

# CHARACTER

Spring 2005

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**CAEC Spring Institute: Educating Heart and Mind...see page 9**

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT as a MODEL for the DEVELOPMENT for CHARACTER

by William N. Tilchin

When Bernice Lerner invited me to take part in the CAEC *Great Lives, Vital Lessons* Curriculum Institute scheduled for November 5, 2004, I was honored by the invitation and readily accepted. "Studying Theodore Roosevelt and Other Great Leaders as a Vehicle for Developing Character, Values, and Historical Interest and Awareness" was the full title of my presentation, of which a substantial excerpt follows:

My own interest in Theodore Roosevelt, who served as President of the United States from 1901 to 1909, goes back to the 1970s. As I began to study Roosevelt while in a Master's program in History at Michigan State University, I discovered much that interested and even inspired me. TR was a prolific author, a person with an enormous zest for life, a dynamic and extremely successful political leader, and a person of very high moral character. He set an ambitious ethical standard for individual and national conduct, and he strove constantly in his personal and professional life to adhere to this standard. Roosevelt was a devoted and faithful husband, a loving and attentive father to his six children, and a President who saw himself as a steward of the American people and of the security and interests of the United States.

As I continued with graduate study in History at Brown University, with a focus on nineteenth and twentieth century U.S. foreign relations, this combination of attributes helped sustain my great interest in TR.

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Working under the supervision of Professor Charles Neu, who himself had authored a book on Roosevelt's foreign policy, I prepared a dissertation on Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire, which then evolved into my first book, published in 1997. And, although my research interests have expanded in the intervening years, here I am in 2004 still fascinated by the many-sided twenty-sixth President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt.

My part-time graduate studies at Brown lasted fifteen years, because I simultaneously held a full-time job as a high school teacher. From 1977 to 1992 I taught at an independent day school in Rhode Island, which today I look back on fondly as, in a sense, my first career. While most of my high school teaching assignments were in basic courses such as the required United States history survey, I did manage to find ways to bring Theodore Roosevelt very prominently into my classroom. In particular, on several occasions I offered a one-semester junior and senior history elective titled *Great American Leaders*, which utilized biographies to explore the lives and eras of Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King. Most of the students who took this elective were drawn to TR, which naturally did not surprise me. And I discovered that teaching about Lincoln, TR, and King not only provided a series of important and reliably interesting history lessons, but also put forward model individuals whom, in subtle and indirect ways – as a sort of hidden curriculum – I took every opportunity to encourage my students to emulate.

*continued*

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT as a MODEL (continued)

As a writer and speaker, Theodore Roosevelt repeatedly emphasized what he viewed as the overriding importance of character. In an article published in *Outlook* magazine several years after his presidency, Roosevelt wrote the following:

I join with the world in admiring [intellect] and paying homage to it. Without it – above all, without its highest expression, genius – the world would move forward but slowly... Nevertheless... character must ever stand above intellect, above genius. Intellect is fit to be the most useful of servants; but it is an evil master, unless itself mastered by character. This is true of the individual man. It is far more true of the nation, of the aggregate of individuals... [True] national greatness... [can be attained only] on a foundation of character.

I also would like to read to you from a speech delivered in New York City in October 2003 by Ambassador William vanden Heuvel on the occasion of vanden Heuvel's acceptance of the Theodore Roosevelt Distinguished Service Medal at the eighty-fourth annual dinner of the Theodore Roosevelt Association. These remarks on the values of President Theodore Roosevelt carry some contemporary resonance, especially during this week of the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Here is part of what vanden Heuvel had to say:

Theodore Roosevelt believed the President of the United States should represent the public interest. And he did. The buying of the Congress by the special interests was to him the most

fundamental corruption of American democracy...

Taxation then as it is now was an issue that defined the battle. Theodore Roosevelt was an original sponsor of the income tax and the inheritance tax. In advocating the inheritance tax, TR

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**"... character must ever stand above intellect, above genius."**

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was not talking economics. He was talking about morality, community, a just society. He understood that wealth could be the foundation on which to build a real life, but the life that he advocated – the life of spiritual and moral effort and achievement – did not need 'vast fortunes.' In fact, he believed the accumulation of such wealth could only be harmful to the generations which inherited it... He argued that great fortunes caused the disintegration of character, and frequently resulted in lives without purpose, passion, and achievement.

