

Can Virtue Be Taught? The Evolution of the Lighthouse Effect

By John Knapp & Tonya Huber

The teaching of English and the teaching of ethics—can they be done together effectively? And should they be? Debate engulfs the topic of ethics, or character, education. Some argue that by the high school years, values are too intrinsically ingrained, and, therefore, are resistant to change through education. On the other side of the debate are people who argue that values *must* be a part of every student's educational experience. With each Jonesboro, Springfield, West Paduca, Pearl, and

Colombine, the debate has raged. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the voice for ethics education has grown even louder. The message is no longer *if*, but, also, *what*, and, especially, *whose*? Can virtue be taught?

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The purpose of this study was to chart the effects of a year-long emphasis on selected moral readings from the classical literary genre in a high school senior English class. Every effort was made to include works of a multicultural, multi-ethnic nature. Students were encouraged to explore the nature of ethics, morals, and values in a number of ways, including 3D personal codes and narratives. At the end of the academic year of this study, a series of events provided the evidence of how students had internalized the concept of virtue and determined to act on their beliefs.

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The focus of this narrative, arts-based inquiry was to chart the effects, of a year-long emphasis on selected moral readings from the classical literary genre: Edith Hamilton's (1969) *Mythology*; Sophocles' (@356 B.C., in Watling, 1974) trilogy, *The Theban Plays*, especially *Antigone*; *Beowulf* (@750 A.D., in Collier, 1910); followed by a comparison of points of view as related to John Gardner's (1989) *Grendel* and Michael Crichton's (1976) *Eaters of the Dead* (retitled *Thirteenth Warrior*, 1996); and a comparison of the biblical accounts of Saul and David, as related in 1st and 2nd Samuel (Samuel, Gad, & Nathan, @11th or 10th B.C., in Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1984). Coupled with the classical offerings were supplemental readings. These included Head and MacLea's (1978) *Myth and Meaning*. With Sophocles' trilogy, students read an essay by E. R. Dodds (1968) titled *On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex*. Reading selections from Steven Covey's (1989) *7 Habits of Highly Successful People* were perused in detail. The sections assigned addressed what Covey dubbed the "circles of influence" (pp. 81-94) in a person's life and then poignantly demonstrated the effects of "reactive" and "proactive" responses to life (pp. 78-80).

From the purposive sample of 19 students evolved 19 unique codes and narratives. One of these, Arthur, will be the focus of this composite, illuminating how an arts-based, narrative approach to a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998) of ethics and virtue evolved into a grounded theory (Creswell; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) study. The composite of Arthur uses his own words as collected in statements extracted from his metaphorical essays, writing responses, reflections, and poetry. Additional comments gleaned from the teacher/researcher notes and personal observations of the first author will reveal even more subtle tones and richer inflections.

The initial design of the study was to draw pre-instruction, pre-reading data from the students, expose them to the methodology, the curricular content, and then, after reflection and discussion, have them produce a post-instruction, post-reading experience essay. The culmination document, an arts-based product called a *personal code* (Osher, Summers, & Andren, 1994, pp. 14-15, 24) evolved as iconic of the moral development of the senior-high students/participants.

Methods of Data Collection

The methods of data collection employed in this study are derivations based on Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) qualifier "methods that allow the researcher to capture *language* and *behavior*" [my emphasis] (p. 46). Four samples (bold italics) were identified and were excerpted from six data sources: (a) a pre-instruction, pre-reading (Sommers, 1993) essay and (b) a pre-instruction, post-reading (Sommers) essay; (c) a post-instruction, post-reading (all moral literature) essay to *capture language* (Barone & Eisner, 1999, p. 75); (d) teacher journal notes to *capture participant observations* (people's actions) (Maykut & Morehouse, p. 69); and, (e)

a final personal self evaluation/reflection to *capture in-depth interviews* (p. 79). In addition to these qualitative indicators, an (f) arts-based (Barone & Eisner) component called *the personal code* was also required to be completed just *before* the composition of the personal self evaluation/reflection, in an effort to capture a synthesis of aesthetic qualities (Barone & Eisner, p. 73). Data tables were compared to the teacher/researcher's journal notes, to each other, and to the observations made by the other investigators passively involved in this project. This was, to be sure, a truncated, but doable version of "axial coding" (Creswell, 1998, p. 209).

