

RCAH 292B: Engagement and Reflection

Section 002	Mon and Wed, 12:40 - 2:30 PM
Spring 2013	Snyder C203
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Office hours: by appointment	355-0212

This civic engagement class will focus on how the "big ideas" that young elementary school students find interesting can be discussed with them in an exciting and fruitful way. The "big ideas" include moral concepts like bravery, friendship, fairness, and justice as well as concepts such as beauty, identity, and even the meaning of life. The goal of this class is not to convince these students that particular interpretations of these ideas and others like them are right (or more correct) than others. It is to teach them how to discuss these "big ideas" respectfully, joyfully, and productively, that is, to introduce them to the game of philosophy.

We will use Thomas Wartenberg's book, *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy Through Children's Literature*, as our primary text. Wartenberg's undergraduate students have taught these ideas to elementary school students for many years, and this book explains the underlying theory behind the project and also includes very practical advice on how to teach these young students.

The most distinctive thing about his approach is that it relies exclusively on children's picture books that young readers likely will encounter in the course of their primary education or at home. Many of them you may remember from your youth, for example: *Frog and Toad Together*, *The Giving Tree*, *Morris the Moose*, and *Emily's Art*. We will read, discuss, re-draw, and reenact these and other stories in small and large groups with these young children.

Before meeting with our young community partners, we will spend the first three weeks in class ourselves discussing what it means to approach these ideas from a philosophical point of view.

The web site for *Big Ideas for Little Kids* is enormously helpful and we will be consulting it regularly. http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page.

The magazine *Philosophy Now* provides a wide range of short, very readable articles on contemporary problems as well as historical figures in philosophy. Back issues of it are available on reserve in the RCAH Language and Media Center.

Book Required for Purchase:

- Thomas Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, ISBN #978-1-60709-335-0

ANGEL Electronic Coursepack (eCSPK)

An additional set of short required readings can be found on the ANGEL site for our Section 2 of RCAH 292B. These readings will depend upon the interests of our 3rd grade students and our own philosophical interests in the "big ideas" we are studying. The readings can be found under the "Lessons" heading in the horizontal menu bar on the ANGEL site for our section. You should print out and keep them.

We have also made pdf copies of all of the children's picture books that Wartenberg discusses in *Big Ideas*, plus several others that raise interesting philosophical questions. These too can be found on the ANGEL site for the course under the Manage>Course Files Manager> Picture Books tabs.

Learning goals:

RCAH students will learn several related skills during the semester. You will learn to

- elicit and clarify elementary school students' questions about "big ideas"
- lead respectful and enjoyable discussions among these students about "big ideas"
- encourage them to be more self-reflective about their assumptions and opinions on "big ideas"
- learn to think and write reflectively about this experience
- work collaboratively to design classroom exercises and performances that embody "big ideas"

RCAH Graduate Fellows:

We are very fortunate to have two RCAH Graduate Fellows working with us this semester, both very experienced teaching younger students. You can read more about their interests on the RCAH web site. Here are short sketches of their relevant experiences and interests.

- **Mark Balawender** (<http://rcah.msu.edu/people/student/balawender>) is an experienced teacher and a doctoral student in the Department of Philosophy with a specialization in Peace Studies and Critical Social Theory who has taught and supervised other students teaching philosophy for kids for several years. He was part of the small planning group that worked with our elementary school partners last year to set up this program.

- **Jon Wargo** (<http://rcah.msu.edu/people/student/wargo>) is an experienced K-12 teacher and now a doctoral student in the College of Education's Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education Program. He has undergraduate degrees in English and Gender Studies, and has taught Children's and Young Adult Literature in the MSU Department of Teacher Education.

Mark and Jon will be working with us closely to implement this program and to assess how well our elementary school students are acquiring philosophical skills and learning how to put them to use in their own academic lives. They will be evaluating which picture books and classroom activities worked most effectively with our elementary school students.

Formats:

At Donley Elementary School

We will be working in two 3rd grade classrooms at Donley Elementary School in East Lansing. Donley is on the corner of Hagadorn and Lake Lansing Rd. in East Lansing. This is a short CATA bus ride from campus on the #24 bus.

- **Donley on Mondays (DM).** On Mondays, approximately half of the RCAH 292B students will teach in Stephanie Krumbach's classroom from 1:20-2:20 PM. Approximately half (9) of the RCAH 292B students will be working at Donley on Mondays in this classroom.
- **Donley on Wednesdays (DW).** On Wednesdays, the other half will teach in Josh Robertson's classroom from 1:20-2:20 PM. The other half of the RCAH 292B students will be working at Donley on Wednesdays in this classroom.

