

# CHAPTER ONE

## **RED RIBBON WEEK**

Pacific Hills was a medium-sized town on the West Coast whose economy rested precariously on the stability of the oil refinery located at the edge of town. The refinery provided employment for many of the town's residents and also generated much subsidiary employment. Businesses in town tended to thrive when the plant operated at full capacity, and floundered or folded during the chronic layoffs. Events halfway across the world had strong ripple effects on Pacific Hills. Conflict in the Mideast might cause changes in domestic oil supply and demand that would affect the refinery's employment needs, and thus the economy of the town. Pacific Hills's population was in a constant state of flux, burgeoning during periods of peak oil production and then dropping during layoffs when refinery workers moved to other towns to find available work. When the oil workers left town, business would drop off elsewhere and cause layoffs in department stores, restaurants, and other businesses. Life in Pacific Hills was characterized by uncertainty and adaptability as people adjusted to the economy's fickle moods.

The school system, like every other institution in town, was gripped by apprehension. With every shift in the size of the refinery's workforce came shifts in the size of the student body. On a moment's notice the factory might lay off several hundred workers, many of whom would immediately leave town in search of other jobs, often taking their families with them and changing the population of the schools. The school system, which was always strapped for money, always had a number of teachers "on the bubble," ready to receive notices of reductions in force when student enrollment dropped. While senior faculty members had job security, newer teachers were always anxious about their future in the district. The lack of stability in both the student body and the faculty led to a sense of vulnerability in the school as a whole.

The school's administration followed a top-down model of decision making. Too many faculty members had uncertain futures in the district for the teachers to provide an organized challenge to the administration's use of authority, and so over the years they developed a sense of powerlessness in response to administrative decisions. The administration itself made few original decisions, but followed the dictates of the state department of education in developing curriculum and programs. At the bottom

of the decision-making heap were the students, whose fate was tied up in their parents' uncertain job status. Students were granted little agency in determining the substance and process of their education. Students and faculty alike were far removed from authority and were strongly affected by the whims of distant forces in the economy, giving them the feeling of being pawns in a larger game played by invisible, powerful, indifferent hands.

Kathy Golden was one of the teachers in Pacific Hills who was "on the bubble." She was in her mid-forties, having married young and raised three children before returning to college to get her teaching credentials. Although she'd never been given a pink slip, she had little enough seniority that the threat of losing her job was everpresent. She had taught in Pacific Hills High School for five years now, one of ten English teachers for a school with a student body that fluctuated between 1,200 and 1,500, depending on the employment at the oil refinery. When she had started in the district there had been thirteen English teachers, but the faculty had been reduced through attrition and layoffs since, leaving her one good enrollment drop from unemployment.

Kathy taught freshmen and sophomores. For both preparations she was provided a curriculum that faithfully followed the literature anthology's organization. Learning objectives were handed down from the central curriculum office and were strictly based on the learner outcomes that were issued from the state department of education. Sophomores were scheduled to learn to write personal narratives and five-paragraph themes, know the parts of speech and the components of literary genres, and be knowledgeable in other such forms in order to pass the state-mandated assessment tests upon which each school's reputation was based. With real estate values tied to test scores, Pacific Hills's elected board of education placed a great deal of importance on these tests and evaluated administrators on the basis of test scores. Administrators, in turn, assessed each teacher's performance on the test scores of students.

The Pacific Hills schools, like schools throughout the country, participated in Red Ribbon Week, a national substance abuse awareness program in which schools devote attention across the curriculum to the dangers and prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. Ms. Golden had mixed feelings about Red Ribbon Week. On the one hand, she felt that it was important to raise health issues in school. She had known bright, potentially successful people who had developed drug or alcohol dependencies and ruined their personal relationships and professional opportunities. She felt that schools would be doing a disservice if they attended to students' cognitive needs and ignored their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. While drugs and alcohol were threats to personal safety throughout the country, they seemed particularly ominous in Pacific Hills, where unemployment struck quickly and caused turmoil within families. Students had access to both alcohol and a variety of drugs, and used them both recreationally and to reduce the stress caused by the uncertainty in their lives. Drug and alcohol problems were a cause of truancy among students, and a concern among teachers for creating health and academic problems for students. Red Ribbon Week, then, served an important purpose in addressing a critical problem facing the community.

**[This] book assumes that programs are not the answers to the learning problems of students but that teachers are and that, indeed, good teachers create good programs, that the best programs are developed *in situ*, in response to the needs of individual student populations and as reflections of the particular histories and resources of individual [schools].**

**Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors & Expectations* p. 6.**

Yet Red Ribbon Week troubled Ms. Golden for several different reasons. The program sought to create a special focus on drug and alcohol awareness and was typically implemented by stopping all customary teaching, shifting the focus to drugs and alcohol, and then returning to business as usual for the rest of the year. Ms. Golden felt that separating the issue out for its own special week raised only temporary awareness and then ignored this crucial problem for the rest of the year. Indeed, because the issue of substance abuse had its own exclusive week, many teachers did not devote additional attention to it.