The remaining portion of my presentation included a plug for the aforementioned Theodore Roosevelt Association (P.O. Box 719 Oyster Bay, NY 11771); praise for Betsy Harvey Craft's *Theodore Roosevelt: Champion of the American Spirit*, an excellent full-length biography for secondary school students; and some observations about my own writing on the subject of TR and

character. I concluded my prepared remarks to the assembled educator-participants by emphasizing my view that Theodore Roosevelt is an unusually promising individual to employ as a vehicle for promoting the development of ethics and character in students.

A series of thoughtful questions then came my way. These enabled me to comment further on such issues as the sources of Roosevelt's morality (first and foremost his father), his heroic battlefield leadership during the Spanish-American War, his great enjoyment of the presidency, his well-considered and restrained conduct toward Latin America (in contrast to a widely accepted caricature), and his diplomacy more broadly (TR was a brilliant and agile statesman whose foreign policy principles were decades ahead of their time).

I ended my session hopeful that I had motivated some participants to elevate the presence of Theodore Roosevelt in their classrooms. Few other historical figures are as likely both to capture the imagination of students and to contribute significantly to their character education.

*William N. Tilchin, an associate professor of social science in the College of General Studies at Boston University, is the author of Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire: A Study in Presidential Statecraft (St. Martin's Press, 1997) and many published essays, including "Morality and the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt" (The Long Term View, Vol. 3, No. 3, fall 1996, pp. 56-65).*

from the  
a c t i n g **D I R E C T O R**  
Bernice Lerner, Ed.D.

## Why Teach **BIOGRAPHY**?

*There are stars whose light reaches the earth long after they have disintegrated and are no more. And there are men whose scintillating memory lights the world long after they have passed from it. These lights which shine in the darkest night are those which illuminate for us the path...*

— Hannah Senesh<sup>1</sup>

Who does not love a good story? Movie producers, playwrights, and authors understand the human fascination with narrative. They appreciate the importance of context and character development. And they know when and how to include elements of dramatic tension — romance, intrigue, tragedy — to capture and hold our attention. Educators, too, can capitalize on students' natural interest in others' lives. Indeed, in striving to promote good character, teachers ought to put before young people exemplars who have struggled and endured, luminaries whose actions demonstrate the human capacity for nobility, integrity, courage, and compassion. By encountering such individuals, students may learn that they are not alone; that others who have gone before them have found ways of coping, of overcoming hardship, of responding to difficult situations in well-considered, constructive ways. To the extent that we teachers carry a repertoire of stories — about both famous and lesser-known individuals — we have at our disposal a vital means of educating for virtue.

By introducing young people to worthy lives, we may, in the words of Plutarch, the first century biographer of notable Greeks and Romans, "arouse the spirit of emulation."<sup>2</sup>

The idea is not, of course, to expose students to individuals whose achievements seem daunting and unreachable, but to illustrate, vividly and concretely, the choices that we are all presented with — in matters both large and small — in the course of our daily lives. Plutarch explained that

[his] design [was] not to write histories, but lives... And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men. Sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their character and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments...<sup>3</sup>

Biography brings into focus not only positive attitudes and attributes, but also human foibles and flaws. Complex and/or ignoble characters make choices that are in their own ways instructive. Our students can learn to judge historical and contemporary figures fairly, from a safe vantage point, engaging in "gossip on a scientific level."<sup>4</sup> In so doing, they can monitor their own tendencies, reflect on their own choices, and consciously better their responses to various situations.

How do we choose from among the repertoire of lives with which we are familiar which to lift into bold relief? Sometimes, the decision is ordained by a curriculum we must follow. Otherwise, we might consider both our audience and our personal interests: Who ought our students to know about? Who do we find particularly fascinating and important?

