to succeed in a course that grades on class participation with a weakened voice and labored speech. Medical appointments and painful therapy take up a lot of Peg's time and energy. She explores endless gadgets and giz-

mos that may make once simple daily tasks easier to perform. She set aside money for a service dog only to find the waiting list is a year long.

Peg finds people are impatient in dealing with disabilities. She is sensitive to her classmates' reactions and finds the staff at the medical supply store to be rude when they cannot understand her labored speech. Peg finds people are even less comfortable considering death. They want to believe they are exempt. Peg does not have time for other people's fears and discomfort. "I am not afraid," Peg states quietly. She pulls out J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the*

Sorcerer's Stone and quotes the wise Dumbledore, "After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure."

Things are not that different now than when Peg climbed her way off SSI years ago. There is still a lot of "attitude" and an incredible amount of paperwork. Peg tries, nevertheless, to celebrate her abilities.

Margaret Sullivan is the director of graduate admissions in the School of Education at Boston University.

POEMS By Peg House

Things that I know how to do or make:

Trouble and chaos. But also order.
Something complicated out of something simple.

Whoopee while the sun shines.

Babies.

Dinners, breakfasts, and lunches.

A good show of things.

Beds.

Cutting Onions at Dawn

The most significant question you can ask a poet is: who's cooking? I mean, all this talk about the creative process.

It's enough to make you sick if you don't know how or even when dinner will get cooked.

This morning I wake at 5 AM picturing spaghetti, with a sauce of diced onions, silky mushrooms, leftover pepper. I cut them up and boil them down, chop up garlic buds, sprinkle basil, oregano. I stir it and talk to it: please cook. I make three lunches — a crafted sandwich, a pickle, an apple in each. Wash the dishes, clean the counters, sweep the crumbs, empty the wastebasket, start the oatmeal and throw a wet washcloth on my sleeping son.

In the old days, didn't they all have servants? This guy Byron, for instance. Shelley had this sister. Was she good at the stove?

And Wordsworth, did he know how to sauté? We know of course that Virginia Woolf had money in the bank and a room of her own, but the room she was referring to was not the kitchen, and anyway, who cooked that meal she ate the day she walked into the water? Like, who cooked that?

I could give it all over to the Birdseye Company and stop making things from scratch, but something elemental would be lost when the frozen peas hit the boiling water. Dicing and slicing, the juice runs out of the onions, the sun climbs over the eaves. I stir the sauce of words to come, the basic fuel.

1990, Peg House



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