

THE CIVIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

Winning Words

Winning Words instructors, students from the University of Chicago, work with younger students in elementary, middle and high schools on Chicago's South Side to cover a curriculum that features an introduction to philosophy and Socratic dialogue, while also working on reading, writing, public speaking, drama, poetry and art. The curriculum uses the Socratic method to engage students in philosophical conversation and to encourage critical thinking and collaborative inquiry, reasoning and expression. Such modes of thought and communication foster the sense of wonder that is at the root of serious introspection, intellectual growth, and ethical reflection.

A Message From the Director

Dear Friends of Philosophy—

The great French philosophical essayist Michel de Montaigne asked a very good question: “Since philosophy is the art which teaches us how to live, and since children need to learn it as much as we do at other ages, why do we not instruct them in it?” It is a question that we still need to ask today, when far too many young people have far too few opportunities to learn the joys of philosophy—the joys of the examined life that philosophers since Socrates have embraced. One of the centerpieces of the humanities, and an art that can open new horizons of understanding of the arts themselves, philosophy is a necessity that is all too often dismissed as a luxury. Why?

Those of us who have experienced the wonders of pre-collegiate philosophy are often, like Socrates, baffled by the weak responses to our questions, when we ask why education, especially in the U.S., is so wanting in this area. Beyond the manifest ways in which pre-collegiate philosophizing is valuable in itself—surely the chief argument in its favor—it is also a marvelous way to foster critical thinking, imagination, literacy, perseverance, concentration, civility, and the ability to converse with others in mature and meaningful ways. And it is cost effective, not beyond the reach of any school system in the U.S. Wise and ethical citizens, willing to discuss and deliberate with others, are vital to a healthy democracy. If philosophy can help foster such citizens, why do we not do more to foster philosophy?

The University of Chicago Civic Knowledge Project has tried to do just that. Through its Winning Words philosophy program, it has tried to do more to foster philosophy, especially in the neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago. We think that our program has added some new and important testimony to the wealth of testimony to the virtues of pre-collegiate philosophy, and the material contained in this journal should illustrate just how this is so. In what follows, you will be treated to some of the thoughts of both the young Winning Words students and their coaches, students at the University of Chicago. Together, the students and their coaches have been doing philosophy, engaging in active creative thinking about important matters and following the conversation wherever it leads. This experience of live philosophy has been exhilarating for all concerned. Such open-ended philosophical conversation, such creative inquiry, is not always easy, but it is always worthwhile.

Of course, just as there are many ways to do philosophy in general, there are many ways to do pre-collegiate philosophy. Pre-collegiate philosophy might take the form of an afterschool program, a special course as part of the regular curriculum, or an aspect of the regular curriculum as a whole. And it may simply be a big part of a young person’s life, beyond or outside of any formal institutional structure. In all of these ways, philosophizing can play a crucial educational role, and we hope that with our larger Winning Words Initiative: A Midwest Resource Network for Pre-collegiate Philosophy, we will be able to do more to advance pre-collegiate philosophy on all fronts.

We sincerely hope that you will join us in this effort—nothing quite compares to the pursuit of the truth about what truly matters and how to live.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bart Schultz".

Dr. Bart Schultz
Director, Civic Knowledge Project and
Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Chicago
Board Member of the Philosophy Learning and
Teaching Organization (PLATO)

A Right to the Examined Life

Jon Catlin

'The unexamined life is not worth living,' Plato says in line 38a of the Apology. How do you examine yourself? What happens when you interrogate yourself? What happens when you begin to call into question your tacit assumptions and unarticulated presuppositions and begin, then, to become a different kind of person? ... It takes tremendous discipline, takes tremendous courage to think for yourself, to examine yourself. The Socratic imperative of examining yourself requires courage. William Butler Yeats used to say, 'It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on the battlefield.'

– Cornel West in Astra Taylor's 2008 film *Examined Life: Philosophy in the Streets*

“What did he just say?” a student interrupts, leaning in closer to my MacBook. “He talks too fast! Play it again,” another says. “What the heck is he doing in a car? I don’t get it,” says another. We’re sitting on the carpeted floor of a classroom in the University of Chicago’s Cobb Hall on a Saturday afternoon.

The lights are off and we’re enjoying some snacks. I look at the eight students huddled around me, somewhat disappointed by their reaction to the film clip that was to frame our lesson for the day. “Sorry if it’s rushed, guys,” I answer, doubting my choice to change things up with a film. “Just slow down and think about what he’s saying.”

I replay the clip once before turning the lights back on and getting into my lesson on—of all impossible questions—the meaning of life.

So began the May 5, 2012 session of *Winning Words* for the students of the College Prep

Program at the University of Chicago, an intensive program held each Saturday for most of the year that aims to prepare underserved Chicago Public Schools students for college. After nearly a whole year working with this group, I’ve moved them on to bigger and bigger questions.

