



5

# LIBERATING THE CURRICULUM

CURRICULUM IS MORE THAN PIECES OF INFORMATION, MORE THAN SUBJECT MATTER, MORE EVEN THAN THE DISCIPLINES. CURRICULUM IS AN ONGOING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PROBLEM OF DETERMINING WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES ARE MOST WORTHWHILE. WITH EACH PERSON AND EACH SITUATION, THAT PROBLEM TAKES ON UNIQUE SHADINGS AND DIFFERENT MEANINGS.



as Chief Executive. He brought to the Presidency the rigid dispositions of mind of his Scottish heritage as well as a sense of destiny and the pious teachings of his father and his father-in-law, both Presbyterian ministers.

In equal measure he brought dazzling intellectual gifts and credentials: educated at Princeton, he graduated from the University of Virginia Law School and went on to earn a Doctorate in Government from Johns Hopkins University. He taught at Wesleyan and Bryn Mawr before returning to Princeton as professor of political economy and jurisprudence, where he later served as president for eight years, starting in 1902.

Woodrow Wilson's big brain was matched by his pragmatic heart, and he found himself often chomping at the bit, eager to try out his reformist ideas in the real rough and tumble world of practical life. In 1911 he dived head-first from the ivory tower into the political mix, becoming Governor of New Jersey. And in 1912, when Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft split the Republican vote, Wilson became President.

### Difficulties Facing the President

In his first term, Wilson supported and passed America's first-ever federal progressive income tax.



### Woodrow Wilson-The People's Choice, the Last Straw

In a move that led to noisy protests from civil rights groups, and is still criticized today, Wilson supported segregation in many federally funded agencies, and this support led to widespread firing of black workers.

Wilson's second term centered on WWI. He had based his reelection campaign on the slogan, "He kept us out of war!" but US neutrality was short-lived. When the German Foreign Secretary offered to return Arizona, New Mexico and Texas to Mexico if they would ally with Germany in the event of war, Wilson asked Congress to declare war in April 1917.

In the late stages of war, Wilson issued his famous fourteen points, his view of a post-war world that



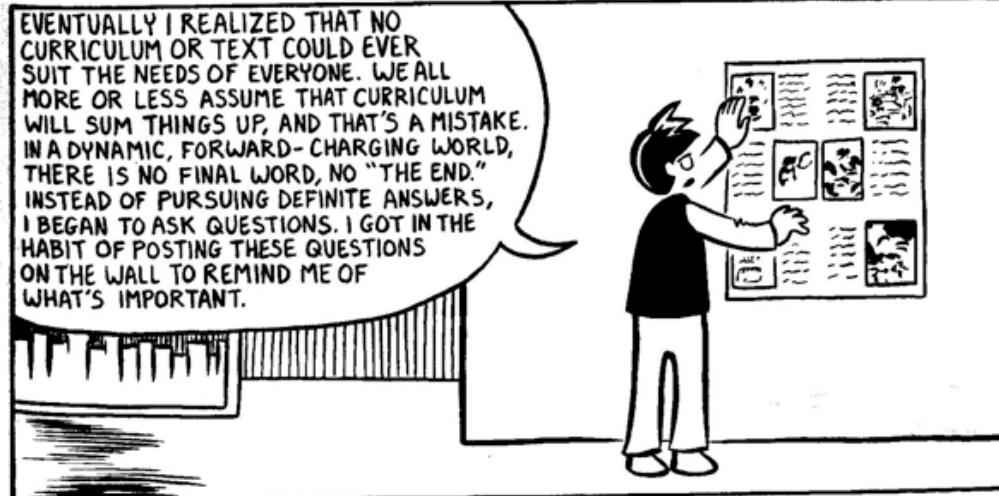
WHEN I WAS A STUDENT, I USED TEXTBOOKS TO PUT MYSELF TO SLEEP. I FOUND THEM ANESTHETIZING...

THE VAPID, FORMULAIC STYLE IN WHICH THEY ARE WRITTEN FUNCTIONS AS A SORT OF MUZAC FOR THE MIND.

WHEN I BECAME A TEACHER, I BEGAN A SEARCH FOR BETTER TEXTS... SOMETHING MORE HONEST, MULTICULTURAL, NON-SEXIST...



