

The Call to Greatness



A Search for Moral Integrity in the Urban Classroom

Vanessa Johnson
Boston University
Dr. Lerner
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I. Description of the Learners

This project is developed with the needs of students at Brighton High School in mind. The student body of Brighton consists of inner-city youth, most of whom reside in the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Mattapan, Roxbury, and Hyde Park. The student population is approximately 48% Black, 45% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 2% other (including white and Native American). The vast majority of the parents are immigrants, as are many of the students. Most of the students at Brighton are second language learners. One hundred percent of the student body qualifies for reduced-price or free lunch.

This framework is designed for the 11th grade English Language Arts classroom. While most students will have passed the MCAS requirements by this time, many of the students are facing the need to re-take the exam. The ideal time to introduce this unit would be during the second semester, after classroom management expectations have been firmly established.

While this framework is developed with the needs of the urban student in mind, it can be universally used as a mode of bringing questions of moral integrity into the classroom. In today's society, it becomes more and more difficult to find exemplars of moral integrity in politics, in the media, and at home. Every demographic in American society faces unique challenges in achieving a balanced and thoughtful understanding of great, or even good, personality traits. Urban youth face a unique challenge in regards to questions of moral integrity, and certain issues are more prevalent for them than for other adolescents. Matters of courage and integrity in the face of societal pressures can be difficult for students who live with violence, poverty, and desperation on a daily basis. Too often, my students seem too busy struggling to help pay for rent or to buy food for their child for me to feel comfortable bothering them with

struggles of right and wrong. But, exempting them from this struggle robs them of the opportunity to develop a strong moral identity, and the opportunity to make real changes in their environments and their lives. If they do not have the opportunity to see moral excellence at home, then it is my responsibility to provide them with these examples in the classroom. If they are unable to see the opportunities they can create for themselves through their own decision-making power, then it is my obligation to demonstrate how powerful they can be. But, I am not a parent, and I am not a police officer. I cannot admonish them for their poor choices. What I can do is offer a way for students to examine a life through literature, and thus give them the tools they will need to live an examined life.

II: The Classroom Project: Goals and Objectives

This project seeks to create a classroom community of interactive learners and writers, and to develop analytical skills for writing in response to literature. It also seeks to create an environment where students can experiment with and incorporate moral decision making skills into their academic and personal lives. The primary texts to be addressed here are *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, and *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez. *The Great Gatsby* will introduce students to the idea of “greatness” in a character, and explore how this term can change depending on the criteria being applied. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts an individual character moving through multiple societies while attempting to understand the criteria of greatness in each society. This novel also depicts the triumph of personal accountability for moral decision making over social pressures. *The Lord of the Flies* takes

students further into the concept of peer and societal pressures, and how these pressures can affect one's understanding of the criteria for "greatness." Finally, *In the Time of the Butterflies* is a historical novel that follows the lives of four young girls in the Dominican Republic and their courage in the face of social injustice. Each of these novels will allow students to discern "greatness" in different societies, and thus helps them to shape a concept of "greatness" in their own lives.

The instructional framework of this curriculum is designed with the hope of developing students' skills throughout the school year. Applications to different texts, will sustain the interactive community developed within each unit.

The initial lessons in the framework offer explicit instruction on how to initiate and sustain meaningful dialogue in response to literature:

- Introduce smaller, simplified writing tasks
- Foster student-centered classroom discussion within fixed groups
- Explicitly model skills for students
- Allow ample time for students to practice the skills within the context of the group, enabling student-initiated exploration of ideas.

As the units progress, students will be asked to document their discussions with writing in increasingly more complex ways:

- Focus on using quotations in order to identify characterization, symbolism, and social clues within the text.
- Students will begin to combine skills in interactive ways as they gain mastery over each individual skill.

- Group discussion will be documented in group binders and on group bulletin boards. All the information from group discussion will be included in the binders, while the bulletin boards will encourage students to select only the most important information.