Arthur Unknown

About Arthur—from the Teacher/Researcher

I was not totally unaware of Arthur. I had watched him as he had seemingly grown up in the halls of our high school and in the shadow of his very popular sister. From my first recollection, he was of slight build, almost fragile. He showed very little propensity for athletics, but instead seemed to love the verbal, intellectual arena of debate, forensics, drama and acting. Humor was his specialty and, if given a minute with an audience, he could always make them laugh. But beyond his reputation as an able debater, I had heard little about him, either good or bad. Like many others, he seemed to just move up and down the halls almost invisibly, especially compared to the athletes, who tended to be the gods here. He, like his sister, selected the most difficult curriculum and seemed to challenge himself, eventually landing him in my Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class for his senior year.

Arthur on Virtue

His first assignment was an essay asking him to define virtue. In it, he wrote,

Virtues are specific behaviors that are viewed as good. A great deal of this definition depends on who is doing the *viewing*. The two most important perspectives are those of the person who is exhibiting the behavior and the person or persons who are receiving the behavior. One must certainly decide for himself what kinds of behaviors he believes are virtuous, but doing so without considering the interests of those around himself is a poor way [to] make these decisions. Ultimately, everyone chooses which behaviors to exhibit and therefore chooses his own morality. (PIPR)

He went on to cite the rare student who admits to not having his homework done rather than making excuses" (PIPR), all as examples of what virtue might *look* like. He, along with many of his peers, was firmly established in the belief that virtue was a dynamic thing and not constant. In fact, in the next section of the essay, written after reading an essay by Sommers (1993) titled *Teaching the Virtues*, he clearly stated as much: "While I do agree that a basic right and wrong do exist, I do not agree with everything that the author says in this article. . . . Sommers cannot deny what

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is a basic fact of human thought: no single philosophy can be accepted by all unconditionally” (PIPO).

Arthur clearly articulated in his response the primary dilemma that anyone who attempts to *teach* virtue will encounter; namely, exactly what is right and what is wrong and who is to say? Arthur was clear that he believed that “right and wrong do exist.” But he was also just as certain that there could be no such thing as a list of “uncontroversial ethical truths.” The question this poses to a research study is an imposing one: If there is no list of basic *truths* (virtues), how can they possibly be taught, learned, or assessed? Arthur went on to say,

Teachers certainly have many important roles in our society (one of them to grade papers like this one) and should be trusted. Despite their importance, however, teachers are mortal people capable of making mistakes and should not be depended upon to make the final decision on what is right and what is wrong for anyone except themselves. The decision of what are the “plain moral facts” can really only be made by an individual for himself. Since these virtues can only be decided on an individual basis, they cannot be taught. Virtues are characteristics that depend on a variety of factors including family, friends, and other experiences from birth until death. To assume that a single class or a single series of classes can totally form a person’s morals is to grossly underestimate the complexity of the human mind. (PIPO)

Arthur had identified in his first essay, before he had even had the chance to become acquainted with his teacher, the most challenging hurdle to be overcome by any person endeavoring to teach what many believe (Arthur included) to be the unteachable.

Although the sad truth is that ethics cannot be taught, one cannot assume either that ethics cannot be influenced heavily by teaching *about* virtues. These two concepts, teaching virtues and teaching about them, are vastly different in that teaching virtues assumes that right and wrong are definite facts that can be learned like arithmetic problems while teaching about virtues accepts virtues as unique characteristics of individuals and works to improve them positively. . . . Instead of teachers doing as she (Sommers) suggests and developing a set list of what is right and what is wrong for their students to learn, teachers should simply stress the rewards that come with being a virtuous person: respect, self-pride, and the increased possibility that others will treat you as well as you have treated them. (PIPO)

So it was that the teacher/researcher first encountered Arthur in the context of this two-part essay, and it was the beginning of a friendly antagonism that continued the entire semester.

Arthur’s First Appearance

In the reflective piece *Personal Pseudonyms*, students were instructed to select a name or phrase that singularly represented them. Then they wrote an explanation for their new *lie-name* and shared it with their class. This was the earliest demonstration of Arthur’s creative writing ability, as he dubbed himself publicly for the first time *Arthur Unknown*.

Arthur Unknown

I stood, as I sometimes did, in my sister's room. When I miss her most, the best remedy is to surround myself with her essence, which is concentrated in her room. Some new, unsolvable situation had arisen in the process of growing up and I wished I could consult my older sister about it. The sun was shining through the window as it only can in a spring afternoon, giving a strange but picturesque light to the walls. I soaked in the wall decorations that I had come for: the *Vote Kelly for Class Secretary* signs, *Reservoir Dogs* posters, pictures of Leo DiCaprio torn out of *Sassy Magazine* with lipstick prints on them, deflated Elmo balloons given to her by long-gone boyfriends, and one particular object that caught my attention. This item stood out to me because it looked so out of place in Kelly's room. It was a copy of the story *Footprints*—you know, the one about God carrying the narrator across the beach. This story belonged in my aunt's bathroom underneath a *God Bless Our Home* sign that she bought at a crafts fair, not in Kelly's bedroom. In my head, I quickly thought over all the times and places that I had seen this story. "Whoever he is," I thought to myself, "the author must be cleaning up on sales of this thing." I squinted my eyes to read the name of the author in the fading spring sunlight and there, at the bottom of the story, I found my pseudonym.