The interruption of regular instruction for Red Ribbon Week always seemed to come at an inconvenient time. Ms. Golden was forced to jockey her teaching so that she brought something to conclusion at the right time, and she always seemed to give short shrift to some important aspect of instruction in order to make space for the program. Pedagogically, then, the program disrupted the rest of her instruction, causing her to regard it as just one more interruption in her effort to teach. The program, presented with no supportive context, was typically regarded by students as a "soft" week in their schedule when they attended assemblies, were presented with prepackaged materials, were told to "just say no" to drugs, and then returned to their normal schedules.

Her reservations about the program's lack of connection to the rest of the curriculum were exacerbated by what she felt was its emphasis on the substances themselves, not on the reasons that people use them. Based on her knowledge of adults who abused drugs and alcohol, Ms. Golden felt that telling students to "just say no" was insufficient in addressing substance abuse. In her view, people don't say no to *drugs*; people say no to *people*. She felt that an effective drug and alcohol abuse program, while emphasizing the medical evidence of the substances' destructiveness, also needed to examine the social conditions that lead to dependency.

**What seemed to be important on the part of school people was not a clear ideological position or a coherently constructed curriculum but simply keeping up with the times. While one may find isolated examples of a school curriculum that followed a consistent ideological line, for the most part, what emerged as the American curriculum in the twentieth century was a hodgepodge of contradictory reforms patched on to the conventional humanist curriculum.**

**Herbert .M. Kliebard, *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing*. p. 7.**

A firm believer in integrating instruction, after her first few years of participating in Red Ribbon Week activities with ambivalence, Ms. Golden began to look for ways to incorporate the program's substance abuse educational information into the curriculum without experiencing it as a disruption. In thinking about how to achieve this end, she developed several related goals: to embed the Red Ribbon Week activities into larger themes of the curriculum, to present substance abuse as a social problem rather than as a substance problem, and to develop instructional activities related to Red Ribbon Week emphases that simultaneously met curriculum objectives.

In looking over her sophomore literature anthology she saw some possibilities. The textbook was organized so that it could be taught either thematically or by genre. The literature was amenable to several themes, such as "Exploring Identity," "Values in Conflict," and "Courage" that addressed social issues implicated in drug and alcohol abuse. Ms. Golden decided that, rather than treating Red Ribbon Week activities as a disembodied unit of study, she would work them in thematically with the literature units she would teach in the regular curriculum. In so doing she could meet her goals of integrating the substance abuse program with students' efforts to construct meaning from literature and with their writing. Furthermore, Ms. Golden saw that by having students write personal narratives about their experiences with social pressures, she could help prepare them for the state writing assessment, which required them to produce a narrative under examination conditions.

**[S]chools do not usually begin their analysis of students by asking what they can already do well. The emphasis, rather, is most often placed on what students do badly or not at all. The curriculum is then conceived as a process of filling in gaps to remediate deficiencies or exposing students to new material.**

**Richard W. Beach & James D. Marshall, *Teaching Literature In the Secondary School*, p. 124.**

Ms. Golden wanted to establish a relationship among the Red Ribbon Week themes, the literary themes, and students' own life themes and experiences. The sophomore anthology's first theme, "Exploring Identity," included such works as Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," Nikki Giovanni's "Choices," Doris Lessing's "Through the Tunnel," and other selections that involved characters facing important choices, often in the face of pressures to act against their better judgment. Ms. Golden saw this unit as an excellent vehicle for helping students connect their literary study with their personal experiences and the themes of Red Ribbon Week.

She wanted the students to approach the issues by framing them in terms of their own experiences. The types of conflicts represented in the literature provided illustrations of the pressures that can lead to drug and alcohol abuse. If students could establish a prior framework based on the scripts of their personal experiences, then their subsequent consideration of literary characters—and ultimately their consideration of choices they would face with drugs and alcohol—would, she felt, be facilitated. She decided to have students develop the initial literary texts for the unit by writing about personal experiences they'd had with choices in the face of social pressure. They would thus be able to include their own personal stories along with the selections from the anthology as the literary material for the unit.

At the beginning of the first class of the unit, she gave students the following prompt: "Write about an experience you've had in which you were pressured to act in certain ways, and had to make a choice about which way to act. What were the circumstances? What were the choices? Who was pressuring you to do what? Why? What did you decide to do? Why? If put in the same situation again, what would you do this time?" Her purpose in giving this prompt was twofold: to have students develop a script for the literary conflicts they would later study, and to have students use writing as a way of exploring their ideas about the topic.