Once students are able to complete these tasks within the group setting, they will be expected to complete work independently of the teacher. The final project of each unit will be an analytical literary essay which combines each skill addressed in the unit. Students will be asked to:

- Draw from their group discussion to develop their own thesis statements based on overarching moral dilemmas.
- Define “greatness” according to the stipulations of the society depicted in each work of literature, which they will decipher according to what they have discussed within their groups.
- Prove their thesis using evidence organized according to each skill developed throughout the unit. This writing task is the most complex, and should be completed with the highest level of independence.

Using this framework, students will learn to examine social cues to understand societal expectations for characters. They will then be able to examine these expectations objectively, making informed judgments about which expectations they consider valid, and which they consider to be inappropriate, invalid, or even immoral. It is crucial for adolescents to separate society’s expectations from their own decision making, especially moral decision making. Looking at literature in this light will help them identify the societal pressure that they live with

in their own world, and better understand when to yield to expectations, and when to stand up for what is morally right.

III. Theoretical Background

A major focus of secondary English language arts education is the development of students' abilities to write in response to what they have read. The term 'writing in response to literature' is broad, and includes assignments varying from jotting down notes during reading, to composing structured analytical essays. This wide spectrum of writing tasks is vital to understanding how a teacher can create a classroom environment and curriculum that facilitates meaningful improvement in student writing. A successful classroom environment would be one which addresses increasingly complex writing and response tasks to help students move towards independence in their writing. The Pearson & Gallagher "gradual release of responsibility model of instruction" should guide teachers when organizing a classroom curriculum based on successful instructional practices in their pursuit of facilitating student independence (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

While the secondary English classroom is the primary milieu for the development of reading and writing skills, instruction does not need to end here. Adolescents are at a critical juncture in their physical, mental, and moral development, and each of these aspects needs to be addressed in today's classroom. According to Erik Erikson's theory of identity crisis and role confusion, the formation of a concrete identity is imperative in an individual's proper development. Erikson refers to the stage in which identity is formed as *adolescence*. During this stage, an individual distinguishes between the values, morals, and identity imposed upon him by

his environment, and the identity he wishes to create for himself. Individuals will tend to “[stereotype] themselves, their ideals, and their enemies” before they are able to establish the balance between their unique ideals and the incorporation of established norms that will comprise their identity” (Erikson, 1950). Erikson feels that this process is done almost completely within the imagination of the individual, for one’s identity is a concept that exists primarily within one’s mind. The adolescent’s need to solidify the aspects of his identity that exist primarily in his mind give way to a tendency to “put trust in those... who will give imaginative, if not illusory, scope to his aspirations” (129). An important stage of identity development is the ability to look objectively at newly acquired aspects of one’s identity to test the validity, desirability, and functionality of these traits. Erikson believes that the most effective way to look objectively at such personal traits is by “projecting one’s diffused ego image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified” (132). This unique and critical moment in adolescents’ development presents a unique and critical opportunity for a teacher to use literature as a way for students to observe, analyze, and judge moral decisions and how these decisions affect characters’ lives. In this case, literature can be used as a mirror to reflect the moral decisions students are dealing with in their own lives, and help them rehearse different options before choosing an option they feel is right for them. This way, adolescents will use their reading and writing skills to help develop a sense of agency and accountability for the decisions they will make in their own lives.

Before using literature as a tool for moral education, students must first receive explicit instruction on how to respond to literature in meaningful and reflective ways, both written and orally. The major skills addressed in this unit are the selection of quality evidence, and using this evidence effectively in both written and oral argumentation. When beginning instruction in

writing and responding to literature the teacher should be ‘in control’ by offering students explicit instruction on the skills they will need to become independent writers. Discussion techniques on how to talk about literature should be modeled for the students, and mentor texts should be used to offer students examples of high quality writing and responses (Atwell, 1998; Angelillo, 2005). As the students begin to understand the expectations of response, the teacher should allow discussion to become student-centered (Adler et al, 2003). The more students are able to understand how to talk in response to literature, the better they will be able to later write their responses down (Dyson & Freedman, 1990; Langer, 2001). Once students begin to initiate and sustain quality oral responses to literature, they should be given increasingly more opportunities to write about what they have read and discussed.