Before you think that the *Footprints* story so embodies me as a person that I had to use the author's name as my pseudonym, let me explain. What was really there and what I saw there were two different things. The script, although it would have accentuated the flower-shaped decorative soaps in my aunt's bathroom nicely, caused my eyes to deceive me. What was really there was *Author unknown*. But what I saw as I squinted into the strange sunlight cast across the wall was *Arthur Unknown*.

Immediately questions surrounded me like the warmth of the sunshine through the window. Who was Arthur Unknown? Why was he unknown? Why wasn't he just Art Unknown? Was there really a family forced to deal with the surname *Unknown*? I remembered hearing somewhere that immigrants to this country were often asked their names when they requested entrance to New York at Ellis Island. Maybe, I reasoned, the Unknown ancestors had simply answered, "I don't know," when asked for a surname.

First, there is the most obvious layer of Arthur. His name is a pun that strikes me as funny since it was born out of misunderstanding. If Arthur ever really wrote something, I imagine he would constantly be cheated out of royalties and recognition by people who mistook his name for *Author unknown*.

After I had allowed my mind to dwell on the complexity of the name, I took a closer look and realized, with more than a little disappointment, the truth. Arthur Unknown, who I had only met seconds ago, already was no more. The more I think about Arthur Unknown, however, the more I realize how much he and I have in common. In fact, we have so much in common that I have decided to steal his name for my pseudonym (he doesn't need it anyway since he doesn't exist).

On a deeper level, Arthur could be unknown for a reason more meaningful than Great-Great-Grandpa Unknown's mistake. Maybe Arthur is unknown because the things he writes are common and universal, like the *Footprints* story. But also like the *Footprints* story is the fact that Arthur can take a strong, universal element and make it very uncommon by stating it in a way so eloquent that

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everyone can understand it. Arthur does not try to write shocking things; he instead writes normal things in a way that makes them special. He is exactly the type of person who would take something trivial, like misunderstanding a wall hanging, and make it into something important, like a pseudonym. Because his name and who he is seem so natural to us, he is never invited to be on *Politically Incorrect*, and his stories never get made into major motion pictures. Instead, Arthur rests quietly on my sister's wall, making his impact on the world from there. Although he is very representative of every man and woman, he can still change their lives because he is anything but common. He is, essentially, a paradox: he stands out and blends in all at once. He is alone, and yet he is at the heart of everyone. He speaks subtly, but powerfully. Above all, he is unknown. We cannot hope to understand him simply by glancing at him on a sun-splashed wall. So much of who he is lies beneath the surface at a deeper level and is not revealed by a superficial spring sun. Indeed, much about Arthur remains unknown, and that is just what makes him interesting and right for me.

Arthur Illuminated

The next component in this prewriting series narrative was the *Student Metaphor*. This was an assignment modified from Kochendorfer (1994, pp. 75-76) and was originally a reflective piece whose intent was to help teachers examine their own methodologies and teaching styles in light of something else, hence, a metaphor. Metaphorical analysis had had so great an impact on the lead author during his core in the Master of Education program (taught by the second author), that he had adapted it for his high school classes. The *Lighthouse* is Arthur's metaphor.

The Lighthouse

I can remember the first time I ever saw a lighthouse. I was probably 5 or 6 and on vacation with my family in San Diego. It stood on a hill on a finger of land that stretched out into the Pacific Ocean forming the San Diego Bay. My mother explained it was there "so that sailors could find their way home." Something about the lighthouse struck me: it was lonely and yet it was intensely tied to everything around it; it was tall and visible; it was admirable; it was dependable.

In my career as a student, I have tried to embody those qualities of the lighthouse. Along the way I have often felt utterly alone. High school forces situations and adjustments on people that can isolate them completely. All too often we forget as we grow up how powerful it can be to lose your first girlfriend or be excluded from a social clique or do many other trivial things that seem incredibly important at the time. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley has John Savage go to a lighthouse in order to find solitude. This usage demonstrates how lighthouses can be symbolic for loneliness. Through lonely times, however, I am reminded of how connected everyone is. I collaborate with other students on projects, learn from teachers, and have grown up, to some degree, in unison with the other people in this room.