These one-hour sessions at Donley will allow adequate travel time within the regularly scheduled time for our section of RCAH 292B (MW, 12:40-2:30 PM)

The format for the **DM** and **DW** groups at Donley may vary slightly from week to week, but in general it will involve small teams of three RCAH 292B students working with small groups of elementary school students (approximately 7 in each group), reading and discussing the picture books selected for our project.

We will spend nine weeks total at Donley, the first six weeks working with selected picture books and the last three weeks preparing and hosting the Donley Philosophy Fair. At least for the first few picture books, each DM and DW group will spend two weeks on one book at a time. This will allow adequate time for discussion and some active learning exercises about the book's "big idea" so that the 3rd graders will be able to make the idea their own. Both DM and DW groups will begin with

two weeks on the *Frog and Toad Together* story "Dragons and Giants." After that they may choose different books from a list of philosophically interesting picture books provided on the *Big Ideas* web site or stick more closely to the stories that Wartenberg uses to illustrate "big ideas" in his book. In other words, gradually the DM and DW groups will have more freedom to choose, within the very broad framework set up in *Big Ideas*, the philosophical topics and picture books they believe are best suited to their Donley students

At the RCAH

On the days they are not teaching at Donley, RCAH 292B students will meet in Snyder C203 from 12:40-2:30 to discuss readings, review their past work at Donley, and plan their lessons for the next Donley class. This means that once we begin teaching at Donley in the fourth week of the semester, most weeks the **DM** group will meet in Snyder C203 on Wednesdays, and the **DW** group will meet in Snyder C203 on Mondays.

The format for these Snyder C203 class meetings will be a **learning circle** in which RCAH 292B students will be presented with several organizing questions or issues for discussion sometimes in small groups but usually in one large circle. The distinctive feature of a learning circle is the way that it is open to the ideas of all the members of the circle and encourages participation. Participants are always respectful of the views of others, no matter how much they may agree or disagree with them. The learning circle is not a debating contest or a series of monologues. Its purpose is to explore difficult questions in a mutually respectful dialogue.

Assignments and Assessment of Student Learning

There are five required assignments, three of which are graded writing assignments. Students must pass both of the ungraded "pass/no pass" assignments to receive a passing grade for the course.

- **Dialogical Journal.** Each team of three RCAH students must keep a shared electronic dialogical journal of their experiences in the civic engagement project. This can be done using Google.docs, for example. The dialogical journal will be due three times during the semester, and each team member is required to make one primary entry and comment on the entries of the other two members, hence the name "dialogical." Of course, the hope is that each comment will prompt further reflection so that team members will want to respond to the comments of one another.

Pass/No Pass

- **Background Essays.** Each student will be responsible for writing two short (200-400 word) essays on two of the "big ideas" to help other members of his or her 3-person team prepare for their work at Donley. These background essays should provide an overview of some of the more interesting approaches to or debates about the idea in question. They

will be due before the lesson planning meeting in Snyder C203 prior to the DM or DW engagement meetings. During the first three weeks of the semester, students will be given more concrete directions and references for writing these Background Essays and some models to consider.

2 @10% each = 20% of Final Course Grade

- **Midterm Reflection Essay.** This will be a reflection on the challenges faced, obstacles encountered, and achievements accomplished roughly midway through the course. 3-person teams will serve as peer commenting groups for the rough draft of this essay and then revised essays will be turned in for individual grades. Approximately 1500-2000 words in length.

30% of Final Course Grade

- **Donley Philosophy Fairs.** During the last three weeks of the semester each small group of seven Donley students and their three RCAH 292B team leaders will compose and perform a philosophically inspired presentation about one or more of the "big ideas" they have explored during the course. This can draw upon class exercises they have already done or it can be a new project. It may include photos and images students have taken or found, poetry they have written, short skits, or any other performance, exhibit, or installation they decide upon. The two Philosophy Fairs will be held during our **DM** and **DW** class periods at Donley for other students, teachers, and parents.

Pass/No Pass

- **Final Reflection Essay.** This will be a reflection on the overall of value of the course for your elementary school students and for yourself. What have you and they learned about some of the "big ideas" we've discussed them? How has that learning occurred? What could be done to build on that learning or remedy some of the problems you've encountered along the way? Approximately 2000-2500 words in length.

50% of Final Course Grade

Policy on Academic Freedom and Integrity

Article 2.3.3 of the *Academic Freedom Report* states that "the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the University's *General Student Regulations* 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades, and the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades, which are included in *Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide*, apply to student conduct in all RCAH courses.

