

Humanities Out There Lesson 10: Selling Out

Last quarter we studied Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. The question that book asked was, in a nutshell, "is it proper to rebel against social norms?" The answer was "sort of" and we saw how the toll on the rebellious individual is balanced by the toll on the stagnant social order, and how in some sense they both need the other to function. *Huckleberry Finn* doesn't dither about with this sort of compromising logic, making it clear that social norms are often hypocritical shams, and that we would probably make less mistakes, morally speaking, by doing the opposite of what everyone else thinks is the 'right' thing. So *Huckleberry Finn* poses a different question, which is something like, "how can I be sure that my rebellion is a true rebellion instead of a fake rebellion?" Twain won't give you any easy answers to this question; recall that the book ends by negating its entire plot and allowing its hero to run away from all of his problems.

Considering our lessons on Hawthorne and Twain, and other lessons Cindyann has done on Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Dickinson, et. al, our students should have some sense of the way that literature can be a kind of social rebellion. We will conclude our quarter by discussing how 'art' became 'entertainment' in the 19th-century United States, and the way that this offered both *greater* and *lesser* possibilities for an artist like Twain to create a true voice of protest against the social status quo. If this sounds exceedingly esoteric, it's not. We know this debate well from our own historical moment, particularly in the way we talk about the music industry. Call it the paradox of "selling out."

Teaching issues to discuss:

- 1) I didn't get as many message board comments about the upcoming lesson as I'd hoped to, but certainly enough for us to get a debate going. And even though I had to finish the handouts for my own scheduling purposes, I left enough leeway for us to make some revisions, at least in the Monday meeting. This is part of my initiative towards getting the undergrad teachers more involved in lesson planning. Those of you who stick around in the spring will see us head even further in that direction.
- 2) There are three major issues to consider for teaching Lesson 10. Issue the first... should the debate encompass the entire class simultaneously? We will begin in 4 person (approx.) groups regardless. But from there we could either have a series of 4 on 4 debates, perhaps outdoors, or a class-wide 16 on 16 debate in which the various groups were called in turn to offer one of their arguments.
- 3) Next issue... to what extent should we create a framework for the arguments the students develop? Should we assign them sides? Should we assign them particular pre-determined types or categories of arguments? (From pop music, from literature, etc.)
- 4) Final issue... we've been talking about the advantages and disadvantages of external motivators like candy in the last couple of staff meetings. Meanwhile, I've been trying to think of a way to create an obvious physical marker in the debate process, like the conch they pass around in *Lord of the Flies*. Then it struck me that there was a way to do this that would add another fold to the 'selling out' topic. What if we were to give the students/groups a dollar bill for every successful argument? Or perhaps even take the dollar away if another group successfully rebutted that argument? How would this work? Is it the most cynical idea I've ever had or would it make some kind of interesting educational point?

Things you should do to prepare for Wednesday

- 1) Read what's in this packet currently and also take notes about any further decisions we make in the staff meeting. Bring it to the school on Wednesday and Friday because you'll need it for cribnotes.
- 2) Finish *Huckleberry Finn*. Take particular note of the cop-out ending and of the way Twain depicts any interactions between art and commerce (e.g. the "Royal Nonesuch")
- 3) Make sure your carpool is OK for both days.

Some stuff that happens after Wednesday

- 1) Please answer the end-of-quarter survey I put on the class message board by Wednesday, February 21. Many of the suggestions to last quarter's survey were incorporated into our lessons this quarter, so I take this very seriously. Check the anonymous box if it suits you better.
- 2) Please follow the instructions on the case study essay prompt. If you are reading this sentence and you don't know what that is, this would be a good time to raise your hand and remind me!
- 3) I would like to have a special planning session during the first week of spring quarter because next quarter's lessons are going to be very different, centered around a play performance, and I want some help brainstorming ideas and formats. Attendance will be optional for spring quarter teachers, but I would especially like the following people to attend, regardless of whether you will be teaching in the spring or not: *Nancy, Guille, Thomas, Uyen, Tina, Danielle, Catherine*. You all missed either a meeting or a teaching session due to scheduling conflicts. So there is nothing punitive here, I am just asking you to be my Spring Quarter Planning Task Force. As I said any other interested parties are welcome in the Task Force.

0:00-0:05 Remaining satire/parody sketches

I hope they still have their lines written down. Five days is an awfully long time in the life on an 11th grader.