“My hope is that this weekly dose of philosophy might just be enough”

“Do you agree with Dr. West that ‘It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on the battlefield?’” I ask. In just two days, Cornel West,

an acclaimed public philosopher and leftist political theorist, is to speak at U of C at a talk several of the students will attend. The class is split on the question and many hands are up in the air. “I don’t think we know what the dark corners of our souls are, and we can’t ever know. So yeah, that’s terrifying,” one student says. “But it’s just thinking! How could that be called ‘courage?’” another blurts out. On we go, trying to distil and question the fundamental claims of each argument.

My hope is that this weekly dose of philosophy might just be enough to return students to asking those naive “big questions” that parents so often discourage their kids from asking. But as admirable as the Winning Words program’s educational ends are, they’re notoriously challenging to teach and to gauge (hence their absence from most public school curricula). The constructive discourse thinkers like Cornel West advocate is glaringly absent from the education of most young people, and urban students in particular. Still, that discourse must be cultivated.

Winning Words’s turn on the Socratic imperative is that all human beings have not the obligation Socrates suggested, but a right, to live an examined life, and that today the obligation has shifted to society to provide each individual the tools to do so.

Back in class, we move on to reading passages from Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*. “What does it mean that Sisyphus is ‘superior to his fate?’” I ask.

“What makes his story absurd and not merely tragic? Why must we ‘Imagine Sisyphus happy?’” I get muddled responses—we need to reread the key passages.

Slowly, students warm up to the idea of absurd happiness, and one makes a connection to religion, “This guy [Sisyphus] is his own Jesus Christ! I mean, he’s suffering for his own kind of freedom and happiness, right?” Another student objects, “absurdism

“The constructive discourse thinkers like Cornel West advocate is glaringly absent from the education of most young people”

sounds just as irrational as the religion Camus condemns.” “So can Sisyphus decide the meaning of his own life by himself?” I ask. “Is that allowed?” The students are puzzled. “Could that mean his life is irrational? Is that a problem if it makes him happy?”

I urge them on. Hands are back in the air. “People should be able to do whatever they want if it makes them happy. I’m with Sisyphus,” one student says. “But then nothing has permanent meaning,” another responds.

“How could people live and work together in a world like that? There has to be some kind of stable, universal meaning to life. There just has to be, but I can’t say what it is.”

I conclude our session by asking students to state and defend their answer to the meaning of life. “YOLO!” I hear from a boy in the back. The acronym, short for “you only live once” has become the 21st century’s *carpe diem*. After a few laughs, I help the student rephrase his answer in philosophical terms: “Okay, so you think it’s fine to defy convention and live the life you want, without listening to authority. You should read Nietzsche!” Around the room, I hear mostly answers like “to make a difference” and “to have a family and to love the people around you,” which though cliché are probably onto something.

Our one-hour time slot is up and the students begin to pack up. “Jon, what’s your answer?” one girl asks. I’m totally unprepared. “Umm...” I glance at the jumble of diagrams and philosophical terms on the chalkboard from the day’s lesson. After a brief pause, I tell her, “It’s cliché, I know, and I’m far from being able to defend this, but it’s to dedicate my life to knowledge and share that knowledge with whomever I can... Basically, to live the examined life.” She shakes her head and smiles before she leaves. “I knew you’d say that.”

“Why Am I Here?”

Matthew Walsh

The most important question that I’ve been asked by a student—and am invariably asked by every student—is “Why am I here?” Not existentially, though such a question is well within the bounds of philosophical inquiry, but practically. “Why am I here, when I could be elsewhere?” Elsewhere is different at different schools: structured outdoor time, basketball practice, drama rehearsal, cheer-leading. But every elsewhere shares one quality: it appears, at one time or another, more attractive to my students than Winning Words. “So,” says the student, “why am I here?”

Eventually, most students find an answer to that question. Their answers vary, and no one answer is correct or incorrect. Some of my students appreciate Winning Words for the freedom of speech allowed in the classroom. Other students enjoy the topics of conversation—Justice, Happiness, Truth, and other Capital Letter Subjects. Still other students value the practical skills that they gain, such as confidence in public speaking, reading, and debate. The specific answer is not important, but it is important that every student finds an answer.

The corollary to that question, of course, is the one that I ask myself: Why am I here? Incidentally, I have a much easier time finding an answer to that question than my students do. If that implies anything, it’s that what they’re offering me is more valuable (certainly more apparent) than what I’m offering them. I’m willing to accept that.

As for my answer, I’m with Winning Words for inspiration. To see the vast potential of each young mind realized, as weeks of philosophical and personal

inquiry make way for enlightenment. To hear the nervous stutter of a student disappear when he becomes aware that the class is more interested in what he has to say than how he says it. To feel the care that students have for one another, the sense of solidarity between them, and to appreciate when that camaraderie is extended to me. I’m inspired by my students, and that’s a sentiment that I can carry out of the classroom. It changes me.

Ultimately, Winning Words is as transformative for its Coaches as it is for its students. Students are introduced to abstract ideas, and Coaches are introduced to the realities of life on the South Side of Chicago. Students learn constructive discourse, and Coaches learn how infrequently that discourse occurs in some classrooms.