**[W]riting can be a powerful process for discovering meaning rather than just transcribing an idea that is in some sense waiting fully developed in the writer's mind. Our language provides a whole panoply of devices that not only convey our meaning to others, but help us develop the meaning for ourselves. . . .**

**In our concern with writing as a way to express an idea or reveal subject-area knowledge, we tend to overlook the extent to which these devices help us generate new ideas "at the point of utterance."**

**Arthur N. Applebee, *Writing in the Secondary School*. p. 100.**

One student, a girl named Lacey, produced the following narrative:

I was with my girlfriends before school one day and they started talking about how boring school was and how they didn't feel like going and about how they wanted to ditch school and go to the mall. Well I didn't want to but they started planning this whole thing like I was going with them and after they got it all planned I couldn't say no so I went with them. We weren't doing anything in my classes so it didn't matter any if I missed so I figured I could miss one day and nobody would notice. We planned to call from the mall and disguise our voices and act like it was our parents calling about how sick we were so I figured no problem. Well we got to the mall and after a while we got bored their too so one of my girlfriends decided we needed to have a shoplifting contest to see who could rip off the most expensive thing. The winner would get to keep all the things that the others stole and the person who stole the cheapest thing would have to call a real dorky guy on the phone and talk to him. Well I didn't want to shoplift or call up some dorky guy but I didn't have much choice so we decided to go to sears and split up and see who could steal the thing that cost the most, I have to confess I cheated, I went to the jewelry section and bought a pair of earrings for 15\$ and pretended I ripped it off. Lucky for me they didn't find out and also lucky for me someone else stole something cheaper. All in all I didn't mind giving the earrings to the girl that stole the most expensive thing which was some perfume but, unlucky for me the school called back my house to check about my sick call and my dad was home to let in a plumber in and I got caught ditching so I got grounded anyhow.

After they had produced these informal narratives, Ms. Golden asked the students to share them in small groups. She planned that these narratives would serve several purposes: (1) Form the basis for short plays that students would perform before the class. (2) Provide students with story scripts from their own experiences which in turn inform their understanding of the conflicts in the literature to be read, and provide the basis for their attention to the social pressures discussed during Red Ribbon Week activities that can lead to drug and alcohol abuse. (3) Serve as the initial consideration of a topic that students would later develop into a formal narrative to be turned in for a grade. (4) And finally, prepare students for the state writing assessment.

**[In drama] movement and gesture play a larger part in the expression of meaning; a group working together upon an improvisation needs more deliberately and consciously to collaborate; the narrative framework allows for repetition and provides a unity that enables the action more easily to take on symbolic status—to have meaning beyond the immediate situation in which it occurs. . . . [Students can act out] in symbolic and often unrealistic—form their fears, hatreds, and desires [to help] them assimilate those too disturbing to be acknowledged literally.**

**Douglas Barnes, *Drama in the English Classroom*, pp. 8–9.**

The students used both the sharing day and the next day to develop their dramatic productions. Ms. Golden told them that they could either use one student's narrative as the basis for the play, or combine elements of several into a single story. In any case they were free to elaborate and fabricate to make the story more interesting and fun to produce. She recommended that they prepare and follow a script, although she did not insist on this feature for groups that performed better spontaneously. When they performed, students were encouraged to use props, music, special effects, or other resources to enhance their productions, although they were not allowed to use real drugs or alcohol in plays that focused on pressures to imbibe them.

Lacey got in a group with her friends Courtney, Jennifer, and Kay. After she read her narrative and talked about the adventure with her friends, Lacey heard the stories they'd written. Courtney had written about a time some friends had pressured her into going out to a quarry and diving off high rocks into a pool of water where a teenager had drowned a few years before after losing consciousness when he'd hit his head on the bottom after a dive. Jennifer had described an occasion when some friends had tried to get her to smoke cigarettes, even though her mother was quite ill with emphysema; she'd resisted the pressure but lost the friendships in the process. Kay had written about a time in math class when some friends had wanted to play a game of "chicken" where the winner was the one who called out the loudest profanity during class. Kay had lost the game but the winner had received several days of detention.

They discussed which play would make the best production. Kay's would require them to curse in class, which they got a chuckle out of, but which they thought would be inappropriate. Jennifer did not want to perform hers because she felt so strongly about her mother's declining health. Courtney's had potential, but they didn't know how they'd simulate the dives in the classroom. They therefore settled on Lacey's story, which they liked, which had a part for each of them, and which didn't require any special effects. They discussed ways they might embellish it: They could make Lacey lose and end up talking to the dorky guy, or they could have Lacey steal the earrings instead of buying them. After talking about the possibilities, they decided to leave Lacey's actions more or less the same, and improvise with the other three characters.