On a more superficial level, I think that I physically resemble a lighthouse. Maybe it was this physical resemblance that first drew my attention to the

similarities between myself and the lighthouse. I am tall and skinny, just like the tall and narrow lighthouse I saw in San Diego. An effect of its tall shape is the lighthouse's visibility. Had the lighthouse not been located in the most visible place in San Diego Bay, the sailors that my mother spoke of would never have found their way home. By applying myself intensely to the things that I do, I try to remain a visible member of the student body. My visibility also spreads beyond the classroom. Oftentimes I'll stay in the auditorium long after play practice has ended to marvel at the solitude and energy of the vacant stage. I stand alone in the middle of the stage and feel the bright lights reflect off of me, as if I were emitting it myself. The same feeling applies when the show time comes. As I stand on stage feeling the power of the theater, I can look out into the sea of seats in the dark and stormy auditorium and watch the sailors in the audience looking at the light I emit. I feel visible. Other times I stand behind the movie projector at the Fox Theatre and feel the power of movies emit from the light that I guide. I feel visible. If I'm going to be visible to those around me, as we all are to some degree, I have decided to make that visibility a positive and not a negative thing. The Columbine killers are visible, but they are obviously not admirable. An admirable visibility is much harder to maintain than an unadmirable one, but the former is the only one that is desirable. The lighthouse is admirable because it uses its visibility for positive ends. If I choose to be a visible person, I want to use my visibility in the most positive way that I can. By living as an exemplary student, I can utilize my visibility to its maximum positive potential. Since I choose to be both visible and admirable, I must also be dependable. A lighthouse that shines only during the day does no one any good. In this same way, a person that only does visible and admirable things when they are easy is less valuable than the person who does them consistently. Only in the time when even the sun fails can the lighthouse be truly appreciated for its dependability.

Arthur was clear in his intention that the term *light* was to be interpreted as a positive, virtuous thing that was not internally created as much as it was reflected and interpreted by the reflector. He went on to insure a crystal clarity to his assertion with a final graphic allusion. Two things about Arthur explode from the passage: one, Arthur clearly believed that a person chose to be or not be moral, "I have decided . . ." and, two, Arthur clearly recognized that there was such a thing as "positive visibility" and "negative visibility" and that the former was what was "desirable" and even "admirable."

One can see Arthur in this third essay had plainly established himself as one who recognized his unique qualities, yet the inference was also there that some things about himself he might change if he could. Clearly though, he respected both the power and the responsibility of one who was "visible" and saw himself as just such a person. Several of these themes were also consistent in the previous two essays, most notably the reference to being "surrounded," yet "lonely," and add to the validity of inferences being drawn from them. Certainly the idea that a *virtuous* man must lead a *lonely* life because the world around him is digressing and going to Hades has become so ingrained in the Western psyche so as to qualify for archetypal status (Head & MacLea, 1978, p. 74).

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Arthur's Oracle

The personal character poem was the next writing endeavor for the students. Arthur's selection of subject matter was again consistent with previous writings and provided more rich insight. Certainly applicable in the analysis of this work, are Barone and Eisner's (1999) conditions for analyzing arts-based research, especially the elements describing the effects of the use of "expressive language" (p. 75), in so much as it is clearly the *connotative* meaning of the language that gives life to this poem, and creates the "virtual reality" (p. 73) that helps the reader find meaning. Equally important is "the promotion of empathy" (p. 77) as Arthur *intends* for his reader to understand *his* oracle from *his* perspective.

Our Oracle

a trip to the city
noises, noises, silence still
people who steal and people who kill
each other while children scream
guns and knives in backpacks gleam
dealers push and hookers pose
a homeless, hopeless man hawks a rose.
I don't like the city.

a trip to the countryside
prejudice proliferates and ignorance prevails
the degradation of females
who raise our children and our thoughts
satellites spark while bookshelves rot
another man drops out of school
sheds his hopes to consume fuel.
I don't like the countryside.

a trip to the oracle
laughter, laughter, sometimes tears
a future that's wonderful and filled with fears
spoons bending with the force of minds
deciphering ancient rhymes
Mr. Knapp struggles while Derek reads

Kyle wanders, Rob believes
Katie argues, so does Seth
Angie'd rather be with Steph
Jillian smiles, so does Michelle
what Katie's thinking I can't tell
people coming and going and roaming the halls
and Arthur sitting back enjoying it all.

I love everyone here
though it may not appear
so, I promise, it's true.
I see hopes in their eyes
and dreams to realize
to end things as they are.
The future is not in the country or city or on a distant star.
No, the future is all right here where I am
where violence is history and schools, not jails, are full.
The future is our oracle.