Policy on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (TTY).

Policy on religious observance

Please inform me within the first two weeks of the semester if you will need to miss class for religious observance so that we can work out alternative arrangements.

Calendar of Topics and Assignments

We are proceeding in an open-textured way. That is while the calendar provides a framework for reading and discussion, exactly how we proceed from class to class will depend upon the pace that you set.

The first two or three weeks will be devoted to planning our future calendar and introducing some of the key philosophical concepts and language that you will need to be successful.

In those first weeks we'll talk about some general views about the nature of the philosophical enterprise. Philosophy has been around a long time, but that doesn't mean that everyone agrees on what it is. We'll also go over some rudimentary philosophical ideas about arguments, discussions, and knowledge. What is a sound philosophical argument? How should a philosophical discussion take place? What does it mean to distinguish, for example, between knowledge, information, opinion, and belief?

	Readings	Topics/Assignments
Monday, Jan 7	- Plato, <i>The Apology of Socrates</i> http://socrates.clarke.edu/aplg0100.htm - Plato, "The Cave Allegory" (eCSPK)	What is philosophy?
Wednesday, Jan 9	- Katz, "The Lost Dialogues - Mr. Socrates" (eCSPK)	

Monday, Jan 14	- Critchley, "What is a Philosopher?" (eCSPK) - Gutting, "Philosophy - What's the Use?" (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Jan 16	- Wallace, "The Use of a Philosopher" (eCSPK)	
Friday, Jan 18		
Monday, Jan 21	MLK, Jr. Day	
Wednesday, Jan 23	- Wartenberg, <i>BILK</i> , Part I, pp.3-34 - Gregory, <i>Teaching Philosophy for Children</i> http://www.prx.org/pieces/66128-teaching-philosophy-for-children-with-maughn-gr#description	What is Philosophy for Children?
Monday, Jan 28	DM:, <i>BILK</i> , Part II, pp.37-60	What is a lesson plan?
Wednesday, Jan 30	DW: Wartenberg, <i>BILK</i> , Part II, pp.37-60 Dragons and Giants (eCSPK)	What is a lesson plan?
Friday, Feb 1		
Monday, Feb 4	DM: <i>BILK</i> , chs 8-9 Dragons and Giants (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Feb 6	DW: <i>BILK</i> , chs 8-9 Frederick (eCSPK)	
		First Dialogical Journal due
Monday, Feb 11	DM: <i>BILK</i> , chs 8-9 Frederick (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Feb 13	DW: <i>BILK</i> , chs 10-11 TBD (eCSPK)	
Monday, Feb 18	No DM (all students meet in Snyder C203)	
Wednesday, Feb 20	No DW (all students meet in Snyder C203)	
Friday, Feb 22		Second Dialogical Journal due
Monday, Feb 25	DM: <i>BILK</i> , chs 10-11 Story tbd by DM group (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Feb 27	DW: <i>BILK</i> , chs 10-11 Story tbd by DW group (eCSPK)	

Friday, Mar 1		Midterm Reflection Essay due
March 4-8	SPRING BREAK	
Monday, Mar 11	DM: <i>BILK</i> , chs 10-11 Story tbd by DM group (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Mar 13	DW: <i>BILK</i> Topic and Story tbd by DW group (eCSPK)	
Monday, Mar 18	DM: <i>BILK</i> , topic and story tbd by DM Group (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Mar 20	DW: <i>BILK</i> , topic and story tbd by DW Group (eCSPK)	
Friday, Mar 22		Third Dialogical Journal
Monday, Mar 25	DM: <i>BILK</i> , topic and story tbd by DM Group (eCSPK)	
Wednesday, Mar 27	DW: <i>BILK</i> , topic and story tbd by DW group (eCSPK)	
Monday, Apr 1	No DM (all students meet in Snyder C203)	Review and planning for Philosophy Fair and Final Reflection Essay
Wednesday, Apr 3	No DW (all students meet in Snyder C203)	Review and planning for Philosophy Fair and Final Reflection Essay
Monday, Apr 8	DM: rehearsing Donley Presentation	
Wednesday, Apr 10	DW: rehearsing Donley Presentation	
Monday, Apr 15	DM: rehearsing Donley Presentation	
Wednesday, Apr 17	DW: rehearsing Donley Presentation	
Monday, Apr 22	DM: Donley Philosophy Fair	
Wednesday, Apr 24	DW: Donley Philosophy Fair	
Wednesday, May 1 10 AM - 12 Noon	FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD	Final Reflection Essay