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The Case for Studying Character(s) in the Literature Classroom

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The Increasing Presence of Character Education

In response to increased violence, bullying, and anti-social behavior among young people in our schools and on our streets (Akiba, M., LeTendre, G., Baker, D., & Goesling, B., 2002; Leming, 1996; Males, 2001; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Smagorinsky, 2002; Tendero, 2000), advocates of character education have proposed and instituted a number of programs designed to teach students to behave more civilly and safely, and to treat one another more respectfully (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005). According to Smagorinsky (2002),

> over thirty states have received federal funding to support character education. In addition, a number of private organizations are devoted to the issue of character development in youth. Often, character-education initiatives involve collaborations among schools, private organizations, businesses, communities of faith, and other organizations interested in the cultivation of a wholesome youth. (p. 303)

Leming (1996) notes that "character education lacks a disciplinary home within the school curriculum. It is taught either as a schoolwide initiative or as a stand-alone subject, infused within a variety of subject-matter areas" (p. 30). These varying approaches spring from differing views of the nature of character and of academic subject matter. As Palmer (1983) has noted, some proponents of character education assume that disciplinary knowledge is amoral, passionless and purposeless; their goal, then, is to surround the supposedly neutral facts that comprise our curricula with ethics and moral mandates. This is a "strategy now employed by our schools where the occasional course in 'values' is offered as a supplement to the standard factual fare" (p. 7). Others have proposed that issues of character cannot merely be added to a supposedly fact-based approach; rather, like Palmer (1983), they argue that all "knowledge contains its own morality" (p. 7), and that questions of ethics, justice, and character must therefore be at the very center of teaching and learning (e.g., Apple, 1988; Campbell, 1997; Freire, 1985, 1993; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002).

We believe that questions of character ought to be at the very center of teaching and learning in literature classrooms, for "practicing a judgment of character. . .is what we inevitably do with every story or drama that comes our way" (Booth, 1988, p. 232). In the remainder of this article, we will first present our definition of "character." Second, we will argue that teachers of literature are perhaps uniquely situated to help young people cultivate concern for character by enriching students' understanding of and responses to the lives and decisions of literary characters. Third, we will discuss the use of case studies as an especially promising approach to character education in literary studies. Finally, we will tell the story of our use of prereading case studies in a literature classroom, demonstrating the ways in which the case studies served to help students develop, extend, and apply their concern for character in the literature classroom and beyond.

What is Character?

Smagorinsky & Taxel (2005) provide an excellent resource for those interested in definitions of "character." In their comprehensive overview of the ways in which perspectives on character influence character education initiatives, they present three distinctly different views of character: the first sees character as a set of objective values that may be transmitted to students didactically; the second assumes that character cannot be transmitted but must be constructed by students as they grapple with complex dilemmas; and the third is "a Native American perspective that sees morality as a set of reciprocal spiritual relationships between people and all earthly things" (pp. 38-39). According to Smagorinsky & Taxel, "each approach yields a different approach to education based on different conceptions of character" (p. 39).

You Can't Bank On It: Rejecting the Transmission Model

As teachers, parents, and citizens, we find the first view of character presented by Smagorinsky & Taxel (2005) to be especially bankrupt; we do not believe that character comprises a set of objective values that can be transmitted, transfused, or deposited into a student's mind, heart, or life. We say that this objectivist, didactic approach is "bankrupt" because it seems to proceed from what Freire (1993) refers to as the banking concept of education. The banking metaphor encourages us to see subject matter as objective, self-existent, intellectual and attitudinal capital, to see teachers as the holders and owners of that capital, and to see students as empty, passive receptacles into which teachers must make deposits. Freire argues persuasively that this banking metaphor leads to impoverished teaching and learning because of its false assumptions about teachers, students, and subject matter.

In our view, posters, banners, lectures, and daily reminders touting various character traits (e.g., "tolerance," "caring," and "responsibility") are not likely to influence our students' attitudes and behaviors, for these approaches assume that students are passive receptacles, that character can be deposited into them from without, and that students will accept and implement those externally derived traits regardless of personal circumstances and situations (Smagorinsky, 2002). As tools in the service of character education, such strategies are bound to fail. But that is not to say that we think these approaches do nothing. Rather, we believe that the widespread use of these didactic tools (Smagorinsky, 2002) constitutes what Kliebard (1990) refers to as symbolic action. According to Kliebard,

> In the political sphere, symbolic action works at least in part by giving cues to targeted social groups that they occupy a certain status in relation to other groups. When President Ronald Reagan ran for reelection in 1984, he promised that he would appoint an Italian-American to the Supreme Court. When he appointed Antonin Scalia, this did nothing in any instrumental sense to improve the standard of living or the general well-being of Italian-Americans, any more than the earlier appointment of Thurgood Marshall improved the lot of African Americans in terms of resource allocation. (p. 11)