These recommendations for curriculum development stem from the fundamental need for teachers to foster social interaction within the classroom community (Dyson & Freedman, 1990; Langer, 2001; Adler et al, 2003). Literature-centered social interaction lays the foundations for independent thought and reflection on the moral lives of the characters they are learning about. Students are no longer restricted to ‘fill in the blank’ with a preconceived answer, whether it be to satisfy what the teacher is looking for or to complete a worksheet, a practice which stifles student learning and creativity (Applebee, 1981; Adler et al, 2003). Students should push themselves to delve deeper into their texts, questioning the characters’ decisions, and learning to reflect this questioning back onto their own lives. Just as students move away from trying to ‘find’ the answer the teacher wants, they will be better able to make independent and thoughtful moral judgments. Using a combination of these two major instructional practices—the “socio-cognitive view” (Langer, 2005) and the “gradual release model” (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)--

creates a very successful classroom environment for the development of independent writing in response to literature, and independent thinking in response to life.

IV: Instructional Framework

The instructional framework has three major components: the group binder, the group bulletin board, and the individual essay. Each component combines individual work with group discussion to further understanding of the skills and themes of each novel, and should be addressed constantly throughout each unit. When used together, these components work to inform each of the other components, and thus strengthen the quality of student work across the framework.

- **The Group Binder:** Students will be asked to work in groups of four, and will be asked to initiate group discussion on a daily basis. To facilitate productive and meaningful discussions, the Group Binder will offer structure and momentum to collaboration. For each reading selection, individuals will be asked to concentrate on one “job”: character sleuth, symbolism revealer, value viewer, and questioner. These jobs will rotate through the group every night, so every member has a chance to hone each of the skills. When in class, students will use the character, symbol, and value squares to help answer the questions asked about the reading. Students will have quotations at the ready to support their discussions. Every night’s work will be organized in the binder by job and in sequential chapter order. The binder will become a detailed account of the group discussions throughout each unit of study.

- **The Group Bulletin Board:** Once the group has gone over the bulk of each reading assignment, they will be asked to streamline their thoughts into a more organized presentation. The group will be asked to identify and display the most important information from their binder on the bulletin board. The bulletin board is divided into sections, helping students to organize their thoughts. The bulletin board should be a daily project, and information should be added to the board using sticky notes so that information can be shifted and changed as students progress through the novels. This emphasizes the importance of revision, both in thought and writing.

- **The Individual Essay:** The final essay in each unit will be an extension of the themes addressed in the group binder and bulletin board. Students will further streamline their thoughts, choosing only the evidence which *best* supports their arguments. The evidence should be drawn directly from the bulletin board or the binder. Again, the graphic organizers will help them learn to organize their thoughts into a persuasive literary essay. This assignment will require the most independence, but it will grow from the group collaboration.

Character Sleuth: Your job is to find quotations that reveal new information about the characters and their traits. You should complete at least 5 **Character Squares** for the section of reading you are responsible for. Possible traits may include, but are not limited to, loyalty, courage, prudence, responsibility, etc. Characters may also display a lack of these qualities. You must include a clear explanation about what character trait is revealed in each quotation.

Symbolism Revealer: Your job is to find examples of symbolism in your reading. Possible examples of symbolism may include, but are not limited to, descriptions of color, light, or possessions. You should complete at least 5 **Symbol Squares** for the section of reading you are responsible for. You must include a clear explanation of the symbol and what it represents for each quotation.

Value Viewer: Your job is to find quotations that reveal what the society values or believes. You should complete at least 5 **Value Squares** for the selection of reading you are responsible for. Possible values may include, but are not limited to, money, image, honesty, loyalty, independence, etc. You must include a clear explanation of what is being valued, and why the society values this, for each quotation.