Students gain an appreciation for their new mentors, and Coaches gain an appreciation for their young thinkers. Winning Words is often framed as an opportunity for students at local public schools to benefit from the tutelage of students at a prominent university, but the opposite is just as true.



Winning Words students from Carnegie Elementary School participating in the American Philosophical Association's annual meeting of the Midwest Division.



Winning Words students with Coordinator Shayan Karbassi and Carnegie Elementary School Vice Principal Juanita Stem.

In Their Words

Winning Words students respond to the views that Glaucon describes as needing a Socratic refutation

"I agree with Glaucon about "what human nature naturally pursues" is "good." I believe this because in my opinion humans always try to work toward their own self reward, whether consciously or not. In my opinion, justice works for the greater good. The greater good of the world unlike the good that human nature works toward."

RYAN COLLINS, 7th Grade

"I disagree with Glaucon because I don't think that humans naturally pursue good. I think that humans pursue good for themselves at the cost of others. For example, if a person steals from another person, they're doing good for themselves but are doing bad for another person."

KAIYA PERSON, 7th Grade

Additional student responses can be found on page 9

"What is Justice?"

Winning Words students explore the definition of justice.

Justice is a right. Justice matters because in most situations people expect it. Especially in law if someone violated your rights you would put your faith in the justice system and hope things play out the way they should. Justice matters to me because of the amount of crime. Justice should be close to equal.

TYLER DICKENS, 7th Grade

"Justice is a system for keeping the world in check and organizing people so that culture and science advance to at least one person's benefit. True chaos is where no one benefits and no one can do anything. Chances are against the survival of humans in a state of true chaos."

ASA MCNAUGHTON, 7th Grade

"Justice is how you determine what is right and wrong. Justice matters because without it when a crime is committed there would be no way to justify a punishment for what was done. Without justice in the world there would be no ownership of anything."

JEREMY BROWN, 7th Grade

Winning Words coaches engage students through creative and thought-provoking discussion.



Learning from Students

Mary Ella Simmons



Instructor, Mary Ella Simmons, with some of her Winning Words students at the annual Winning Words performance and reception.

Some three years after arriving on campus as a University of Chicago undergraduate, many details of those initial weeks of college have blended together.

I don't remember which days I met which friends, how I felt about my first lectures and professors, or many of the nuances of *The Wealth of Nations* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. What I can still recall, though, is my surprise at and fascination with all of the discussion during those first weeks of the goals of this education. Why were we here at the University of Chicago? Outside of future careers as academics, why should studying Ovid and Adam Smith matter? What was the purpose of the

liberal arts education we were to receive?

I took these initial discussions about the reasons for a humanities-driven liberal arts education quite seriously, so perhaps my subsequent involvement with Winning Words is not surprising.

It was not my primary reason for volunteering at the time though—what was I really going to get out of discussing Socrates with elementary school students twice a week, aside from some funny stories, a sense of civic involvement, and a nice bullet point on my brand-new resume?

Many funny stories and resume drafts later, I see my experience as a Winning Words coach as an integral, if unexpected, facet of my liberal arts education. To teach a concept to someone else

you must first master it for yourself, and while I make no claims of truly mastering any of the philosophers I have discussed with my students, I know that my preparations each week and my discussions with them have enhanced my understanding of these thinkers.

Taking Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* and figuring out how you can get fourth and fifth graders—some of whom are poor readers—to engage with it necessitates a deeper involvement with the text than simply reading it or listening to a professor's lecture would require. This process is not about dumbing down these works, but rather understanding for yourself the underlying arguments being made, and figuring out how to highlight them for this much younger audience,



while maintaining the beauty in the way the argument has been made.

I close with one of my most powerful Winning Words memories, from my experience last year coaching a lively group of fourth- and fifth-grade girls at John Fiske Elementary School three blocks south of campus. We were preparing a play about the life of Socrates, and had begun to talk about his trial and death.

They were curious about what crime he had committed, and we starting talking about what it might mean to “corrupt youth.” Education was not the first explanation that came to their minds, but when I asked them why people in charge might not want the young people in their city to be highly educated, they were quick with their answers.

“Because you’re not always going to listen to them if you can think for yourself,” they said, “Because you won’t follow stupid or bad directions if you’re smart. You’ll have more power.” These girls were not the typical participants in a discussion of the aims of education, and the level of discourse was far lower than in any of the discussions I heard in my first weeks on campus. Yet for me, the purpose of a liberal arts education, for engagement with the humanities, for learning how to think, was never clearer than in the explanations given to me by these Southside elementary school philosophers.

My University of Chicago education, and my understanding of its purpose, would not have been complete without my experience as a Winning Words coach.



Winning Words students participating at the annual Winning Words reception in Ida Noyes Hall at the University of Chicago.

In Their Words

Continued from page 9

“I do not agree with Glaucon at all. Although it may personally benefit that person, it doesn’t make it good. What may benefit one person may cause pain and misery to another. What is good would be what is good for everyone.”