EVENTUALLY I REALIZED THAT NO CURRICULUM OR TEXT COULD EVER SUIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE. WE ALL MORE OR LESS ASSUME THAT CURRICULUM WILL SUM THINGS UP, AND THAT'S A MISTAKE. IN A DYNAMIC, FORWARD-CHARGING WORLD, THERE IS NO FINAL WORD, NO "THE END." INSTEAD OF PURSUING DEFINITE ANSWERS, I BEGAN TO ASK QUESTIONS. I GOT IN THE HABIT OF POSTING THESE QUESTIONS ON THE WALL TO REMIND ME OF WHAT'S IMPORTANT.





**ARE CHALLENGES FROM CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY FAIR GAME FOR INVESTIGATION?**

I DON'T KNOW ALL THE ANSWERS. NOT ONLY DO I NOT KNOW HOW TO SOLVE GLOBAL PROBLEMS LIKE ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, I DON'T EVEN KNOW THE SOLUTION FOR HOW TO GET KELYN TO SETTLE DOWN AND FOCUS. WHAT I CAN DO IS TRUST MY STUDENTS TO TACKLE BIG QUESTIONS IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS. OUR CLASSROOM CAN BECOME A PROBLEM-SOLVING INCUBATOR.

**IS PRODUCTIVE WORK GOING ON?**

I'M INTERESTED IN WORK THAT IS PURPOSEFUL AND ENGAGING FOR ME AND MY STUDENTS. I'M INTERESTED IN THE DIGNITY OF WORK, AND IN THE HUMAN DESIRE TO MARK OUR EXISTENCE THROUGH WORK. MUCH OF THE "WORK" OF SCHOOL IS NOT WORK AT ALL — IT IS MAKE-WORK OR BUSY-WORK, MEANINGLESS STUFF TO OCCUPY OUR TIME. I WANT CLASSROOM WORK TO BE IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS, TO ME, AND WHEN POSSIBLE, TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY.



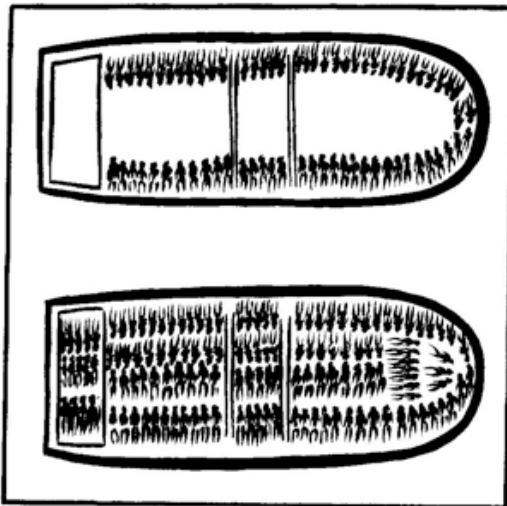
**ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCOVERY AND SURPRISE?**

I'M INTERESTED IN STUDENTS CONSTRUCTING THEIR OWN KNOWLEDGE AND FEELING POWERFUL AND ENERGIZED ENOUGH TO GO FURTHER IN THEIR EXPECTATIONS. THE MOTIVATION AND SELF-ESTEEM THAT COME FROM AUTHENTIC DISCOVERY AND REAL ACCOMPLISHMENT MAKE CONVENTIONAL MOTIVATION TACTICS SEEM SILLY. I WANT TO BE SURE THAT MY CURRICULUM PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE DISCOVERIES.



**IS THE WORK LINKED TO STUDENT QUESTIONS OR INTERESTS?**

I'M CONCERNED THAT SCHOOL BE A WELCOMING PLACE, A CREATIVE PLACE FOR STUDENTS TO WORK ON THEIR OWN CONCERNS. A LOT OF WHAT GOES ON IN SCHOOL IS OF THE "TAKE-THIS-PILL-BECAUSE-I-KNOW-WHAT'S-GOOD-FOR-YOU" VARIETY. I DON'T WANT MY CLASS TO DRIVE CHILDREN OUT; RATHER, I WANT TO DEVELOP MY AGENDA IN LIGHT OF THEIRS.