—AU

Arthur on Virtue

Arthur's frank response to the question, *How, if at all, has the study of these stories affected your attitudes regarding your own morality? (post-instruction, post-reading essay)* was, at first, predictable, but packed quite a surprise toward the end of his statement.

After reading this play [Sophocles' (Watling, 1974) *Antigone*], however, I believe I understand my own morality more clearly and find myself in between two theories. Pondering the conflict between Antigone and Creon made me realize that I believe that society should have a system of morality that is universal. I also believe that these morals should be *very* basic.

This last sentence clearly contrasted Arthur's initial statement from the pre-instruction essay, where he stated, "these virtues can only be decided on an individual basis, they cannot be taught" (PIPR). To explain this change, Arthur gave the following rationale:

Moral relativism can be defined as the view that no constant morality exists and that all values are judged by the situation. In the play *Antigone*, the title character represents this type of view. She believes that even though her brothers have committed a crime they should still be given proper burial. This view goes against the common value that one should obey authority, because a law had been made against burying one of the men. By Creon's judgement, the people should obey the *letter of the law* and punish the one man accordingly. Antigone disagrees with his moral relativism and implores him to *change* his values according to the case. This is a blatant example of moral relativism. In the end, Creon sees that Antigone's judgement was correct and that he should not have been so stubborn. I took this outcome to mean that Sophocles was intending for the reader to support relative morality. Upon closer examination, I began to see the aforementioned conflict and was therefore stuck somewhere in the middle between the two views.

The opposing but still present philosophy was moral absolutism. This type of morality to me means that all of man should uphold certain *universal* values. When I read Creon's part, I began to see that the situation leading up to the events described in *Antigone* were an example of the success of moral absolutism. If

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Creon had not had absolute morals, he could have seen nothing wrong with the two brothers' actions. They were fighting a war, and so killing each other in that situation may not have been wrong. Because Creon knew that killing one's brother *was* wrong, and attacking one's own city *was* wrong however, he condemned one of the men and attempted to restore order to Thebes. The two men's tragic deaths vividly illustrated the need for a basic morality.

This selection patently demonstrated exactly the type moral cognition that Sommers (1993) suggested would occur. The student, in this case, was not inculcated but, instead, came to his own conclusion based on the evidence *he* found in the story. Interestingly, Arthur's interpretation of the story was flawed, yet his logic was cogent. In the story, Antigone gives her life for what she calls "the higher laws of the gods" (Sophocles @356 B.C., in Watling, 1974, p. 74), or *moral absolutism*, whereas, Creon holds to the infallibility of *man's* governance, which is unquestionably *moral relativism*. In spite of this interpretive error, Arthur showed adroit evidence of deep moral reflection, and he went on to circumvent misanthropists who might have suggested that he had been somehow *forced* to this conclusion by the structure of the story or the bias of the writer, ". . .critics can claim that the book [story of *Antigone*] attempts to pull the reader to one side, but the overall effect of the two viewpoints on me was to feel my own morality somewhere in between the two" (PIPR). It is in this wrestling match between the two that students forge long-lasting impressions and make decisions about what constitutes truly virtuous living. I present Arthur's composite as a fair representation of what happened with many students in this study.

Arthur Unveiled

The following is the result of the final culmination exercise which evolved and became such an integral part of the virtue building experience. This was Arthur's own personal code (see Figure 1), and, as with the other writing samples, it bore an uncanny consistency that was neither asked for, nor anticipated.

Arthur and Others in Action

The final item of data included in this study was unique to Arthur. Because of his position as class president, Arthur was required to offer the *Welcome* speech at senior graduation. A welcome speech, in and of itself, would normally provide little by way of meaningful data, but given the atmosphere of moral talk that had been pervasive in our classroom for that entire year, this particular speech became the document that related the culmination of several virtuous *acts* that will be related. The reader will recall the initial definition for virtue created between the two classes some eight months earlier—"Virtue is a selfless attitude resulting in an action of service; a *need* within an individual to do the right thing, not out of obligation or guilt, but simply because it is right, . . . it is right attitude leading to right action