They spent class time working out a script for the play. They decided to write out their lines and keep a script handy in case they forgot what to say or do, although they wanted to avoid reading the script during their performance. They figured that they didn't need special props; they could put four chairs together and pretend it was a car for driving to the mall, they could simulate telephones by holding their hands to their ears, and they could use things they already had—earrings, perfume, a wallet, a hairbrush—to shoplift. To show that they felt that shoplifting was wrong, they decided to change the story so that Jennifer got caught stealing and was grounded for six months by her parents, and Courtney, who played the role of the girl who won the contest, ended up feeling guilty and mailing the contraband back to the store.



It took a class period to perform all the plays. One set of students performed a scene from a party where a boy was tempted by his friends to drink beer; he gave in to their pressure and drank several beers before getting sick and passing out on the lawn, where the police found him and returned him to his parents. Another group performed a play in which a student had been grounded and his friends persuaded him to sneak out through his window and

join them for an evening of carousing, a night that ended with a car accident that brought in the police and resulted in an even longer grounding from his parents. Another play concerned a girl whose best friend wanted her to help cheat on a test by providing her with answers; the girl agreed to help but panicked during the test and didn't pass along the answers, causing her friend to shun her thereafter. The final play was about a girl who went out on Halloween with some friends who decided to blow up people's mailboxes with some big firecrackers they had left over from the Fourth of July; she went along with the group but successfully deflected efforts to get her to light the fuses until one of the boys in the group insisted that she light the fuse that they put in the mailbox of her parents' friends. She gave in to the pressure, lit the fuse, and exploded the mailbox, but felt terrible and confessed in church the following Sunday.

Following the production of the plays, Ms. Golden led a class discussion of the story featured in each drama. The class found remarkable consistency across the productions: Each one involved a character whose values were challenged when friends offered temptation and pressure to do something illicit. Although Ms. Golden was at times alarmed by the degree of temptation available to her students, she encouraged them to draw on their experiences to guide the discussion of the issues.

Ms. Golden then told the students that the literature they were going to read would be based on similar types of conflicts, although not necessarily featuring teenagers or the specific pressures they'd seen in the plays. She led the students through discussions of several works of literature from their anthology, including Daniel Inouye's "My Shirt Is for Church," Frost's "The Road Not Taken," and

Giovanni's "Choices." With each selection she urged the students to consider the characters' dilemmas, the types of social forces conspiring to influence their choices, and the consequences of each decision they might make. Discussions were not confined to the text, but also included references to the student plays and other sources of student knowledge about social influences on personality development, including films, television programs, and episodes from their lives. When discussing "The Road Not Taken," for instance, Lacey referred back to her experience with ditching school and shoplifting, pointing out that while on one hand it was easier to go to school than to go out and shoplift, on the other hand it was easier to give in to peer pressure than to resist it and go to school. For her, the road less traveled was the road to resisting pressure, although it was a road she had difficulty taking.

Ms. Golden intended that the small-group plays and the whole-group discussions would scaffold the students' understanding of the story scripts found in much of the literature about personal choices within a social context, literature that found its basis in human experience. After helping to guide their initial explorations of these themes in teacher-led discussions, Ms. Golden asked students to work in small groups to examine unfamiliar stories involving a similar script. Students read Doris Lessing's "Through the Tunnel," a story about a young English boy vacationing with his widowed mother at a French villa. The boy, Jerry, meets some older, wilder, native boys who dive deep beneath the ocean's surface and swim through a subaquatic tunnel to prove their manhood. Jerry tries to dive with them but loses his nerve and surfaces as the older boys complete their dive. They then abandon him, leaving him feeling inadequate. He believes that he will not be considered a man unless he swims through the tunnel, and so spends his remaining vacation attempting dives; he finally succeeds on the last day, but nearly drowns in the process and is so exhausted that he feels no celebration or accomplishment from his achievement.

Ms. Golden provided the students with a heuristic to frame their discussion, based on both the story structure of their personal narratives and the questions they had posed when discussing literature in the teacher-led discussions:

What conflicts and choices does the character face in this story?

Who is pressuring the protagonist to do what? Why?

What did he decide to do? Why?

How do you evaluate this choice?

What is the basis of your evaluation?

If put in the same situation as the character was in, what would you do? Why?

Lacey got back into her group with Jennifer, Courtney, and Kay to discuss these questions. They began looking at the character and his response to the social pressure to dive through the tunnel and prove himself. Their discussion eventually turned to his maturity:

*Courtney:* He had no self-confidence or he wouldn't need to dive through that tunnel.

*Jennifer:* What do you think?

*Courtney:* He's, um, shy. He was by himself. Kind of like being an outcast.

*Lacey:* He was intimidated by those older guys because he was rich and sheltered, and they were so wild and could do things like dive through the tunnel.

*Courtney:* Yeah. Is he actually immature for these . . . I mean, how can you be immature?