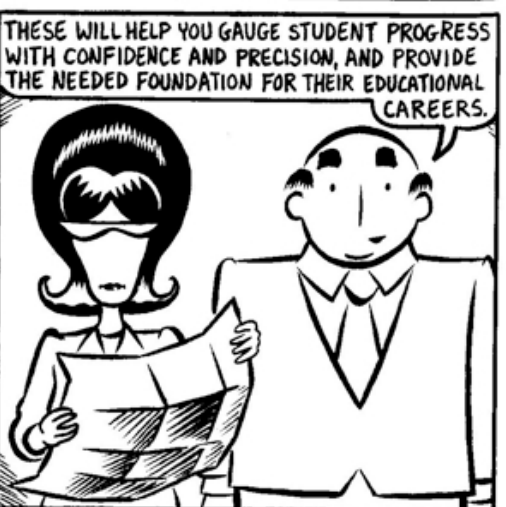
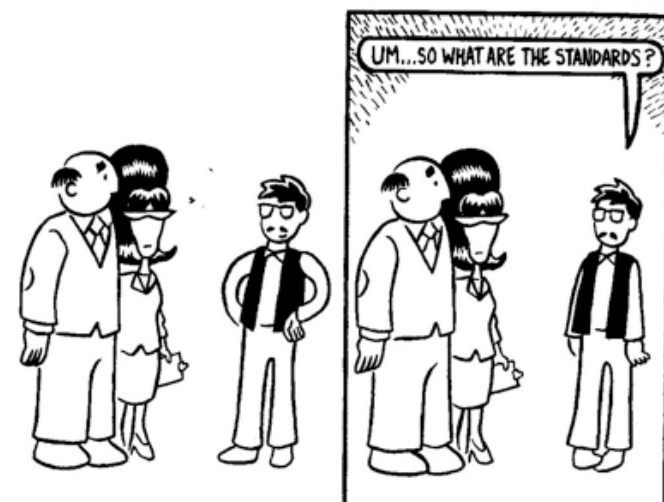
**ARE STUDENTS ACTIVELY ENGAGED WITH PRIMARY SOURCES AND HANDS-ON MATERIALS?**

I WANT CHILDREN TO EXPLORE THE WORLD IN ORDER TO TAKE MEANING FROM IT AND TO MAKE SENSE OF IT. I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THEIR FEEDING ON PREDIGESTED MATERIALS; I WANT THEM TO GET RIGHT UP NEXT TO WHAT THEY'RE STUDYING, TO TOUCH IT AND SMELL IT. SLAVERY AS A FEW PAGES IN A TEXT BOOK IS SANITIZED AND SMOOTH, BUT SLAVE NARRATIVES, ACTUAL BILLS OF SALE, AND CONGRESSIONAL DEBATES—THAT'S MORE REAL, AND IT OPENS SPACES FOR DIGGING DEEPER.

**IS WORK IN MY CLASSROOM PURSUED TO ITS FAR LIMITS?**

I OFTEN WONDER IF WE COULDN'T GO ONE MORE STEP, ASK ONE MORE QUESTION, BRING IN ONE MORE RESOURCE PERSON, TAKE ONE MORE TRIP, FIGURE OUT ONE MORE ACTIVITY. I WORRY THAT TOO MUCH OF WHAT KIDS EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL IS SKIMMING ALONG THE SURFACE OF KNOWLEDGE AND NEVER REALLY PLUNGING IN. SOME TEACHERS SAY, "MAKE IT SIMPLE," BUT MY JOB IS KEEPING IT COMPLEX. COVERING A ZILLION ITEMS MAY NOT BE AS REWARDING AS PURSUING SOMETHING FULLY, DEEPLY, TRULY, AND WELL.







ALICE JEFFERSON TEACHES 4TH GRADE IN A CITY SCHOOL.



EVERY YEAR SHE DOES A SUSTAINED STUDY ON A TOPIC SHE KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT.



MEREDITH MCMONIGLE WAS RYAN'S HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER.



SHE USED A REQUIRED TEXT AND MADE IT CLEAR TO ALL THAT IT WAS REQUIRED, BUT SHE TOOK ANOTHER STEP: EACH UNIT WAS ENHANCED WITH ALTERNATIVE TEXTS, AS WELL AS ART, POETRY, AND FICTION THAT DEFINED THE ERA.



SHE CHOOSES LARGE AND AVAILABLE TOPICS LIKE "WHALES," "QUILTING," OR "PAPER," AND PROVIDES SPACE ON A BOOK SHELF AND AN ACTIVITY TABLE DEVOTED TO THIS SPECIAL STUDY.



WHATEVER TOPIC ALICE CHOOSES SEEMS SUDDENLY TO BE EVERYWHERE. OF COURSE, IT WAS THERE ALL THE TIME, BUT CONSCIOUS FOCUS BRINGS IT FRONT AND CENTER.