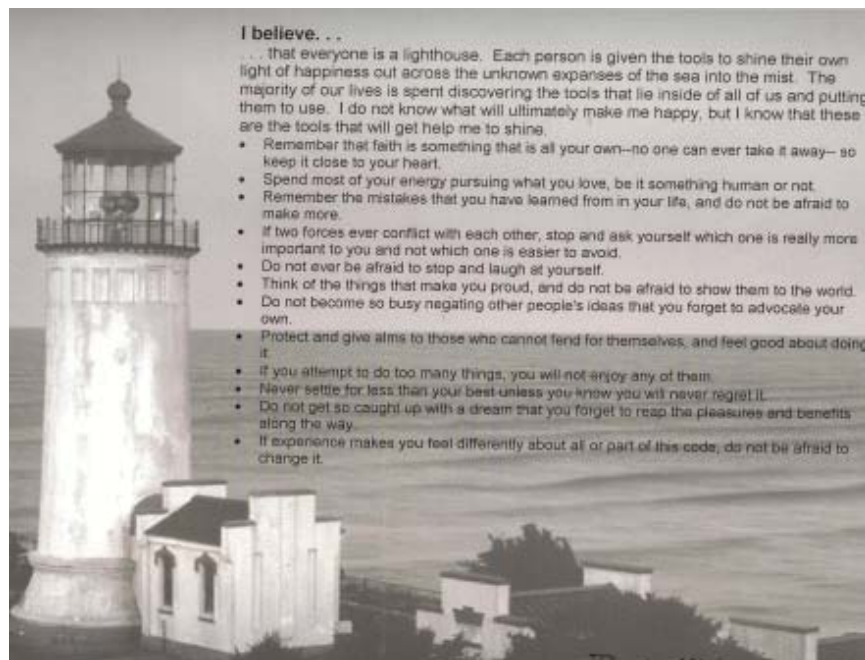


Figure 1. A smaller reproduction of *Arthur's Personal Code*

regardless of, and often in spite of, circumstance or situation” (Researcher’s Journal, 8.29.99). This is the *yardstick* that must be used to measure whether or not the teacher/researcher had been successful in answering the initial question, “Can virtue be taught in the senior English classroom?” Readers may determine their own level of empathetic understanding (Barone & Eisner, 1999, p. 77) of the story. [Note: Individual student’s selected pseudonyms are used in place of the identification codes which have been used throughout this document up to this point.]

Arthur's Test: Virtue Versus Tradition

At our high school we have had a long-standing tradition surrounding the graduation ceremony which has evolved into almost a *rite of passage*. So competitive was this activity, that seniors began collaborating very early in their final year in an attempt to *one up* the prior year’s graduating class. The tradition was generally fairly benign except that, to most of the faculty and many of the parents, it was an embarrassment to an otherwise reverent and respectful occasion, the senior graduation ceremony. To successfully participate in this tradition, seniors were *expected* to identify, as a class, an object within the context of their school environment and *steal it*. They would then conceal it somewhere under their robes and hand it to the principal as they received their congratulatory handshake at graduation. The peer

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pressure behind this little activity was incredible. Several attempts had been made by the administration to circumvent the activity. But, letters to parents, threats of holding diplomas, and promises of pat downs [that is, checking students for possible contraband by physically *patting* them up and down through their clothing] had all been less than successful and had, in fact, garnered mostly negative, reactive responses from students and parents. Because of this, as a faculty, we had all but given up ever circumventing this embarrassing tradition.

Arthur and Margaret Mead: Never Doubt the Power of a Small Group

It was approximately two weeks before graduation. Emily Mord, a normally articulate, and very opinionated, young woman entered my 5th hour AP class clearly disgusted. Emily, knowing that I was listening, said loud enough for everyone in the class to hear, “I don’t care, I’m not going to participate, and I don’t care who knows it. I really am ashamed that the best my class can be remembered for is that we could steal spoons from the school cafeteria.” Hamlette and Marie Annette, two other very articulate and outspoken young ladies voiced similar repugnancies. I quickly polled the class visually and it seemed that most present agreed with Emily. It was here that I decided to gently try inculcating.

“Emily, ladies, do you *have* to, or do you *choose* to?” I said, in my best proactive, reactive voice.

Emily responded non-enthusiastically to my attempt, “Okay, Mr. Knapp, so what do I do? Nobody in *my* class is going to listen to me, especially now” (in reference to the lateness in the year). The other two chimed in with similar statements. Others agreed, also.

I responded, “So, you’re all just a bunch of cows being led quietly away to the slaughter, huh? No choice? Nope, no choice at all. Instead of focusing on what you don’t want to do, why don’t you decide what you *do* want to do and try to proceed from there?” . . . I said emphatically, “what would you do if you could? That is what you should decide.”

Emily responded indecisively, “I wanted to leave something that we would always be remembered by, . . . a legacy, of some sort . . . like a statue maybe, or a scholarship.” “Hey, a scholarship is what I suggested a long time ago,” said Marie. “But, of course, nobody would listen to me, and now it’s too late. We could never raise enough money.” To this I didn’t say anything, I just walked quietly to the board and wrote—“ $2 \times 200 = \$400$.”