Questioner: Your job is to question the text. You should ask 10 questions for the section of reading you are responsible for. Your questions should include 2 of each type of question (Clarifying, Motivational, Structural, Reflective) leaving the final 2 questions to be the type of your choice. You are **NOT** responsible for answering the questions until you meet as a group to confer on the answers.

<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Character Trait:</p>	<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Character Trait:</p>
<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Character Trait:</p>	<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Character Trait:</p>
<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Character Trait:</p>	<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Character Trait:</p>

<p>Symbol: Quotation:</p> <p>Page # Explanation:</p>	<p>Symbol: Quotation:</p> <p>Page # Explanation:</p>
<p>Symbol: Quotation:</p> <p>Page # Explanation:</p>	<p>Symbol: Quotation:</p> <p>Page # Explanation:</p>
<p>Symbol: Quotation:</p> <p>Page # Explanation:</p>	<p>Symbol: Quotation:</p> <p>Page # Explanation:</p>

<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Social Value:</p>	<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Social Value:</p>
<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Social Value:</p>	<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Social Value:</p>
<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Social Value:</p>	<p>Page #: Quotation:</p> <p>Social Value:</p>

Clarifying Questions: Ask questions that clear things up. Ask who, what, where, and when about things in the text in order to end confusion and to review important facts in the text.

Motivational Questions: Ask questions about **why** characters do things. Ask to discover what influenced or inspired a character to act in the way she did or say what she did.

Structural Questions: Ask questions about the author's stylistic choices, such as the author's point of view, chapter length, setting, genre, language, theme, title, etc.

Reflection Questions: Ask questions about what you would have done in that character's shoes - questions that place you in the text.

V: The Texts

While this framework can work for any text, the four texts presented here are particularly appropriate for the instructional needs and moral issues relevant to urban adolescents. The sequence is meant to facilitate increasing student independence. The first two titles, *The Great Gatsby* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, are both complicated texts, but focus on single characters, allowing students to dissect these characters' actions in a systematic and thorough manner. The last two titles, *Lord of the Flies* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*, introduce many different characters, offering students a more complex view of which characters are "right" or "wrong," which are "strong" or "weak," and of course which are "great" or "not great." As students work through the sequence, they will be better able to make their own judgments about a multitude of characters, and be better able to use the skills developed with this framework.

***The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

The Great Gatsby, a story about privileged white people written by a privileged white man that occurs in a privileged era, may not be an obvious choice for the urban classroom. However, the issues addressed in this novel extend far beyond color lines and time periods. The central issue of this novel is one that all adolescents face on a daily basis: the struggle between image and identity. Gatsby struggles to create for himself an image that allows him to function successfully in a privileged and elitist society. He goes so far as to totally reinvent himself, almost totally eliminating his identity from existence. While his life's quest is to attain the ultimate symbol of success, Daisy Buchanan, he fails to understand that his true identity is

inescapable. He also fails to understand that Daisy's obsession with image will never allow her to accept how Gatsby's lower class roots would tarnish her image with the American 'aristocracy.' Because of this, he is never able to create an image that is good enough for the Buchanans, and the world of decadence and wealth that they represent. In the end, his quest for the perfect image leaves him alone, redeemed only by the strength and consistency of his dream.

Gatsby's quest is one that parallels the adolescent's search for an identity in a world that is obsessed with image. Urban teens idolize the entertainment industry, a culture that has grown to deify the acquisition of things, whether it is jewelry, cars, sneakers, or women. Often times, urban teens see image, and the money it takes to create an image, as the primary way to remove themselves from the challenges of the world they live in. Unfortunately, not enough attention is paid to the worthiness of the manner in which the image is acquired. Just as Gatsby used bootlegging and lies to create his image, urban teens are faced with the temptation to resort to drugs and crime to create the image they think is so important. Using Gatsby as an example of a man who forsakes his identity for his image, students can begin to analyze the importance and potential emptiness of image. Students can also begin to analyze how social pressures can make certain things seem essential, when in reality these things offer no lasting results. But perhaps the most lasting lesson this novel has to offer is the importance of perseverance. Gatsby's dream may have been misguided, it may have been dictated by an empty society, and Gatsby may have never reached his dream of becoming a part of the elite society. But Gatsby never gave up hope that his love for Daisy would make his image become his identity, and even in death, he was at peace with himself. This idea of perseverance combined with the need to find a worthy goal is an essential topic for urban teens to discuss and to apply to their lives.