*Kay:* It's, it's kind of like when you're not really mature until you're social. You can't be mature if you're some kind of hermit because then you'll never learn how to do the things that mature people do.

*Lacey:* Until you're social? Because you may be—so, a person's shy so they're—unsocial?

*Kay:* It takes a maturity to be social.

*Lacey:* No.

*Kay:* Yes, it does.

*Lacey:* No. Because his problem in the story was that he went through the tunnel because he was trying to be like those other guys, live up to somebody else's expectations. So he was being social, but I think that made him less mature because it made him take the road more traveled like what's-his-name the poet said, even though hardly anybody could make that dive, so it was less traveled and more traveled at the same time. I don't know. I'm kind of confused.

*Jennifer:* It's like that movie *Pretty in Pink* where the guy won't date the girl even though he really likes her because his high-class friends think she's geeky because of where she lives.

*Lacey:* Huh?

*Jennifer:* You know, it's easier to date her because he wants to, but it's also easier to put her down because that's what his friends expect, so it's harder and easier, but mostly harder no matter what he does.

*Kay:* But going through the tunnel made him more of a man, so he was more mature.

*Courtney:* Yeah.

*Lacey:* Yeah. But I mean, no, I don't believe you have to be social to mature, and I don't think you're a man just because you're macho.

*Courtney:* Ma-cho ma-cho ma-a-an.

*Lacey:* I think he gave in to the pressure just like I did when I ditched school. I was being social so, according to you, I was being mature, but I don't think so.

*Courtney:* But you are not as successful when you are, when you keep to yourself.

*Lacey:* So you have to be successful to be mature, too?

*Courtney:* Yes.

*Lacey:* Why? I mean, the kid in the story was successful because he finally swam through the tunnel, but he wasn't even happy about it, and he almost died anyhow.

*Courtney:* Well, the older guys probably still thought he was a dork because he was a rich kid. He might've swum through the tunnel, but they didn't accept him at the end of the story, so if he did it to get accepted, then it didn't even work

*Kay:* Is "swum" a word?

*Courtney:* Who cares? I just used it, so it's a word. Anyhow, the boy in the story wanted to act like the older guys, so he risked his life. I think that's not mature even though it's social because he did it because of social pressure because he thought they ran away from him because he couldn't dive through the stupid tunnel. I think he just did it to be like everyone else, just like I did when I went diving at that quarry—I could have killed myself just like that other guy did and just like that kid in the story almost did.

*Jennifer:* So, that showed whatever-his-name-is's lack of immaturity, no, no, lack of maturity, um, that he wasn't independent enough to listen to himself. That he listened to others, no, he couldn't talk their language. He tried to be like them, which shows that even though he thought he was like the older guys he was actually doing something stupid.

The students continued to discuss the story in this fashion in response to the heuristic Ms. Golden had provided them. In their discussion they looked at the character in terms of their own narratives, the other literature they'd read, and other examples they generated about people in similar circumstances. Each group responded to these questions in writing and gave them to Ms. Golden. Ms. Golden didn't particularly like to require the written answers when students worked in small groups, but found that students were less likely to socialize off task if they produced a written response.

The students followed up their small-group discussions with a class discussion of the story in which they exchanged views developed in the small groups. As in Lacey's group, students disagreed over Jerry's obsession with going through the tunnel and his ultimate success in doing so: Did they represent a positive step forward or reveal his weakness in allowing social pressures to dictate his behavior? In exploring the question of whether the character had taken the road more or less traveled, students compared Jerry to their own narratives, to other people they knew, and to other characters from literature and popular culture. The issue remained unresolved; when the question came up about how the students would act if put in Jerry's situation, many views emerged concerning what would be the best course of action to take.

To see how well students had adopted these response procedures for their own purposes, the class read a play from their anthology, Reginald Rose's *Twelve Angry Men*, a drama in which one man resists pressure from eleven other jurors to quickly convict a boy accused of murder. The class read the play together, and then students used the questions from the heuristic that guided their small-group discussions to stimulate their response to the story. Lacey produced the following paper in response to the play:

### **12 Angry Men**

This play is about a jury that's supposed to decide if a boy killed his father. Most of the jurors think the boy did it and just want to go home. One of them, #8, doesn't think so and tries to get the others to see if it's possible he's innocent. At the beginning of the play there's a description of all the jurors. Most of them are described with words like "Bitter" and "slick" and "dull-witted" but #8 is called "A quiet thoughtful man. A man who sees all sides of every question and constantly seeks the truth. A man of strength tempered with compassion. Above all, a man who wants justice to be done and will fight to see that it is." Well, after that introduction you know he's going to be right, and sure enough he is.

The other people on the jury though don't want to hear about it and are really mad that he tries to be fair. They complain about how long the trial took and about how hot it is. #7 wants to end their discussion quickly, so he can go to a play. # 10 thinks he's guilty because he's poor. #3 thinks that because he bought a knife he must be the killer. #8 is the only one who wants to talk about the possibility that he's innocent.