In my work with teachers I often choose to discuss the life of a prominent educator of character who is little known in this country: Janusz Korczak (1878-1942). I believe that Korczak, a Polish physician, educator, and champion of children's rights, provides for teachers an example of a thoughtful and dedicated practitioner who saw each child's uniqueness, and who — at a time when it was not customary to do so — asked the following useful questions about those in his charge: Who is this child? What is his or her greatest gift? What does he or she fear? How can I make this child feel valued? I believe that teachers ought to try and acquire such information about their students.

I believe that Korczak's orphanages, organized as "just communities," helped children to feel safe and well cared for, to know what it means to treat others and their property with respect, and to earn the esteem that comes from contributing in positive ways to an ordered society. I believe that it is worth studying Korczak's difficult family history, the choices he made that he later regretted, and how he reacted to those who tried to take advantage of him and to those who opposed his ideas.

In studying biography, it also behooves us to ask, "Who influenced and/or inspired this person?" Janusz Korczak, for example, adopted the ideas of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), a Swiss educator who encouraged teachers to be reflective, observant, and loving. Ludwik Krzywicki,

*continued*

a renowned Polish sociologist who was able to intensely focus his mind despite the oppressive conditions in which he was forced to live, was another figure who impressed Korczak. This professor creatively endured life in a cramped, windowless jail cell in Spokpina prison, which he shared with Korczak when they were arrested in 1909, during a wave of Czarist repression of intellectuals. And finally, in his darkest moments, while faced with an increasingly desperate situation in which he and his children were subjected to Nazi rule, Korczak turned to the writings of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the Roman Emperor who endured great suffering and tragedy, who composed *Meditations*, personal reflections in which he strove to comprehend the motives of others.

If we are curious as to how an individual's thinking and dispositions evolved; what, specifically, he or she was up against; and how we might apply lessons from his or her life to our own, our students are likely to discern our passion and to share in our interests. And by bringing biography into our classrooms we not only capture our students' attention and ignite their moral imagination, we also attend to what Nel Noddings terms the "great questions of life": "How should I live? What kind of life is worth living? How do I find meaning in life?"<sup>5</sup> Encouraging children to pose and answer for themselves such questions is the ultimate aim of schooling. Biography can help us to reach this aim. A worthy life makes for the most compelling of stories. It

illustrates that we humans are the sum of our choices, that we each have the power to shape our own destiny.

<sup>1</sup> *Hannah Senesh, a Hungarian Jew who had emigrated to Palestine during World War II, parachuted into Hungary and tried to save Jews trapped in the Nazis' clutch. She was caught and murdered. This quote is an excerpt from her poem, Yesh Kochavim (There are Stars).*

<sup>2</sup> *Lance Morrow, "Plutarch's Exemplary Lives," in Smithsonian (July, 2004) 110.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *I quote here the art historian, Halina Nelken.*

<sup>5</sup> *Nel Noddings, Educating Moral People (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 72.*

*To be published in Education Week in 2005*

## Great Men and Women Inspired by the Lives of Others

### *The Inspiration*

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Cincinnatus >  
George Washington >  
Winston Churchill >  
Benjamin Franklin >  
Anne Sullivan >  
Mahatma Gandhi >  
Florence Nightingale >  
Theodore Roosevelt >  
Johann Pestalozzi >  
Marie Souvestre (teacher) >  
Abigail Adams >  
Elizabeth Cady Stanton >  
Cato >  
Ruth Nichols (aviator) >

### *The Inspired*

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George Washington  
Abraham Lincoln  
John F. Kennedy  
Andrew Carnegie  
Helen Keller  
Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela  
Elizabeth Blackwell  
Franklin Delano Roosevelt  
Janusz Korczak  
Eleanor Roosevelt  
Elizabeth Cady Stanton  
Susan B. Anthony  
Nathan Hale  
Amelia Earhart

**NEW!**

# Great Lives, Vital Lessons

A Character Education Curriculum Resource for Grades 5-8

KATHLEEN CLIFFORD • DEBORAH FARMER • KURT KURTZHALS  
ALISON REICHERT • MEGAN BLACK UY • MARY WORLTON  
KAREN E. BOHLIN AND BERNICE LERNER, EDITORS

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A Character Education Curriculum Resource for Grades 5-8

Karen E. Bohlin and Bernice Lerner, Editors

Kathleen Clifford, Deborah Farmer, Kurt Kurtzhals, Alison Reichert,  
Megan Black Uy, Mary Worlton

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**"This is a great resource for teachers to introduce through their regular curriculum, a very identifiable way for students to learn the more important tenets of civility."**

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ISBN 1-892056-41-0

**\$19.95**

*Great Lives, Vital Lessons* combines well-written biographies, incisive questions, and practical applications with useful primary sources and excellent bibliographies. This book will connect with students. It is perfect for middle-school teachers who wish to bring character education into social studies classrooms.