-Sydnie Dillon, 7th Grade

“I agree with Glaucon because I believe that human nature makes humans seek what they feel is good. Robbing a bank is evil but the criminal feels it is good and it is good for him. The same would apply for one who is just. If there was a guy who is about to shoot someone and the just person keeps him from it. Both thought what they were doing was good. As you can see it works on both sides. This is why I agree with Glaucon.”

-Julian Chrobak-Prince, 7th Grade

“What may benefit one person may cause pain and misery to another. What is good would be what is good for everyone.”

-Sydnie Dillon, 7th Grade

“I do agree with Glaucon when he states that human nature inherently pursues good as a personal good. If a just person put on the Ring of Gyges even though they may not do unjust things to other people they would find a way to personally benefit from being invisible when they put the ring on. I think that it is just human nature to personally benefit from a situation one would benefit from. Because this is human nature one should not be called unjust from trying to benefit from being invisible as long as they are not doing unjust things to other people or anything that will harm society as a whole.”

-Jelani Nicol, 7th Grade



Spread the Word

Share your experiences with with Winning Words at facebook.com/ckpww



Start a Program

Learn more about starting a Winning Words program in your area at winningwords.uchicago.edu

Sample Lesson Plan

The Winning Words Core Curriculum was assembled under the editorial direction of Bart Schultz, Director of the Civic Knowledge Project, and is a composite production reflecting the collaboration of many dedicated Winning Words coaches, whose experience with the program led to the ideas and methods presented here. The lesson plans are divided into three segments, Grey, Black, and Green, which provide for discussions related to such figures as Socrates, John Dewey, Martin Luther King, Jr., Timuel D. Black, Henry David Thoreau, and Wangari Maathai. These discussions range across many topics, including the right and the good, human rights, civil liberties, non-violence, and political and environmental justice.

Grey Curriculum, Lesson Plan 1: Introduction to Winning Words & Wisdom

GOALS

- Students will become familiar with their teacher and the basic format of the class.
- Discuss and share current understandings of the terms “philosophy” and “wisdom.”
- Become acquainted with one sort of question with which philosophy concerns itself, and carefully consider a few such questions together.

COACH PREPARATION

Coaches should have reviewed the Winning Words Core Curriculum, both the lesson plans and the introductory statements (with the primer on the elenctic Socratic method and dialectic, noting how these differ from rhetoric, eristic, and sophism). Ideally, the coaches will also have already spent some time reading one of the classic introductions to philosophy (for example, Bertrand Russell’s *The Problems of Philosophy* or Thomas Nagel’s *What Does It All Mean?*) or a major work in philosophy (for example, Bernard Williams’ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*). Copies of these works are available at the CKP office. The more time spent perusing the works contained in the coach planner, the better. Winning

Words coaches are also expected to participate in some of the professional development opportunities offered through the Winning Words Initiative—for example, Steve Goldberg’s Teachers’ Workshops—and to participate in the regular coach meetings.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is philosophy? What is wisdom? What is the Winning Words program?

Coaches are expected to participate in professional development

The meanings of ‘wisdom’; student/teacher introductions.

Seat students around a large table if possible. If the classroom contains many desks and chairs facing the front of the room, have students arrange chairs into a large circle for discussion. Introduce yourself, and inform the students that you are yourself a student (at the

University of Chicago) who studies and discusses something called “philosophy,” and that philosophy means, literally, “the love of wisdom.” Students may have heard these words before, but they will probably not be able to produce concrete definitions of them. Inform the students that, in order to see what they know, and to become acquainted with them personally, you would like to discuss the matter of ‘wisdom’ with them. Be certain to inform students that this activity requires that all be willing

and do not supplant even wacky student definitions with a dictionary definition, or your own definition. A further point: do not hesitate to steer students away from tedious hypotheticals. Remind them that they are discussing ideas and word definitions—not specific real-life situations, which will be discussed in due course.

AGREE/DISAGREE

a third sign in the center, “not sure.” Tell students that they should run to the sign expressing the opinion of a wise person in response to each of the statements that you put to them.

- This school’s principal is named [insert name of principal].
- This school is in Toronto.
- Chicago is a city in Illinois.
- The floor of this room is [insert color of floor].

What is wisdom?

to listen carefully to one another without disruption, and that, before saying anything, each student must first carefully think about what he or she wishes to say, and raise his or her hand.[1]

Choose a student to begin, and proceed through all of the students, inquiring as to name, grade in school, and opinion regarding the question “what is wisdom?” Invite each student, after sharing his or her opinion, to write it on the board next to his or her name.

DISCUSSION

After sharing, begin a seminar-style discussion[2]. Point out which definitions agree with one another, and which conflict. Ask students with conservative definitions to elaborate, and attempt to cull clarification from students with vague ideas. Avoid constructing a consensus,

The goal is to see how students respond to questions that do not have easy answers

The goal of this exercise is to see how students respond to questions that do not have easy answers, and to demonstrate why philosophers concern themselves with such questions.