Sips, a normally vocal member of the class who had a keen understanding of finances asked, “Mr. Knapp, what’s up with that . . . what are you saying?”

“It’s simple math,” I replied. “If you really *wanted* to leave a scholarship, it would be a simple enough thing to do. Two dollars apiece, most of you will spend more than that on pop between now and tomorrow. If you really *wanted* to do it, you could do it.”

From this point, the actions of these students became incredibly animated.

Finally, after devoting the first 20 minutes of an already full class period to discussing and problem-solving, they determined to try to do it. The first hurdle they had collectively determined, was to sell it to Arthur and Brinker Bear. Arthur, because he was class president, and Brinker, because he was, along with Emily and Marie, one of the top three debaters in the school (and by the end of that summer, in the *nation*) and, consequently, was highly respected for his ability to *argue*.

In a short 20 minutes, the plan had evolved to this, they would shelve the stolen spoon idea and each student would be asked to donate at least two dollars toward a scholarship to be awarded the next year. As the idea evolved, it took on other attributes as it seemed to almost develop a life of its own: it became not just a scholarship, but an *academic* scholarship; it would not be a single shot-in-the-dark effort, but instead would be issued as a *challenge* for each succeeding year to *better*; it would not be just another nameless award, but would be called the *Class of 2000 Millennium Scholarship*, after the class of 2000; students wouldn't just give dollar bills, instead, each student would purchase and give to the principal, two Sacagawea gold coins, newly minted for 2000 and, hence, the final adjustment, the *2000 Golden Millennium Scholarship Class Challenge*.

Arthur in Action

Now a convert, Arthur began to organize the initiative. Plans were set in motion. In each case, students pursued their assignments with a passion and, in each case, success was accomplished. The final hurdle was a meeting with the building principal, which really proved to be no hurdle at all. He was only too glad to embrace any idea that would eliminate the possibility of the embarrassment of several years before. He determined to call a surprise class meeting in the auditorium 15 minutes before the end of school *that day*. He would make the announcement and no supervision, save the teacher/researcher, would be present. The selling would be left up to Arthur and his small group of classmates.

Arthur's Light Shines in the Shadows of the Auditorium

As the announcement was made, I stood in the very back of the auditorium in the darkness. Only the stage lights were on, the senior student body, about 175 students [a number were gone for various reasons like college classes and work release, etc.] had entered and were sitting semi-quietly in the darkness. Arthur, using a microphone, began to speak. Unbelievably, the students quieted themselves as he began to articulate the events of the past 24 short hours. As Arthur spelled out his group's ideas, I kept expecting someone to laugh out loud, to ridicule, to cajole. But it didn't happen. Then, I looked closely and understood why. Arthur stood center stage. To his left was Brinker, also standing. Beside him was Sips, both were popular, imposing speakers. Seated on the stage were Marie Annette, Hamlette, and the originator of the idea, Emily Mord. Along with them were several other hand-

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selected, and quite out-spoken supporters. Anhellica, uni, -G-, Liz, Nōbotka, JesusFreak, ünima, and Running Wind were among their number. Any one of them could just as easily have been in Arthur's place and done it at least as well. These were all the power-players from my AP classes, the ones who had studied virtue for a year. But more than that, they were students who had truly endeavored to practice the virtuous ideas that we had talked so much about. I wondered who, in their class, would dare to challenge them as a group? I could think of no one.

As the strategic brilliance of this meeting occurred to me, so too I remember being struck by Arthur's own image as he stood there seemingly alone at center stage, illuminating his rapt audience with his now-well-thought-out enlightenment, an oracle that would require them to change doing things *the way they had always been done*, literally to change a *tradition* that had been going on for decades. I wrote his words as quickly as I could. He said, "I know it's not a popular idea [speaking about the scholarship], we all have our spoons, already. And they didn't cost us a thing." Even as he said this, Arthur reached into his own pocket and removed two spoons. There was much cheering and lots of laughter. Students all over the auditorium held up their own spoons in approval. Then, in a very quiet, almost sad voice, Arthur continued, "But it's the right idea . . . and it's the right thing to do." He paused and peered out across his class. He looked for a moment, much older than his 17 years as he waited until all were absolutely quiet. He continued, "We *are* the class of 2000 and we stand at a crossroads. We can go out like every other class has, with the presentation of stolen property, . . . or we can set ourselves *apart*. We can be *different*. We can be *remembered* as a class that, *instead of stealing something*, actually *gave something*. We can leave a *legacy*."