0:05-0:15 Aaron's PowerPoint

The purpose of the PowerPoint is to introduce the debating topic via some historical context about Mark Twain's literary marketing innovations and via cross-referencing rap songs by Jay-Z and Talib Kweli.

0:15-0:30 Debate Prep

As with last quarter's trial exercise and this quarter's satire exercise, we know that students can give a competent oral performance if they are allowed sufficient time to develop arguments in their groups and *write them down*. Guidelines for leading this exercise T.B.D. in staff meetings.

0:30-0:50 Debate exercise

Guidelines for leading this exercise T.B.D. in staff meetings, along with suggestions for what should be on the back side of the students' handout.

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The Monday staff meeting came up with the basic parameters for tomorrow's exercises, but we made some revisions in today's staff meeting, as follows. You should probably print this out.

1) Satire scenes as necessary

2) Powerpoint

3) Break into groups. The purpose of your group is to develop arguments for its position. The two positions are as follows: Position X = Commercial goals and artistic goals can work in conjunction vs. Position O = commercial and artistic goals will ultimately always conflict. See below for what your group's position is and my X's and O's will make more sense.

4) Possible arguments or examples can be drawn from personal experience, Huckleberry Finn, other books from Cindyann's English class, other books from other classes, and pop culture. It might be wise to help your students develop a variety of those different types of arguments although my handout will not actually specify that they do so.

5) Your group should develop at least one specific argument for each student in the group. They should write it down and be prepared to speak it. The student handout will be the hip-hop and William Dean Howells stuff on the front and five blanks for writing in their arguments on the back.

6) The process you use to develop these arguments depends on how you think your group works well. You could give them purely independent projects or the arguments could emerge from dialogue and discussion amongst the group as a whole. Just make sure each argument is assigned to a person, even if you develop extra arguments.

7) One student in your group is the devil's advocate. You may want to assign this position to the most competent critical thinker in the group, or the most comfortable speaker. Or you might let them choose. The devil's advocate will anticipate at least one counter-argument that the opposing faction might use. Again, they can work on this idea collaboratively if need be. Explain that the role of the devil's advocate is similar to the role of the scout team in football or to what Eminem does in the climactic rap battle in 8 Mile. We made these same analogies during the trial exercise last quarter. The point is that knowing what the opposition might say is a good way to be prepared to make a strong argument against them. This is also on the handout.

8) About 15 minutes before the bell I will stop the preparation activity and move everyone outside. We will line up in rows as follows. Note the X's and O's so you know which position your group is taking and which other tutor's group yours is paired with. Note this is just an example and it doesn't matter where the X's and O's are as long as the correct X is paired with the correct O. The groups should stand close enough together that they get some visual of the groups parallel to them but far enough apart that they can't really get distracted by hearing what they're saying. Groups opposing each other should stand close together as if threatening aggressively.

X (Chris) ---- X (Bethany) ---- X (Thomas)---- X (Nancy & Jessica)
O (Saul) ----- O (Emily) ----- O (My) ----- O (Uyen)

X (Julie) ---- X (Hong) ---- X (Theresa) ----- X (Michael)
O (Josh) ---- O (Guille) ---- O (Catherine) ---O (Tina & Danielle)

9) Before the debate begins I will give half of you a ball, probably a racquetball. This is the Ball of Knowledge. Or something. I will undoubtedly write some kind of stupid name on it.

10) The next thing that must immediately happen is for you to announce to the devil's advocate that he/she has been traded to the opposing team. This will be a surprise. Tell them that since they were representing the opposing team's idea anyway that they are a traitor and they might as well work with them. Basically you are trading the opposing team one student for one of your students.

11) I will then blow a whistle. (Where the hell do I get a whistle?) This begins the debate. Have the O devil's advocate (now playing for X) give his/her argument, then the X devil's advocate (now playing for O) give his/her argument. After that, have one X student read his/her argument, then one O student, then one X student, etc. until you're all out of arguments. The ball should be tossed to the student giving the argument at each step.

12) If we don't lose our battle with the bell like last week, once all the arguments are stated tell your students that the debate is over and they now have the chance to decide which side they "really" support.

13) Some groups will finish faster than others, so if you need to kill more time, toss the ball, talk about college, start another debate, etc. This might be a good opportunity to remind your students that this is our last week and they might see you again in April.