Inform students that discussing what wisdom can be very difficult, and that such difficulty is experienced often by philosophers—people who think about it all the time. Now that the question “what is wisdom?” has been asked, the class will see how its definitions of wisdom work in practice. Place two signs at opposite ends of the room, one reading “agree,” the other reading “disagree.” Place

Are the answers to such questions easy or difficult to find? If somebody didn’t know whether these were true or false, how would they go about

Promoting learning through discussion

looking for that information—that is to say, what method of inquiry would they use? Continue with the statements, moving further from easily ascertainable claims and toward difficult ethical questions. Have students explain their positions.

Willingness to share is essential

(Continued on page 11)

Sample Lesson Plan

Continued from page 11

- It is the greatest good to a man...to converse and to test himself and others.
- A person who is wise will admit that his wisdom is in fact nothing.
- The noblest way is not to crush others but to improve yourself.
- The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.

Hopefully some students will have placed themselves in the “not sure” area. Encourage some discussion about this, and draw out their explanations for “not knowing” the answer. Explain that these statements were all made by Socrates, one of the founders of Western philosophy, who will be studied in classes to come. Is it bad to “not know,” or is it good? If we do not know the answer, do we have to find one, or should we be content not knowing?

NOT KNOWING

Distribute paper to students and ask them to choose a statement to which their response was “not sure,” or make up a statement or question to which “not sure” is the wisest response. What, according to their view of wisdom, makes this the wisest response, and why do they think this? Ask them to take their time and

carefully explain why this is their opinion. Remind them that their spelling, writing quality, or eloquence is not of concern—that you are only trying to understand what they think about the question of wisdom, and that willingness to share is essential for the class to be successful.

CLOSING

Collect sheets and offer students thanks for attending the session of Winning Words. Ask for a show of hands to see how many students may wish to return. **Hand out permission slip forms to students who are considering returning. Inform students that with the next class, they will be starting notebooks and learning more about philosophy.

[1] In the case of elementary and middle school students, WW coaches have found hand-raising to be absolutely necessary in order to prevent repressive discourteousness. As time goes on this may become unneeded, and one may encounter a class small enough to not require it from the start.

[2] By this it is meant a seminar-style class discussion with the teacher as aggressive moderator. Do not hesitate to politely jump in and welcome the student to the class before raising a question or reservation about part of his or her definition. Invite students to address each other, etc., but do not permit tangential chatter to overtake the initial question. If this seems pesky to say, it is only because such distractions can be a problem in classes of this type. The goal is discussion-based classes for young people made possible by insistent and thoughtful guidance from a teacher.



Sample Lesson Plan #2

Black Curriculum, Lesson Plan 1: Introduction to Winning Words Black

Time: 1 hour

GOALS

To review and deepen understandings of the terms “philosophy,” “human rights,” “the civil rights movement,” “civil disobedience” and “non-violence.” To continue the discussion of the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and show how MLK was linked to and admired both Socrates and Gandhi.

COACH PREPARATION

Coaches should read and review MLK’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and the sections on Gandhian non-violence in *Stride Toward Freedom: the Montgomery Story*. Copies of these works are available at the CKP office. They should also read MLK’s “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi.” Again, the more time spent perusing the works/resources given in the coach planner for the “Black curriculum,” the better. For some relevant general background and a wealth of online resources, check out the Stanford website, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle.” Coaches should also review relevant lesson plans from the Grey curriculum concerning the trial and death of Socrates.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Students are engaged in collaborative inquiry

What are human rights? What was the U.S. civil rights movement? Why was the practice of non-violence important to the U.S. civil rights movement in, for example, the Montgomery bus boycott and the actions in Birmingham? What did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

like about Gandhi? What did their form of non-violent civil disobedience seek to achieve?

Activity 1: MLK and Socrates (15-20 minutes)

Review the discussion from the previous session, asking the students if they have thought more about the meaning of human rights, civil disobedience, and non-violence. Remind them that they are engaged in a collaborative inquiry, seeking to make progress in considering difficult philosophical questions. Give them their journals and explain that you want them to write down their thoughts and various points made in class. Invite comments on the handout on MLK and Socrates. If necessary, review the life and death of Socrates, explaining the background to MLK’s remarks.

DISCUSSION

Ask the students what they make of the line: “To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.” Ask them how they would compare Socrates and MLK—on what did they agree, and on what did they disagree? Invite students to take turns reading the relevant passages from

What are human rights?

“A Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

Activity 2: MLK and Gandhi (25 minutes)

Rehearse the profile and chronology of Gandhi, reminding the students how MLK followed Gandhi and Black followed MLK, and how the U.S. civil rights movement was committed to non-violence. Again, if possible review the following website/statement with them: <http://www.thekingcenter.org/about-dr-king> and the following account of Gandhian non-violence, which stresses a number of the key points: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/against/nonviolence.shtml> Non-violence does not, you should stress, mean passivity or cowardice. Explain some of Gandhi’s non-violent actions for purposes of comparison (see, for material, MLK’s “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” available at *(Continued on page 14)*)

Winning Words In the Press

Winning Words was featured in the 2013 edition of *The Core*, a University of Chicago publication.