Here he paused again and looked very slowly around, making eye contact with each of those who shared the stage with him. "I speak for those of us up here." The imagery of this scene was overwhelming. Arthur and the students with him on stage were the only students standing in the light. All the other students were hidden in the darkness. I remember wondering if that had been a planned symbolic gesture on Arthur's part. He continued, "With or without you, we *are* going to make this happen. And we won't participate in something as lame as giving stolen spoons." I recall being amazed at the silence that followed. No one shouted out. No one challenged his blatant breach of tradition. In fact, no one spoke at all. It seemed for several seconds as though every student in the auditorium had held his/her breath. And I was dumbfounded as Arthur stood there, center stage, and I was reminded of the imagery of his *Lighthouse* essay and the emphatic commands to himself in his *personal code*. By his own oracle, he was representing the "lights of all those who had given him light" and, at this moment, he literally looked as though he was the only "source of light" in the auditorium and I was struck by the similarities between Arthur and his analogous "tall, slender *lighthouse*," and how he now stood "surrounded, yet alone."

So powerful was the symbolic imagery of this moment of silence, that I think

the sound of Arthur's voice shocked most of us back to reality. "Well, if there is no discussion, what do you think? Can we do this?" I must admit, the response that followed overwhelmed me. The reaction to Arthur's call was loud and unanimous, and there was not one student who spoke in dissent. In fact, the idea garnered such overwhelming support that I think even Arthur and his contemporaries were surprised (and, I know, relieved). Most who had stolen spoons placed them, *unbent*, on the stage, an idea of Arthur's. He had told the crowd that he had an idea of how to use them, collectively, to put an end to the old tradition by drawing attention to just how immature and ridiculous it really was. And, in its place, they, the class of 2000, would begin a new tradition and leave a positive challenge for each successive class—and, more than that, they would leave a legacy—the *2000 Golden Millennium Scholarship Challenge*.

Arthur and the Class of 2000's Legacy

Four days later, in his concluding comments to the administrators, faculty, parents, and community at our 2000 high school graduation, Arthur related the following in his welcoming speech to the attendees and his class.

So, how do you address the most hyped graduating class of the last 2000 years? After all, we're the first class of the new millennium, or the last class of the old millennium, no one's really figured out which yet, but either way, it's incredibly important. We've had to live under the shadow of this hype. I mean, how do you live up to a reputation as the class who survived the frightful Y2K bug, which turned out to be not-so-frightful? The media has been tracking us for years with the *Class of 2000* specials on local nightly news. I can remember experiencing the hype clear back in 6th grade when we were sold t-shirts with *Class of 2000* printed on them. Society has led us to believe that the future of the world depends on us, depends solely on the class of 2000. The scary part is, they're right.

One way that we're trying to live up to the hype is something you'll see here today. You see, there's a bit of a tradition here at _____ High School. As students walk across the stage, each year they hand some object to Dr. _____. Usually, it's stolen property from the school. [It was here that Arthur reached under the podium and placed a large *bouquet* of spoons and forks on the podium, as visual evidence of their absurdity. There was much laughter and applause.] We were all set to follow suit with forks and spoons from the cafeteria, and we may still have some of that property, when we had an idea of how to live up to our hype. Instead of stolen items, we will be giving Dr. _____ gold Sacagawea dollars (appropriate because they came in this, the year 2000, the year we graduate). These dollars will then go into a scholarship fund to be named after the Class of 2000 and to be given to a graduating senior at _____ High School next year. At last count we had \$540.00. How's that for a legacy from the class of "zero"? Margaret Meade once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The class of 2000 is living proof of this fact. Juniors—the class of '01—sophomores, and freshman, you now have a challenge laid before you. You can't let this scholarship die. Can you do better

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than us? Can you raise more than we did? Will you raise more than we did? Or, will you steal something and let *that* stand as *your* legacy?

We now know a little bit about how very special this class is, but the truth is that no one really knows who or how much more we can achieve yet. No one knows how many more gold dollars we will drop into the betterment of the world. . . . I will conclude by defending the so called “class of nothing” with this promise: You’ll see a lot of people walk across this stage this morning, but, although we are the class of two, zero, zero, zero, I assure you, none of *them* will be zeros.

Summary

It would be tempting to look at the composite of this student and wonder if Arthur was just an anomaly, an unusual combination of student, environment, and circumstance. But, as the research team reviewed the work of the 19 students/participants, all agreed that vignettes of their moral development would be just as compelling, with the only exception occurring in the singular inclusion of the graduation speech. Virtue can be taught in the senior English classroom. Perhaps, as importantly, the research team believes that arts-based narrative inquiry in education allows the reader to see what is not reducible to the literal (Eisner, 1998, p. 9)—allowing the reader to resonate with the words of Arthur Unknown.

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