Peter H. Gibbon

Author, *A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness*

*Great Lives, Vital Lessons* provides teachers with terrific primary source documents and lessons that embody the character traits that we teach. All of the lessons are designed in such a way that teachers can easily choose how much they want to focus on a person or a trait based on how much time they have. It is also very easy to combine these lessons with existing ones in order to add more focus to the character traits without sacrificing any of the content.

Mac Link, 6th & 7th grade social studies teacher, Chapel Hill, N.C.

*Great Lives, Vital Lessons* provides a rich and deep resource for middle school character educators. Drawing from diverse sources and representing men, women, and children from across cultures and time, *Great Lives* will inspire students and allow them to see, through exemplary stories, the power of the human spirit.

Jean Behnke, Head of School, Crossroads Academy, Lyme, N.H.

There are rare moments in a long teaching career when you discover a book that meets your goals and challenges your creativity so perfectly that you wish you'd written it yourself years ago. This is the case with *Great Lives, Vital Lessons*. Challenging teachers and their students to push their thinking beyond simplistic good/bad categories and what responses the teacher wants to hear, *Great Lives, Vital Lessons* is a pearl in a sea of unsophisticated "workbook-y" materials.

Linda Stark, ethics chair and 7th grade English and social studies teacher, Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, N.J.

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# From the **TRENCHES**

## "First Lady to the World": **ELEANOR ROOSEVELT**

by Deborah Farmer Kris

*Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.*

— William Shakespeare

All of history's heroes and scoundrels were once teenagers. I think of that occasionally when I look over a class of seventh grade students. While historians are apt to mine anecdotes about world leaders' youths for shades of significance, we teachers generally do not engage our students in a study of history-makers' early lives. Should we? In some cases, such a process would not be sufficiently relevant to warrant the use of class time. Other times, a single specific episode from a person's youth — such as a run-in with injustice, an important encounter with an influential adult, or an obstacle or illness — yields important insights into the individual's later adult choices. At the very least, such discussions can place a person in historical context, helping students understand the shaping power of Time and Place.

Students are actually unlikely to pass through twelve years of schooling without studying — in depth — at least *one* person's journey toward greatness. The lesson seems obvious: the determination of a forty-six-year-old child welfare advocate (or senator, fire-fighter, soldier, civil rights activist, mother, principal, or Nobel Prize Laureate) is the sum of forty-six years of various choices. If we can trace the seeds of virtue to someone's childhood and young adult years, then isn't it worth helping *today's* young adults see the potential fruits of their present choices?

Eleanor Roosevelt was a woman "born great," at least in terms of family name and socioeconomic status. However, she easily could have receded into the shadows of family history, victim to bad parenting and a

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**"... in spite of timidity and fear, in spite of a lack of special talents, one can find a way to live widely and fully."**

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shy disposition. Later, Eleanor, as First Lady, had "greatness thrust upon her" by virtue of her husband's presidency in a pivotal moment in history. Again, she could have chosen a safer, less public role. Eleanor "achieve[d] greatness" not by birth or station, but through the compassion and determination which took root in her childhood. As she wrote, "About the only value the story of my life may have is to show that one can, even without any particular gifts, overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable if one is willing to face the fact that they must be overcome; that, in spite of timidity and fear, in spite of a lack of special talents, one can find a way to live widely and fully."

I taught *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery* by Russell Freedman in conjunction with a history unit on the Great Depression. Two themes that permeated

the unit were Hope and Courage. Eleanor's life, which became public during the Depression, provided a rich discussion of both themes. I was unprepared, however, for how connected to Eleanor some of my students — girls, in particular — began to feel. I am convinced that many of my students admired Eleanor-the-Adult because they first empathized with Eleanor-the-Child.