Excerpt from “School of Thought” David L. Hoyt

At 3:15 on an October afternoon, Sage Gerson, '13, pushes desks together. Vanessa Corbin's fifth-grade classroom at Beulah Shoemsmith Elementary—home of the yellow-shirted Beulah Bees and site of Barack Obama's 2008 polling place—now looks more like a seminar room.

Nestled to one side of leafy Kenwood Community Park, the school is

surrounded by Victorian row houses and mansions—although most of the affluent families nearby do not send their children there. The student population at Shoemsmith is 85 percent low income, 95 percent African American. On the wall of room 200, a large red construction-paper poster reminds students: “NO EXCUSES.”

Twice a week for the past four years, Gerson has taught an after-school philosophy program, Winning Words, in Corbin's classroom. Corbin, who has 25 years of teaching experience, lingers in the background and helps control the chaos if necessary. It usually isn't.

The small group of fifth graders that joins Gerson in room 200—five girls and one boy—are visibly eager. Gerson, an English major and environmental-studies minor,

Sample Lesson Plan #2

Continued from page 11

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol5/July1959_MyTriptotheLandofGandhi.pdf.

DISCUSSION

Remind the students about the difference between human rights and legal rights. Ask them again if they think that MLK and Gandhi were right to break the law. Press them on why or why not they believe this. Ask them to explain under what circumstances civil disobedience would be right or wrong. Follow up by asking them why people should or should not practice non-violence.

Ask them if non-violence makes a difference to the rightness or wrongness of civil disobedience. Ask them if there is any way to settle the question of whether non-violent civil disobedience is right or

wrong. Press them on why Gandhi and MLK believed that it was right under certain circumstances. Did their religious views make a difference to their philosophies of non-violence? Ask them if the U.S. is right to honor MLK with a national holiday, and what that means.

Words for the Day:

Non-violence, civil disobedience, Socrates, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

CLOSING

Collect permission slips and make sure that each student has a journal. Offer students thanks for attending the session of Winning Words. Ask for some quick takes on the most interesting question of the day—what did the students find most intriguing? Which questions do they want to pursue?

Ask them to write down their thoughts in their journals so that they can share them at the next session.

offers a recap on Socrates and his method: “Because we’ve lived our lives and have had experiences, we have opinions. The Socratic method helps you get closer to an answer that is true, the ultimate truth. You don’t go into these things knowing the right answer.”

The students remember Socrates from the previous



session. They have more trouble recalling the meaning of the word philosophy, though young Stormi (who describes herself as someone who “already gets good grades”) knows that dinosaur springs from the same language as the love of wisdom.

Gerson asks her students to pick a word, stand up, and define it. Michael chooses leader, which he defines as someone who takes school seriously, as opposed to being a follower and hanging out on the street. He concludes with an exhortation that sounds like something he’s been told many times: “Get off the street! Be a leader!”

Already the students have learned not to accept such statements without questioning. “I hear you, but I still don’t understand what you’re saying,” Jori says. Stormi points out that going to school involves a lot of following: “Are you still considered a leader or a follower?”

Later it’s Gerson’s turn. She picks loyalty, defining it as “caring about someone, standing up for them, and being committed to their general well-being.” The discussion revolves around interpersonal relations before turning to political loyalty—the example of Socrates is unspoken, but never far off—and then veers abruptly into uncomfortable territory.

Gerson: Do you guys think that if you’re not loyal to your country you should be punished?

Jahari: Yes.

Gerson: Why?

Jahari: I don’t know that answer yet.

Sydney: I don’t think you should be punished for it because that was what Martin Luther King fixed for us, and being punished is being all messed up again.

Gerson: Sydney has a great point. People who disagree with their country—do you think they’re being loyal by disagreeing, or are they being disloyal?

Stormi: I think it’s kind of in between.

Sydney: Yesterday I went to my grandma’s house, and it was this group of kids just fighting. It didn’t really make sense to me because they were the same race, and they were all from the same neighborhood. Do you think that people turning on people that you know is being disloyal?

Gerson: I definitely think that’s disloyal. I think a good



example is civil rights. Think about if African American citizens during the ’60s had decided to fight each other, they wouldn’t have gotten anything done. The reason they accomplished so much was that they were unified. The issues of loyalty and punishment elicit stories of violence observed by several of the students. Michael follows with a similar but unrelated anecdote:...

Read On:

The story continues at:

<http://thecore.uchicago.edu/>

[Winter2013/features/school-of-thought.shtml](http://thecore.uchicago.edu/Winter2013/features/school-of-thought.shtml)

Sample Lesson Plan #3

Green Curriculum, Lesson Plan 2: Attitudes

Time: 1 hour

GOALS

Review and share understandings of the idea of “environmental philosophy.”