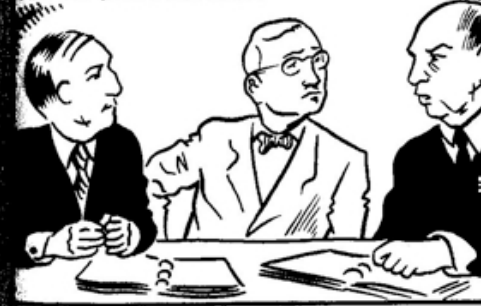
ALICE SAYS THE SPECIAL TOPICS PLAN KEEPS HER ALIVE AS A TEACHER — ENGAGED, INTELLECTUALLY CURIOUS, ALWAYS LEARNING. HER OWN ENERGY SPARKS UP HER STUDENTS, AS WELL. NEW DISCOVERIES AND EXPERIENCES ARE DRAWN INTO THE VORTEX AND FUEL FURTHER WORK.



SHE HAS OVERTHROWN THE I-KNOW-YOU-DON'T-KNOW STANCE, AND CREATED AN ETHOS OF COLLECTIVE INQUIRY — STUDENTS AND TEACHERS SHOULDER TO SHOULDER INTO THE UNKNOWN.



ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ATOMIC BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI, THE STANDARD TEXTBOOK PRESENTS THE HEROIC AND STEADY ACTIONS OF PRESIDENT TRUMAN AS HE DROPPED THE BIG ONE AND BESEECHED GOD TO GUIDE HIM SO HE MAY USE THE BOMB "IN HIS WAYS AND FOR HIS PURPOSES."



HOWARD ZINN'S *A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES*, KEIJI NAKAZAWA'S MANGA SERIES *BAREFOOT GEN*, AND DOCUMENTARY FILMS LIKE *ATOMIC CAFE* REVEAL THE UNITED STATES AS A NATION INTENT ON DEMONSTRATING ITS NEW WEAPON, AND A JAPANESE CITIZENRY DECIMATED AS A CONSEQUENCE.



SHE WANTED HER CLASS TO EXAMINE THE CONTRAST BETWEEN TEXTS. THIS PROVIDED A LESSON ABOUT THE SUBJECTIVITY OF HISTORY, AND A BROADER LIFE-LESSON ABOUT CULTURAL AGENDAS AND THE NEED TO ALWAYS QUESTION PERSPECTIVE, STANDPOINT, AND AUTHORSHIP.



DANNY MORALES-DOYLE TEACHES HIGH SCHOOL CHEMISTRY.



IN HIS CLASSROOM, THE STUDY OF METALS WENT DEEPER THAN THE PERIODIC TABLE OF ELEMENTS.



ONE ASSIGNMENT WAS FOR STUDENTS TO WRITE A LOVE LETTER EXPLAINING TO THEIR FUTURE PARTNER WHAT KIND OF ENGAGEMENT RING SHE OR HE WOULD BUY THEM.



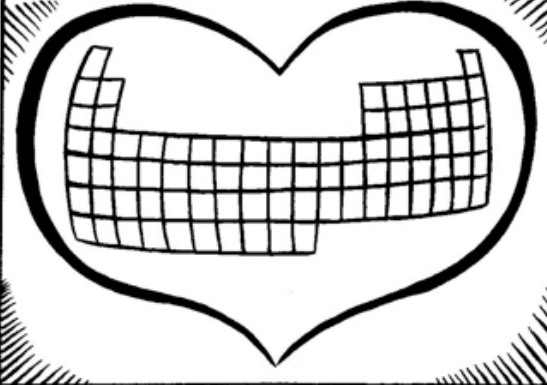
RESEARCHING THE ELEMENTS IN ENGAGEMENT RINGS, STUDENTS DISCOVERED GOLD MINES AND "BLOOD DIAMONDS," VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION IN AFRICA, ALL FUELED BY OUR LOVE OF BLING.



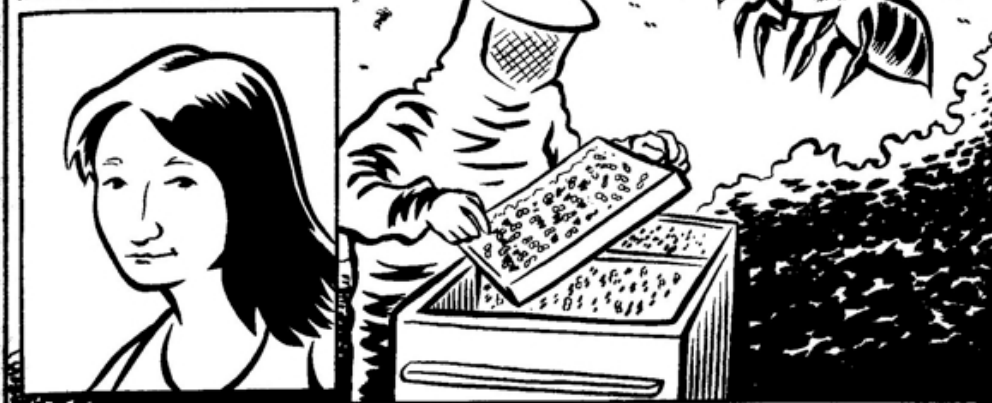
TEENAGE FASCINATION WITH LOVE AND ROMANCE DROVE A MANDATORY UNIT OUTSIDE THE LAB AND INTO THE WIDER WORLD.