The other jurors all try to put pressure on #8 to convict the boy. When they count the votes #3 says "Somebody's in left field." When #8 asks if everyone thinks the boy lied #10 says "Now that's a stupid question." Other jurors almost try to fight him to get him to stop defending the boy. #3 even says he's going to kill him. But soon some of them start to come over to his side. #9 admires him because of his courage. Others do too and eventually they figure out that the boy was innocent.

Just as it said he would at the beginning, #8 stuck by his principles and didn't let the others pressure him into going along with their opinion. Because he cared about the truth and not about going to a play or something selfish he saved the boy's life. I hope that if I'm ever in a situation like that I'll do what's right and not let anybody else bully me into going along with their program. I admire people who stand up for what they believe in and hope that someday people will admire me for the way I act.

Following this writing, the students returned to their personal experience narratives that had formed the basis of their dramas. Ms. Golden both wanted to help students develop these into polished pieces of writing, and to help students develop strategies for producing narratives in response to prompts for the state writing assessment. The students would produce narratives for the state writing assessment during a controlled time period, and ultimately Ms. Golden felt that they needed some practice under time constraints. For their initial instruction, however, she wanted to regard writing as an extended process involving prewriting, drafting, revision, peer critiques, and other stages of writing that she knew many writers engage in when producing thoughtful manuscripts.

Students had already produced initial drafts and had read a variety of other texts that considered related issues. They therefore had been exposed to several literary narratives and poems that provided narrative elements for them. To identify these elements she decided to work inductively. From her files of student work from previous years, she selected a set of narratives representing a range of qualities that were often unevenly represented in single papers. One narrative, for instance, included a number of fascinating details and vivid images, yet had several spelling and grammar errors. Another provided a clear, linear account of an event, yet employed banal language and little sense of dramatic progression. Still another related the story well, yet was excessive and overly ornamental in its use of modifiers and similes. Ms. Golden took these essays and retyped them, excluding the original writers' names and manipulating them to provide contrasts in qualities.

She then asked students to form small groups and gave them a set of five essays, asking students to read them carefully and then rank them from best to worst. To produce this ranking each group needed to analyze their features and make value judgments on their relative qualities. Ms. Golden had prepared the narratives so that there was no clear hierarchy of quality; indeed, different groups came up with different rankings. The point of the activity was for students to use these essays to consider what they valued in narratives rather than for Ms. Golden to lead them toward a predetermined set of values.

Following the small-group work the students met as a class to discuss the sample narratives. Students discussed their relative rankings and why they had so judged them. Ms. Golden orchestrated the discussion, encouraging students to argue with one another over the merits of the papers. Through this discussion students identified a set of qualities that they felt should be included in effective narratives, such as a compelling and authentic story line, strong (but not overdone) images, a clear (although not necessarily linear) account of action, a portrayal of relationships, an absence of narrative explanation for events, and other features. Although their priorities differed for which features were most important, students generally agreed on those that needed to be present. Ms. Golden then informed the students that the criteria they had identified would be what she would ultimately use in grading their narratives.

Following this activity, Ms. Golden asked the students to produce a narrative related to the theme of exploring identity through choices in the face of social influence. They had the option of rewriting their original narratives or producing a new one. Students had one class period to produce drafts, plus whatever time they needed at home to complete them.

Lacey decided to revise her original story to try to make it more interesting. She got out her original narrative, read it, and then rewrote it as follows:

My name is Lacey and I am a good girl. Or at least I try to be. One time my friends tried to get me to do things that I thought were wrong, because I was weak I did them anyhow and lost the trust of my parents and my friendships also. I learned from this experience not to do things that other people want you to do, but just to do what's true to you. Here is my story.

I was with my girlfriends before school one day and they started talking about how boring school was and how they didn't feel like going, then they got this great idea to ditch school and go to the mall for the day. Well I sort of wanted to go and also didn't want to go. But they started planing this whole thing and before I knew it I was headed out to the mall in one of their cars. We werent doing anything in my classes so it didnt matter any if I missed so I figured I could miss one day and nobody would notice.

Well we got to the mall and called school and disguised our voices and acted like it was our parents calling about how sick we were so I figured no problem. After we hung around for a while and had a coke and some donuts at the coffee shop we got bored so one of my girlfriends decided we needed to have a shoplifting contest to see who could rip off the most expensive thing. The winner would get to keep all the things that the others stole and the person who stole the cheapest thing would have to call a real dorky guy on the phone and talk to him. Well I didn't want to shoplift or call up some dorky guy but I didn't have much choice so we decided to go to sears and split up and see who could steal the most expensive thing. I have to confess I cheated, I went to the jewelry section and bought a pair of earrings for 15\$ and pretended I ripped it off. Lucky for me they didn't find out and also lucky for me someone else stole something cheaper, all in all I didn't mind giving the earrings to the girl that stole the most expensive thing which was some perfume. But unlucky for me the school called back my house to double check about my sick call and my dad just happened to be home. He'd come home from work to let a plumber in and answered the phone and it was the atendance office double checking my phone call. I got caut ditching so I got grounded, I learned the hard way to do what you think is right, not what your friends want you to do. After that they weren't such good friends anyhow.