Freedman's book spends forty pages describing Eleanor's difficult childhood — including her mother's disdain for her appearance, her father's alcoholism, her parents' early death, and the headaches and insomnia that plagued her. Eleanor wrote, "Looking back it strikes me that my childhood and my early youth were one long battle against fear." With that backdrop, we began to investigate how she traveled from being a frightened child to acting as eloquent "First Lady to the World." We looked at the role education played in her development, particularly the influence of one teacher who "shocked [her] into thinking." I asked students to look for patterns in her life. Students began to note that when life became bleak, Eleanor — as a teenager, young wife, or first lady — would invest herself in the service of others and once again find herself. After one discussion, a student asked me, "Is this why you are always pushing us to do community service? Do you think we're getting too wrapped up in our own problems?" While I didn't claim any ulterior motive, I told her that it's always interesting to see how people "unwrap" themselves from problems, from

self-pity, when they become thus involved. Occasionally, a student's connection with Eleanor Roosevelt has served as a personal inspiration. One student addressed a letter to Eleanor, thanking her for helping her see herself with new eyes. She noted that she, too, felt like an ugly duckling and was plagued with insecurities and nightmares. However, like Eleanor, she felt that compassion was her strength and wrote that she identified with Eleanor's desire to help others. She concluded by saying that Eleanor's story gave her hope for the future. This student was beginning to understand that she had the ability to choose greatness, even if the fashion-conscious peer culture had different standards of worth. She has reread this biography at least once since seventh grade, and told me that Eleanor Roosevelt still provides her with a sense of hope for her own life.

Recently, I gave this book to a young woman in an urban youth group. She is determined to be the first person in her

family to graduate from high school. She read the book in a week, and later relayed the following story: "My goal all year was to make National Honor Society. My grades were good enough, I worked in student council, but the advisor felt I hadn't performed enough community service. I was crushed. I went home and cried. Then I picked up the Eleanor Roosevelt book and reread the story of her childhood. It made me feel a lot better. She may have been rich, but she had it harder than me in a lot of ways, and she still became such an amazing person."

Eleanor Roosevelt — because of her strength *and* her struggles — can help students see how greatness is the work of a lifetime, not an accident of birth or the circumstances of a single moment. As she noted, "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face . . . You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

## RECOMMENDED READING:

### Picture Books

*Eleanor*  
by Barbara Cooney  
Viking Childrens Books, 1996

*Amelia and Eleanor Go For a Ride:*  
*Based on a True Story*  
by Pam Munoz Ryan, Brian Selznick (illus.)  
Hyperion Books, 1999

*When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson*  
by Pam Munoz Ryan, Brian Selznick (illus.)  
Scholastic, 2002

### Young Adult Books

*Eleanor: A Life of Discovery*  
by Russell Freedman  
Houghton Mifflin, 1997  
(Newbery Honor Winner)  
*With Love, Aunt Eleanor: Stories from My Life with the First Lady of the World*  
by Eleanor Roosevelt II  
Scrapbook Press, 2004

*Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*  
Edited by Robert Cohen and Eleanor Roosevelt  
University of North Carolina Press, 2002

### Book Excerpts

*War Peace and All That Jazz*  
by Joy Hakim  
Oxford University Press, 1994  
(Engaging history text covering the 1920s — WWII)

"Can a Woman Ever Be President of the United States?"  
by Eleanor Roosevelt 1935  
in *A Patriot's Handbook*  
Caroline Kennedy, editor  
Hyperion, 2003

*Deborah Farmer Kris is a long-time CAEC associate and a teacher at the Elisabeth Morrow School in Englewood, NJ. She is a co-author, with Karen E. Bohlin and Kevin Ryan, of the Building Character in Schools Resource Guide (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001) and a contributor to Great Lives, Vital Lessons: A Character Education Curriculum Resource for Grades 5-8 (Character Development Group, 2005).*

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national and international contacts of the  
Center for the Advancement of  
Ethics and Character.