Is Gatsby Great? Says Who?

Assignment: You will write an essay persuading the class that Jay Gatsby IS or IS NOT a “great” man. You will have to define what “greatness” is according to the society in which Gatsby lives, according to how other characters view him, how the author portrays him, and according to your own standards.

Quotation	Quotation	Explanation In Your Own Words
<p style="text-align: center;">Society Says....</p> <p>What does society consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this society values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gatsby Does...</p> <p>What are Gatsby’s actions? Find a quotation to show how Gatsby functions within the society.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is Gatsby Great?</p> <p>Explain how Gatsby’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, society’s values.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Characters Say....</p> <p>What does another character (Nick, Daisy, Tom, etc.) consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this character values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gatsby Does...</p> <p>What are Gatsby’s actions?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is Gatsby Great?</p> <p>Explain how Gatsby’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, this character’s values.</p>

<p>The Author Says.... What does the author consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows how the author uses symbolism to show what he values.</p>	<p>Gatsby Does... What are Gatsby’s actions?</p>	<p>Is Gatsby Great? Explain how Gatsby’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, the author’s values.</p>
<p>The Reader Says.... What do YOU consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you value.</p>	<p>Gatsby Does... What are Gatsby’s actions?</p>	<p>Is Gatsby Great? Explain how Gatsby’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, your values.</p>

***Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston**

This novel follows the life of a Southern black woman in the 1930s as she moves in and out of several societies. Janie Mae Crawford is highly influenced by the people around her, but she learns to create an identity for herself despite the image others try to impose upon her. Students will follow Janie's journey from childhood to independent woman, and have the opportunity to see how decisions and personal accountability effect change in Janie's life. This quest for self-actualization is an extension of the image vs. identity struggle introduced in *The Great Gatsby*, but offers deeper insight into Janie's decisions and struggles, and a more complete view of a character that achieves a truly individual identity.

The themes of this novel are especially appropriate for the urban classroom, and in particular the urban female teen. Janie succumbs to society's pressures about what is "expected" of young girls and women. She marries the man her grandmother chooses and tries to be the housekeeping, hardworking woman she is expected to be. She rejects this life and chooses to join her second husband Jody in Eatonville Florida, where she becomes the quiet and supportive wife her black bourgeois husband wants her to be. Acquiescing to his demands, she silences her dreams and hides her femininity under wraps, literally under a hair wrap. When Jody dies, she realizes how much of herself she has sacrificed and actively searches for a way to become who she has always dreamed of being.

The social, family, and peer pressures young women feel today are tremendous. Janie's greatest mistakes are when she sacrifices her own identity to fulfill the image others create for her. So often, young women mistakenly allow others to exploit them so that they can feel a

sense of belonging. Watching Janie subject herself to this exploitation, and ultimately rise above it, is an empowering tale for all adolescents.

**Is Janie Great?
Says Who?**

Assignment: You will write an essay persuading the class that Janie IS or IS NOT a “great” woman. You will have to define what “greatness” is according to the society in which Janie lives, according to how other characters view her, how the author portrays her, and according to your own standards.

Quotation	Quotation	Explanation In Your Own Words
<p style="text-align: center;">Society Says.... What does society consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this society values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Janie Does... What are Janie’s actions? Find a quotation to show how Janie functions within the society.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is Janie Great? Explain how Janie’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, society’s values.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Characters Say.... What does another character (Logan, Jody, Tea Cake, etc.) consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this character values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Janie Does... What are Janie’s actions?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is Janie Great? Explain how Janie’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, this character’s values.</p>