Become acquainted with one sort of question with which environmental philosophy concerns itself, and carefully consider a few such questions together.

Introduce and discuss the “Promethean” attitude as a possible problem for environmental ethics.

COACH PREPARATION

Coaches should already be very familiar with the Winning Words Core Curriculum, and they should review the lesson plans having to do with Prometheus, including the play Prometheus by Aeschylus, available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aeschylus/prometheus.html>. They should also study the legend of Orpheus and read Part. IV and the first part of Part V. of Hadot’s *The Veil of Isis*, on the “Promethean Attitude” and its historical influence. Coaches should devise questions or examples to bring out the difference between the “Promethean Attitude,” the “Orphic Attitude,” and the “Socratic Attitude.”

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is the “Promethean Attitude”? What is the “Orphic Attitude”? How would Socrates consider such attitudes? Is there a “Socratic Attitude”?

ACTIVITY 1: MEANINGS OF “PROMETHEAN” AND “ORPHIC”

Remind the students that you are yourself a student (at the University of Chicago) who studies and discusses something called “philosophy,” that philosophy means, literally, “the love of wisdom,” and that one can philoso-

phize about many different things, including the natural world. If the students have already worked through the Grey curriculum, ask them to recall the story of Prometheus. In any event, remind the students of the story (and of the general background of ancient Greek myth and tragedy), giving them a quick sketch and then inviting them to take turns reading some parts from Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, including the following:

PROMETHEUS

Think not that I for pride and stubbornness
Am silent: rather is my heart the prey
Of gnawing thoughts, both for the past, and now
Seeing myself by vengeance buffeted.
For to these younger Gods their precedence
Who severally determined if not I?
No more of that: I should but weary you
With things ye know; but listen to the tale
Of human sufferings, and how at first
Senseless as beasts I gave men sense, possessed
them
Of mind. I speak not in contempt of man;
I do but tell of good gifts I conferred.
In the beginning, seeing they saw amiss,
And hearing heard not, but, like phantoms huddled
In dreams, the perplexed story of their days
Confounded; knowing neither timber-work
Nor brick-built dwellings basking in the light,
But dug for themselves holes, wherein like ants,
That hardly may contend against a breath,
They dwelt in burrows of their unsunned caves.
Neither of winter’s cold had they fixed sign,
Nor of the spring when she comes decked with
flowers,
Nor yet of summer’s heat with melting fruits
Sure token: but utterly without knowledge
Moiled, until I the rising of the stars
Showed them, and when they set, though much
obscure.
Moreover, number, the most excellent
Of all inventions, I for them devised,
And gave them writing that retaineth all,
The serviceable mother of the Muse.
I was the first that yoked unmanaged beasts,
To serve as slaves with collar and with pack,
And take upon themselves, to man’s relief,
The heaviest labour of his hands: and
Tamed to the rein and drove in wheeled cars
The horse, of sumptuous pride the ornament.
And those sea-wanderers with the wings of cloth,

The shipman's waggons, none but I contrived.
 These manifold inventions for mankind
 I perfected, who, out upon't, have none-
 No, not one shift-to rid me of this shame.

CHORUS

Thy sufferings have been shameful, and thy mind
 Strays at a loss: like to a bad physician
 Fallen sick, thou'rt out of heart: nor cans't prescribe
 For thine own case the draught to make thee sound.

PROMETHEUS

But hear the sequel and the more admire
 What arts, what aids I cleverly evolved.
 The chiefest that, if any man fell sick,
 There was no help for him, comestible,
 Lotion or potion; but for lack of drugs
 They dwindled quite away; until I taught them
 To compound draughts and mixtures sanative,
 Wherewith they now are armed against disease.
 I staked the winding path of divination
 And was the first distinguisher of dreams,
 The true from false; and voices ominous
 Of meaning dark interpreted; and tokens
 Seen when men take the road; and augury
 By flight of all the greater crook-clawed birds
 With nice discrimination I defined;
 These by their nature fair and favourable,
 Those, flattered with fair name. And of each sort
 The habits I described; their mutual feuds
 And friendships and the assemblages they hold.
 And of the plumpness of the inward parts
 What colour is acceptable to the Gods,
 The well-streaked liver-lobe and gall-bladder.
 Also by roasting limbs well wrapped in fat
 And the long chine, I led men on the road
 Of dark and riddling knowledge; and I purged
 The glancing eye of fire, dim before,
 And made its meaning plain. These are my works.
 Then, things beneath the earth, aids hid from man,
 Brass, iron, silver, gold, who dares to say
 He was before me in discovering?
 None, I wot well, unless he loves to babble.
 And in a single word to sum the whole-
 All manner of arts men from Prometheus learned.

CHORUS

Shoot not beyond the mark in succouring man
 While thou thyself art comfortless: for
 Am of good hope that from these bonds escaped
 Thou shalt one day be mightier than Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

Fate, that brinks all things to an end, not thus
 Apportioneth my lot: ten thousand pangs
 Must bow, ten thousand miseries afflict me
 Ere from these bonds I freedom find, for Art
 Is by much weaker than Necessity.