The students then brought their narratives to class and critiqued one another's papers in small groups. Each student used notes from class discussions as a critical guide in responding to their peers' narratives, and each student was responsible for noting the advice of other students to take into consideration for the revision. Students were required to turn in all drafts along with the final draft, including notes generated during peer revision.

Lacey's group provided her with some suggestions based on their ranking of the sample essays Ms. Golden had provided. Jennifer thought that she explained too much and needed to *show* the way she lost her friends, rather than coming right out and saying it. Kay said that the story would be more interesting if she included dialogue about their plans, rather than just saying that they decided to go to the mall and steal things. Courtney thought it was a good story, but that Lacey needed to work on her spelling and punctuation, and pointed out where Lacey could improve in these areas. After they had finished with Lacey's paper, they read each of the other students' narratives and critiqued them similarly.

Following the small-group responses, students took their narratives home for revision. Ms. Golden gave students several days to complete them and turn them in for a grade, using the criteria that the class had developed for assessment. Based on her group's advice, Lacey produced the following narrative:

### **The Day I Ditched**

Caution: This is A TRUE STORY! The names have been changed to protect the guilty.

I was standing around before school when I saw some of my friends, Jackie, Allison, and Julie. We started talking.

"Another boring day at school" said Jackie.

"That's what you say everyday" I said.

"Well let's do something about it" said Julie. "Let's go out cruising at the mall."

"Yeah!" said Jackie. "Cruising at the mall!"

"I've got a car!" said Allison.

"Uh, I think I've got a math quiz" I said.

"No problemo!" said Julie. "We'll call in sick and you can make it up.

Let's go!"

We got in the car and drove to the mall. When we got there Allison called the attendance office and said, "Hello I'm Jackie Davenport's mother and she has the flu, so she won't be coming to school today. Goodbye." A few minutes later Jackie called and said I was sick, then Jackie called and said Allison was sick, then finally I called and said Julie was sick. Then we went to the coffee shop and ate donuts for a while and drank Cokes.

Pretty soon we got bored with this. Allison said, "I know, let's go shopping."

Julie said, "Do you mean for those five finger discounts?"

"Of course!" Allison said. Then she said "I know let's make it interesting.

Let's see who can rip off the most expensive thing."

"Yes!" said Jackie. "And whoever steals the most expensive thing, everybody else has to give her the stuff they stole."

I didn't like the sound of this, but then it got worse. "And who ever steals the cheapest thing has to call . . . CHET PERKINS on the phone!"

Well we all laughed really hard at this since he's the dorkiest guy in the whole school. So then we got up and went to Sears for the shoplifting contest. We all went in separate directions so as not to make anyone suspicious. All the clerks seemed to be staring right at me so I was scared to steal anything. Finally I got a good idea, instead of stealing something I'd buy something and pretend like I stole it. So I made sure no one was looking and bought a pair of ear rings for \$15.

We met back at the coffee shop. Julie stole a bottle of perfume worth \$25 and she won so we all gave her our stuff. Allison stole a hairbrush worth \$10 and had to call Chet Perkins and talk to him.

We hung around until school was out and then went home. My dad was waiting there for me and boy was he mad. He'd come home from work to let a plumber in and answered the phone and it was the attendance office doublechecking my phone call. He grounded me for two months so that I had to come straight home from school every day and not ever go out with friends even on weekends. Even after I got ungrounded I didn't see those friends much any more.

In the months that followed the completion of their narratives, Ms. Golden periodically provided them with prompts for narratives that they would produce within time constraints. Following their writing she would have students critique one another's narratives and provide her own response as well, using the criteria they had developed during their ranking activity to evaluate the papers.

As Ms. Golden had planned, Red Ribbon Week occurred following the completion of the in-class attention to narratives. During Red Ribbon Week students were required to attend assemblies, listen to talks by recovering substance abusers, receive pamphlets and other information about substance abuse, and be spectators to other presentations related to the week's theme. A week before Red Ribbon Week, as students were working on their narratives, Ms. Golden assigned them to read *Alex the Great*, a young adolescent novel that presents a problematic friendship from the perspectives of its two main characters, Alex Starky and Deonna Johnson. The girls are best friends but their lives are going in different directions: Alex is routinely truant, takes and sells drugs, steals, and otherwise rebels against rules, while Deonna is a tennis star who follows a straighter path. Deonna must decide whether it's best for her friend to keep her out of trouble or turn her in. The book presents the themes of the literature they had been reading with a special focus on the ways in which social pressures can lead teenagers to get involved with addictive drugs, and the ways in which teenagers must consider what's best for their friends and their friendships.