STANDARDS ARE BENIGN. WITH A LITTLE EXTRA WORK, TEACHERS CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY WANT TO DO, DEVELOP IT FULLY, THEN MAP IT ON TO WHAT THEY NEED TO DO.



SUE HUBBELL ISN'T A TEACHER AT ALL. SHE'S A BEEKEEPER. BUT HER JOURNALS CONTAIN INSIGHTS WE CAN USE.



*Beekeepers are an opinionated lot, each sure that his methods alone are the proper ones. When I first began keeping bees, the diversity of passionately held opinions bewildered me. But now that I have hives in locations scattered over a thousand-square-mile area, I think I understand it.*

*Frosts come earlier in some places...*



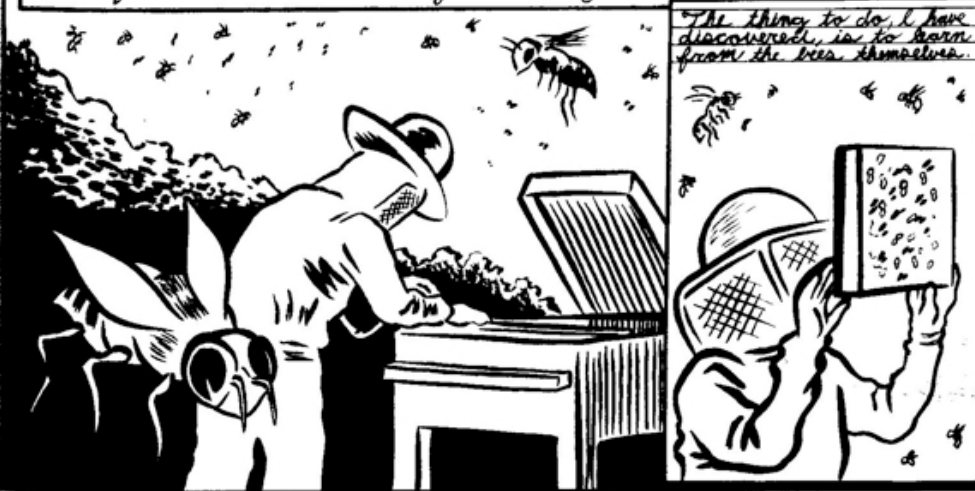
*...in others, it's spring comes later.*



*Rainfall is not the same. The soils, and the flowering plants they support, are unlike...*



*I have learned that as a result of these variations I must keep the bees, variously, in one place or another. They find it difficult to understand why practices that have proved successful for them do not work for others. But I have learned that I must treat the bees in one yard quite differently from the way I do those even thirty miles away!*



*The thing to do, I have discovered, is to learn from the bees themselves.*



EACH OF YOU IS REQUIRED TO WRITE A COMPLETE SENTENCE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE HERE IN THE PARK.



WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT DO YOU SMELL? WHAT DO YOU HEAR? WHAT DO YOU FEEL?



IT'S SO MUCH! BIGGER THAN TV EVEN! I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN...



THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT.



# KEEPING TRACK

THE ROOT OF THE WORD "EVALUATION" IS "VALUE," AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT INCLUDES UNDERSTANDING WHAT STUDENTS VALUE AND BUILDING FROM THERE. STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW THAT THEIR PRESENCE IN THE CLASSROOM IS BOTH VALUED AND VALUABLE. AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IS INSIDE-OUT RATHER THAN OUTSIDE-IN. IT IS AN ATTEMPT TO GET AWAY FROM SORTING A MASS OF STUDENTS AND CLOSER TO THE TEACHER'S QUESTION: "GIVEN WHAT I KNOW NOW, HOW SHOULD I TEACH THIS PARTICULAR STUDENT?"