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## wisdom from **GREAT LIVES**

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

— Abraham Lincoln,  
Second Inaugural Address

"I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will come out all right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again."

— Anne Frank

"I have gone without food and sleep in order to think; to no avail: it is better to learn."

— Confucius

"You must never so much as think whether you like it or not, whether it is bearable or not; you must never think of anything except the need and how to meet it."

— Clara Barton

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved."

— Helen Keller

"Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service."

— Gandhi

## recommended movies on **GREAT LIVES**

*The Crossing*, 2000  
*The Miracle Worker*, 1962  
*The Miracle Worker*, 2000  
*The Diary of Anne Frank*, 1959

*Gandhi*, 1982  
1776, 1972  
*Martin Luther King, Jr.: "I Have a Dream,"* 1986

## recommended books on **GREAT LIVES**

Freedman, R. *Lincoln: A Photobiography*  
Mooyart, B.M. (trans.) *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*  
Dubowski, C. E. *Clara Barton: Healing the Wounds*  
Freedman, R. *Confucius: The Golden Rule*  
Adair, G. *George Washington Carver*  
Old, W. C. *George Washington, Father of Our Country*  
Marcus, R. B. *Galileo and Experimental Science*  
Gold, G. *Gandhi: A Pictorial Biography*  
Brill, M. T. *John Adams: Second President of the United States (Encyclopedia of Presidents)*  
Petty, A. *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*  
Keller, H. *The Story of My Life*  
Wukovits, John F. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

All quotes and recommended biographies and films are taken from the lessons in *Great Lives, Vital Lessons: A Character Education Curriculum Resource for Grades 5-8* (Character Development Group, 2005). We encourage educators to research movies and books of quality that portray the "great lives" they plan to bring before their students.

## Upcoming **EVENTS** in **CHARACTER** **EDUCATION**

### **April 2-4, 2005 Orlando, FL**

*ASCD's 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference.*

Contact ASCD  
Telephone 800.933.ASCD (2723)  
Fax 703.575.5400  
E-mail member@ascd.org  
Website <http://www.ascd.org>

Be sure to check out Bernice Lerner's presentation on Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> from 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM!

### **April 15, 2005 Boston, MA**

*CAEC Institute, Boston University's School of Education.*

Contact Megan Black Uy  
Time 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM  
Telephone 617.353.3262  
Fax 617.353.4351  
E-mail caec@bu.edu  
Website <http://www.bu.edu/education/caec>

### **May 6, 2005 Boston, MA**

*Character, Courage, and Excellence in Sport:*

*A Workshop for Coaches, Teachers, and Parents*

Sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character and the Institute for Athletic Coaching Education at Boston University's School of Education.

Contact Megan Black Uy, CAEC  
Time 8:30 AM to 2:30 PM  
Telephone 617.353.3262  
Fax 617.353.4351  
E-mail caec@bu.edu  
Website <http://www.bu.edu/education/caec>





CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF ETHICS AND CHARACTER

*"Excellent institute!  
I feel replenished.  
I am motivated and  
determined not only  
to make some good  
changes in my own  
classroom but to help  
strengthen our school  
community's dedica-  
tion to character  
education."*

— Institute  
Participant

*"Thank you, CAEC,  
for allowing me to  
attend. This institute  
was absolutely won-  
derful and character  
education will now  
be the foundation of  
my classroom ethos.  
The presenters did a  
fabulous job! I am  
honored to have  
attended."*

— Institute  
Participant

## CAEC Spring Institute — "Educating Mind and Heart: The Theory and Practice of Character Education"

**When:** Friday, April 15, 2005  
9:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Where:** Boston University School of Management\*  
595 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston

(Directions and parking information will be provided to all registrants)

Through philosophical exploration of virtue, ethics and curriculum integration, learn how to draw upon literature, art, film, and other sources of wisdom to engage students in lively discourse and active learning.

Participants will come away with new insights and practical approaches, able to bring greater depth to their character education efforts. Our Institutes are designed for educators who are beginning to think seriously about the ethical implications of their leadership in classrooms and schools. We invite schools or districts to send teams of teachers or administrators responsible for school leadership or professional development (e.g., lead teachers, curriculum coordinators, principals, superintendents).