During Red Ribbon Week, Ms. Golden's students read and talked about *Alex the Great* and about the influences and temptations that were available to them. Ms. Golden made an effort to weave "official" Red Ribbon Week materials into their discussions, providing specific information on particular drugs when their use came up, and inviting a school counselor to talk with students about how to resist the pressures brought on by other teenagers to experiment with drugs and alcohol. They discussed the particular issues of their community, such as the constant threat of unemployment that faced many of their families, and how to develop other resources for dealing with despair and loss. Students discussed behavior that followed from substance abuse, such as physical abuse, lack of responsibility, and lack of consideration for others. They further explored what to do in response to these behaviors and how to help friends who were allowing drugs and alcohol to affect their lives. In conjunction with information provided by Red Ribbon Week officials, students identified a great array of resources for avoiding the social pressure to engage in substance abuse, and for addressing problems of abuse when they developed among families and other social groups.

At the conclusion of Red Ribbon Week, Ms. Golden made certain to extend the lessons of the program into their continued explorations of literature. When studying other themes of the anthology, such as "Values in Conflict" and "Courage," students returned to the issues that were raised during their thematic unit on "Exploring Identity" and their connections to Red Ribbon Week. They continued to develop their ability to write narratives on themes related to the literature they studied, at times engaging in extended processes and at times producing them under exam conditions. Ms. Golden thus achieved her goal of integrating the program into the curriculum and tying student production to a personal exploration of important issues in their lives, to their informed reading of thematically related literature, and to their preparation for state-mandated writing assessments.

## **Standards in Practice**

Students in Ms. Golden's class draw on a wide variety of sources to understand the ways in which social pressures can influence the directions their lives take. Ms. Golden asks them to consider their own experiences with peer pressure as a foundation for their reading and writing activities, and for their consideration of the Red Ribbon Week themes. These experiences then contribute to the development of students' own literary and dramatic texts that become part of the class's oeuvre of literary works, and that become key texts in their consideration of the moral issues involved in making personal decisions amidst social pressures. These personal texts further serve to inform their reading of literature that concerns social pressure, and of factual documents about substance abuse. Their consideration of their own experiences with peer influence is abetted by their involvement in extended writing. This attention to the process of writing enables them to consider carefully the elements that would contribute to an effective narrative, and also to consider at length their relationships with their peers through their continual attention to their personal experiences. Through their integration of their own experiences with different strands of the English language arts curriculum and the school substance abuse program, the students are encouraged to engage in literacy practices that help them reflect on, identify, and achieve their own goals.

## **Resources**

### **Writing to Learn/Writing Across the Curriculum**

#### **Books and Articles**

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## Using Drama in the Classroom

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- Barnes, D. (1968). *Drama in the English classroom: Papers relating to the Anglo-American seminar on the teaching of English at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, 1966*. Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Bolton, G. M. (1984). *Drama as education: An argument for placing drama at the centre of the curriculum*. Harlow, Essex, England: Longman.
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- College Composition and Communication*, National Council of Teachers of English
- Composition Chronicle: A Newsletter for Writing Teachers*, Viceroy Publications
- English Journal*, National Council of Teachers of English
- Exercise Exchange: A Journal of English in High Schools and Colleges*, Clarion (PA) University
- Focuses*, Appalachian State (NC) University
- Issues in Writing*, Department of English, University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point
- Journal of Advanced Composition*, Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition
- Journal of Basic Writing*, City University of New York
- Journal of Teaching Writing*, Indiana Teachers of Writing
- Quarterly*, Center for the Study of Writing, University of California-Berkeley
- Reading & Writing Quarterly*, Hemisphere Publishing Corporation
- Research in the Teaching of English*, National Council of Teachers of English
- Rhetoric Review*, Rhetoric Review Association of America
- Teachers and Writers Magazine*, Teachers and Writers Collaborative
- Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, National Council of Teachers of English
- The Writing Center Journal*, National Writing Centers Association
- The Writing Instructor*, English Department, University of Southern California
- Writing Lab Newsletter*, National Writing Centers Association: An NCTE Assembly
- Writing on the Edge*, Campus Writing Center, University of California–Davis
- Written Communication*, Sage Publications

### **Organizations and Committees**

- National Writing Centers Association: An NCTE Assembly
- NCTE Commission on Composition
- NCTE Committee on Teaching the Conventions of Writing within the Context of the Student's Own Writing
- NCTE Conference on College Composition and Communication
- Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition

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## **Young Adult Literature Concerning Substance Abuse**

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