<p>The Author Says.... What does the author consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows how the author uses symbolism to show what she values.</p>	<p>Janie Does... What are Janie’s actions?</p>	<p>Is Janie Great? Explain how Janie’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, the author’s values.</p>
<p>The Reader Says.... What do YOU consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you value.</p>	<p>Janie Does... What are Janie’s actions?</p>	<p>Is Janie Great? Explain how Janie’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, your values.</p>

***Lord of the Flies* by William Golding**

This novel explores the extremities of human behavior as a group of young boys are stranded on a deserted island and are forced to learn to survive on their own. The power struggles, search for structure, and demise of social regulations are fictional, yet true to the human experience. Students can see how fear instigates several extreme reactions in peoples' personalities. While the boys begin the novel as a group of recognizable character types, they evolve into very different and sometimes frightening beings. *Lord of the Flies* highlights the role organized society, or its lack thereof, has on human behavior.

Golding's story touches on some very real and very difficult aspects of the adolescent experience: peer pressure and rebellion. Some of the characters deal with an insatiable hunger for power, demonstrating the importance of personal accountability and social consequences in an organized society (such as a classroom). Also, many of the characters fear the isolation of the island, and join in group behavior they know is wrong so that they can feel the security of the group. Adolescents are often fighting against rules and regulations, feeling that authorities are only there to restrict. William Golding's characters clearly show the importance of authority, and how rules can help to maintain safety within a group, as well as empower individuals. Peer pressure is a major challenge for all teens, and *Lord of the Flies* allows them to analyze and recognize what causes people to give in to pressures, and the consequences of giving up one's identity for the benefit of fitting into a group.

**Is Ralph/ Jack/ Piggy/ Simon Great?
Says Who?**

Assignment: You will write an essay persuading the class that one of these characters IS or IS NOT a “great” leader. You will have to define what “greatness” is according to the society in which the children live, according to how other characters view him, how the author portrays him, and according to your own standards.

Quotation	Quotation	Explanation In Your Own Words
<p style="text-align: center;">Society Says....</p> <p>What does society consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this society values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">_____ Does...</p> <p>What are _____’s actions? Find a quotation to show how _____ functions within the society.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is _____ Great?</p> <p>Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, society’s values.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Characters Say....</p> <p>What does another character (Ralph, Jack, Simon, Piggy, SamandEric, Roger, etc.) consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this character values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">_____ Does...</p> <p>What are _____’s actions?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is _____ Great?</p> <p>Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, this character’s values.</p>

<p>The Author Says.... What does the author consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows how the author uses symbolism to show what he values.</p>	<p>_____ Does... What are _____’s actions?</p>	<p>Is _____ Great? Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, the author’s values.</p>
<p>The Reader Says.... What do YOU consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you value.</p>	<p>_____ Does... What are _____’s actions?</p>	<p>Is _____ Great? Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, your values.</p>

***In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez**

This historical novel tells the story of four women who became symbols of freedom for a nation. The Mirabal sisters were real women living in the time of a despotic regime in the Dominican Republic. Julia Alvarez's depiction of these women is fictionalized, but the inspiration for their story is real. Each of the Mirabal sisters – Dede, Minerva, Patria, and Maria Teresa (Mate) – has very different personalities, and demonstrates very different aspects of courage. This story shows how influential the individual can be, and how necessary courage is to the individual. The sisters lived in a society that devalued the individual citizen, idolized an image of power, and required universal deference to one man. In this limiting society, each of these sisters found the courage to live their own lives, and faced extreme consequences for this seemingly basic human right. Students will learn how precious freedom is, and how degrading life can be when stripped of these freedoms. These sisters also offer an example of how small decisions and actions can make an enormous impact; people need neither money nor power to become a hero.

So often, urban teens live in a world of violence and poverty that can seem inescapable. Failure seems so ingrained and institutionalized that the individual attempt at change sometimes feels insignificant. This gives so many young girls and boys a feeling of defeat before they have even tried. The Mirabal sisters' story counteracts this idea of defeat, proving that a difference can be made, even when society is working against you. Students will analyze the sisters' decisions, and their individual expressions of courage needed to make decisions. Alvarez does not offer a romanticized image of these sisters, and they face as many challenges and defeats as they do successes. They often falter in their quest for freedom, and fear overwhelms them at

times. Students can see how they cope with their fears, and how they continually have to make decisions to stay true to themselves.