For more information: 617.353.3262 or [caec@bu.edu](mailto:caec@bu.edu)

**Friday, April 15, 2005**  
9:00 am to 4:00 pm

*Early registration (before March 25): \$225 first participant, \$200 each additional participant*  
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# OBSERVATIONS on or Near the Topic of GREAT LIVES, VITAL LESSONS

by Stephan Ellenwood, Ed.D.

In one of his few comprehensible statements Kierkegaard advised us, "Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward."

In doing so he was helpful in connecting our understandings about the past with decisions we must make collectively and individually in the present about the future. This helps us avert studying history aridly; that is, as an interesting chronicle – or "for its own sake." W. Somerset Maugham was always wary of studying something "for its own sake." He said those who urge us to do so are the same ones who tell us "they drink the gin for the gin's sake." But once you agree there may be lessons in the past, we also have to agree to be really careful in drawing those lessons. Biographies are perfect for being real careful. Knowledge of the past doesn't automatically instruct us about what to do in the future. At best it can be a good advisor, and then only if we think about it precisely.

Charles Mullett explained succinctly perhaps the fundamental virtue of studying biography. He claimed, "If history becomes anonymous, it becomes inevitable."

History is not just the march of large inexorable forces. It is of further importance to know that history is also the result of individuals making individual decisions. Too often students conclude that history is the automatic evolution of grand themes, such as nationalism, industrialization, war, or globalization. We need to show students how in so many ways the course of those large themes is shaped by famous, and not so famous, individuals making individual or small bore choices.

If our students don't thoroughly understand the interplay between large forces and individual choices, we'll have created one of democracy's most dangerous creatures – civic drones, citizens who passively observe, "Oh, it is warring outside." To prevent such apathy we need to pin down what we can do with biographies in the face of state mandates, frameworks, and required history curricula which sadly are often no more engaging or specific than tables of contents of history textbooks.

One important reform would be to make state mandates no more than 60% of school time; the other 40% should be up to each department and the individual teacher. As a part of that it would be easy to sell the idea that in a lot of history classes a good part of that 40% would benefit from close-in case studies and biographies.

We should also be careful that not all biographies be about the famous, or be selected because of their "lessons" to students. Biographies are ideal for engaging students in the complexity of personal values and public duties. The best education occurs when students fully understand these complexities and clearly see ways in which they can learn from those who have gone before.

At one end of the field of biography we have hagiographies where the historical work is tilted toward exaltations and lessons. Parson Weems fell into that category, but at least he was fully candid. His book title read: *The Life of Washington: With Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honorable to Himself and Exemplary to his Young Countrymen*, 4th edition, *Greatly Improved*. It was only in this edition that the apocryphal cherry tree story was invented to provide a lesson about, of all

things, honesty. He may have been following Carlyle's injunction – historians should "find the great men, clean the dirt from them, and place them on their proper pedestal." Good teachers know how to make their study of biography much richer than that.

Lytton Strachey attempted a reform approach to biographies that became known quickly as the "debunkers." It too was abused by its advocates. Finding our way between biographies as commemorative moralizing or as graceless, cynical debunking of traditional heroes is the history teacher's challenge.

In summary, we would serve our students well if we can find biographies that tell one's story, find biographies that are of lesser known heroes, and show how biographies reach across eras – so they know, for example, Booker T. Washington was a 9-year-old freed slave at the time of Appomattox and how that era shaped some of his ideas and his actions. We must somehow convince students that they are the authors of their own biographies. Good, balanced biographies will show how making one's own story involves a consciousness of one's era as well as of one's own individual circumstances. If we can link such knowledge with students' reflections about how they want their story to turn out, – then we would be teaching the most vital lesson.

*Stephan Ellenwood is Associate Dean of External Funding and Faculty Development as well as Chair of the Curriculum and Teaching Department at Boston University's School of Education.*

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The next issue will spotlight "**Character and Sport.**" The deadline for our next issue is **May 16, 2005**. Please address all correspondence to: Newsletter Managing Editor, Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, 621 Commonwealth Avenue Boston, MA 02215

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