DISCUSSION

After sharing, begin a seminar-style discussion. Remind the students that you will ask them to keep thinking about their notions of environmental wisdom as the course proceeds, and that they will be working together in a collaborative inquiry to try to make progress in their thinking about environmental philosophy. Explain to them that much environmental philosophy has been very concerned about what is called the "Promethean Attitude" and invite them to speculate on why that might be so. Introduce the character of Orpheus, and explain how the Orphic Attitude could be understood as quite different from the Promethean Attitude. Ask the students to volunteer examples of each. Ask them what kind of attitude Socrates took. Ask them to write these terms down in their journals and to keep trying to think of ways to illustrate them.

WORD OF THE DAY

Promethean Attitude, Orphic Attitude, Socratic Attitude.

CLOSING

Ask them what they have in their journals so far. Stress that these journals are very important, and that they should keep writing down thoughts and questions that occur to them. Explain that they should also feel free to draw pictures or diagrams relating to their thoughts and questions, and give them some examples from the journals of Thoreau.

Testimonials

Fans of Winning Words comment on their experiences with the program

“In the company of great wisdom one tends to listen, to absorb as much new information as possible. You did not miss a beat in regards to the history of the south side community. And I would say to the community: If you bring [your children] the [Winning Words Program] will teach them!”

-Phillis Humphries,
Community Member

“This is phenomenal! When I first began the Odyssey Project (South side class of 2005-2006), I became irate, because I found myself understanding that an education in the Socratic method should have been taught at the middle school level. I believed that so many of life’s unnecessary burdens could have been alleviated, if people would have been taught how to think. Great job, Bart and the Civic Knowledge Project!”

-Gloria N. Robinson,
Odyssey Project Alum



Sage Gerson, '13, prepares written arguments for a debate in her Winning Words course—the same assignment her students are doing

Upcoming Events

November 2, 2013

The Winning Words Initiative Conference:
A Midwest Regional Resource Network for
Pre-Collegiate Philosophy
9:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.
1131 East 57th St.
Chicago, IL 60637

February 26, 2014

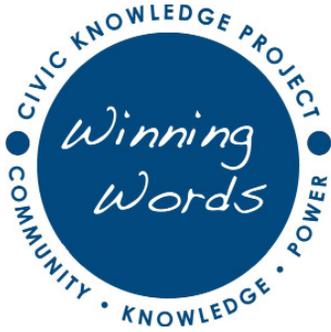
American Philosophical Association
Central Division Meeting
Palmer House Hilton

March 15, 2014

Annual Winning Words Program Reception
12 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Ida Noyes Theatre, Ida Noyes Hall
1212 East 59th Street Chicago, IL 60637

Journal Design:
Shayan Karbassi

Front Cover Artist:
Stormi Knight,
Shoesmith Elementary



Students will engage with philosophy by learning its historical significance, analyzing philosophical texts, and practicing philosophy themselves. Through group discussion, individual reflection, writing, and formal dialogue, students will discover and carefully consider a number of life's important questions.

Our aim is to enable young students to wonder and search together, with guidance from their Winning Words coaches.

Useful Resources

CKP WEBSITE

To learn more about CKP's mission and programs, visit:
<http://civicknowledge.uchicago.edu>

PLATO WEBSITE

Learn more about the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization:
<http://plato-philosophy.org>

WINNING WORDS WEBSITE

To access important documents and exchange ideas with other CKP instructors and coaches visit:
<http://winningwords.uchicago.edu>

FACEBOOK

To become a fan of Winning Words on Facebook and receive updated news and information, visit:
<http://facebook.com/ckpww>

CONTACT

CPK Director Bart Schultz:
rschultz@uchicago.edu

Winning Words Coordinator Shayan Karbassi:
skarbassi@uchicago.edu

Want More Lesson Plans?

Winning Words lesson plans can be accessed at winningwords.uchicago.edu.

Are you a concerned K-12 teacher who would like to enrich your school with philosophy? Are you a concerned parent who would like to know more about how your child's school could improve its offerings in the humanities? Are you a concerned philosopher or student of philosophy who would like to see more philosophy at the K-12 levels? Then please be sure to RSVP for the UChicago Civic Knowledge Project's big Winning Words Initiative conference on Nov. 2nd! The Winning Words Initiative is a Midwest resource network aimed at helping teachers, schools, and students gain better opportunities to do pre-collegiate philosophy. All are welcome--teachers, parents, students, administrators, and more! We honor our teachers, who can earn professional development credits for participating (and win some special raffle prizes).

To RSVP, go to: <http://civicknowledge.uchicago.edu/wwinitiative.shtml> and hit the RSVP link, or e-mail rschultz@uchicago.edu or call 773-834-3929 ext. 1.

winning *words*

Pre-Collegiate
Philosophy Initiative