**Is (Dede, Minerva, Patria, Mate) Great?
Says Who?**

Assignment: You will write an essay persuading the class that one of the Mirabal sisters IS or IS NOT a “great” woman. You will have to define what “greatness” is according to the society in which the sisters live, according to how other characters view her, how the author portrays her, and according to your own standards.

Quotation	Quotation	Explanation In Your Own Words
<p style="text-align: center;">Society Says....</p> <p>What does society consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this society values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">_____ Does...</p> <p>What are _____’s actions? Find a quotation to show how _____ functions within the society.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is _____ Great?</p> <p>Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, society’s values.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Characters Say....</p> <p>What does another character (other sisters, husbands, neighbors, etc.) consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you think this character values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">_____ Does...</p> <p>What are _____’s actions?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is _____ Great?</p> <p>Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, this character’s values.</p>

<p>The Author Says.... What does the author consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows how the author uses symbolism to show what she values.</p>	<p>_____ Does... What are _____’s actions?</p>	<p>Is _____ Great? Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, the author’s values.</p>
<p>The Reader Says.... What do YOU consider to be “great”? Find a quotation that shows what you value.</p>	<p>_____ Does... What are _____’s actions?</p>	<p>Is _____ Great? Explain how _____’s actions fulfill, or do not fulfill, your values.</p>

VI: The Persuasive Essay Format

The persuasive essay is not only a major emphasis of the high school curriculum in Massachusetts; it is also the ideal format for students to discuss ideas of moral integrity. No person is perfectly good, or perfectly bad. Each of these novels is true to this statement, offering complicated and multi-faceted depictions of the human experience. Because these characters have both negative and positive qualities, there is no right or wrong answer when judging their moral integrity. The persuasive essay allows students the freedom to make their own judgments in regard to the characters, and forces them to look at all aspects of their personalities. Quality persuasive essays hone students' skills in creating and defending an argument, as well as ask students to introduce an opposing viewpoint—because a one-sided argument is an incomplete argument. The persuasive essay outline guides students while moving from idea to organized essay.

Is _____ Great?
The Persuasive Essay Outline

Thesis Statement: _____

Body Paragraph One (Strongest Support): Says Who? _____
Topic Sentence:

Evidence #1 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Evidence #2 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Body Paragraph Two (Weakest Support): Says Who? _____
Topic Sentence:

Evidence #1 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Evidence #2 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Body Paragraph Three (Opposing Viewpoint): Says Who? _____

Topic Sentence: _____

Evidence #1 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Evidence #2 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Body Paragraph Four (2nd Strongest Support): Says Who? _____

Topic Sentence:-

Evidence #1 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Evidence #2 (Quotation & Page #): _____

Conclusion: _____

VII: Conclusion

It is the nature of man to rise to greatness if greatness is expected of him.

~ John Steinbeck

Urban education can be a difficult undertaking. Everyday I'm faced with the "You teach where?!" question. But even more difficult is the path for an urban youth. Everyday they face violence, drugs, and the expectation of failure. I spend just 425 minutes with my students a week, and when divided among 31 bodies, this time becomes a precious commodity. I cannot hope to change their home environment, the gangs on their street corners, or the looks they get when walking through a retail store. What I can hope to change is their opportunities for the future.

Just as one rises to expectations, one falls to them as well. Society expects too little of these bright and talented young men and women, and thus the taste of true success is often a foreign one. The classroom is one environment where adolescents can learn what it means to be a "great" student, and what it means to be a "great" person. My hope for this framework is to empower my students with the skills to recognize greatness, the language to discuss issues of moral integrity, and the courage and curiosity to address these issues in literature and their lives. When students learn to expect great things from the characters they read about, they will begin to expect great things of each other, and great things of themselves.

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