Similarly, in education, some widely accepted policies, procedures, and goals related to character education may affect public perception more than they effect any instrumental change. As Kliebard (1990) notes, "the main function of symbolic action resides in its use of language to organize allegiances, perceptions, and attitudes" (p. 11). The banners, posters, and over-the-squawk-box announcements touting various character traits serve an important symbolic function in that they declare to an increasingly worried society that public schools are doing something about issues of violence, hatred, and intolerance. As symbols, these didactic approaches announce to concerned parents that charter schools and private schools have not cornered the character education market, that public schools have not abandoned the teaching of traditional values and virtues in favor of a supposedly neutral, "anything goes" approach (Apple, 1996). We are not arguing that proponents of these more didactic approaches in the public schools are intentionally deceiving their students or the public by promising change through didactic means. We are simply arguing that the effects of didactic approaches to character education are likely to be more symbolic than instrumental because students are not passive receptacles, and because learning does not happen best through transmission or transfusion (Hillocks, 1999).

Constructing Principled, Situational, Relational Responses

For these reasons, we reject the first of the three formulations of character announced by Smagorinsky & Taxel (2005). Our view of character aligns most closely with the second and the third alternatives, which present character education more constructively and more relationally. We agree with Hillocks (1999), who argues that "what is learned may only be learned in terms of what we already know and that learners must construct what is to be learned for themselves" (p. 19). Similarly, in his discussion of constructivist approaches to character education, Smagorinsky (2002) notes that

> Constructivist approaches to teaching and learning are less likely to assume that you can improve students' character by announcing character traits to them and showing them good models of people with character. Instead, they assume that students will construct their own codes of behavior no matter what you say to them. An educator's role, then, is to guide and assist this process of construction through attention to the environment, materials, and activities that students manipulate, interpret, and reconfigure. (p. 305)

But what, exactly, are we asking and helping students to construct? Issues of character become of paramount importance when human beings face ethical dilemmas and decisions. We therefore believe that what students need to build are principled ways of noticing, reflecting on, and responding to the intricacies and ramifications of particular problems and situations.

As Smagorinsky (2002) has argued, "we need. . .a definition of character that has some flexibility and takes the *context* of moral action into account" (p. 307, emphasis added). In advocating what he calls a reflective approach to character education, Smagorinsky writes that students should pay attention to context by considering the details that make particular situations ethically challenging and by generating responses which could help us to navigate those situations effectively and morally. This reflective approach is necessarily situational, focusing as it does upon individual, idiosyncratic problems and dilemmas. Smagorinsky concludes that no fixed set of rules can tell students what to think or how to proceed in every circumstance.

Because of its situational focus, Smagorinsky (2002) calls his approach "relativistic" (p. 307). However, unlike some other advocates of relativistic approaches (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 1986, 1992), Smagorinsky believes that students' responses to ethical dilemmas ought to be both situational and principled. For example, in describing his relativistic approach, he argues that the students' ultimate task is "to develop and live by *standards* of moral conduct" (p. 306, emphasis added) and that all reflective approaches to character education share a "focus on a constructivist approach to developing a *code of ethics*" (p. 306, emphasis added). Smagorinsky thus calls for an approach to ethical dilemmas and to character development that is at once flexible and principled: it helps students to pay attention to each situation's unique variables, and it helps students to develop their own standards and codes to guide their responses to various situations. In Smagorinsky's approach, then, principles are developed constructively and applied flexibly.

For example, students who decide that honesty is one of their guiding principles should also be free to decide that the operators of the Underground Railroad acted morally (and demonstrated admirable, courageous character) when they lied to protect fugitive slaves (Smagorinsky, 2002). But this flexibility does not diminish or dilute the importance of the principled standards and codes. It seems to us that Smagorinsky would agree with Benhabib (1992), who has argued that those who approach ethical dilemmas from a purely relativistic, situational point of view are in danger of deciding that "what is morally good is what is best for those who are like me. Such a claim is no different than arguing that what is best morally is what pleases me most" (p. 187). Like Smagorinsky, Benhabib believes that situational and principled approaches to moral dilemmas are "complementary and not antagonistic" (p. 180): a situational focus enables attention to the specific circumstances of the individuals involved in ethical dilemmas; and a principled approach "enable[s] articulation" of those individuals' voices (p. 168). For Benhabib, the combination of the situational focus and the principled approach mitigates the possibility that we will make decisions based on what is best for ourselves instead of aiming for the maximum good of the individuals involved. As we have argued elsewhere (White, 2003), this mingling of situational flexibility and principled standards of moral conduct is precisely what is required to promote and sustain reciprocal relationships between people.

Thus, our definition of character education is in accord with Smagorinsky & Taxel's (2005) second formulation of character, for it is constructivist in nature, encouraging students to develop and apply the meanings of "character" for themselves. Our approach is also in accord with the third formulation of character, for it is relational

in focus, emphasizing both the humanity of the individuals involved in ethical dilemmas, and our students' relational responsibility to those individuals and their situations.

Cultivating Understanding Through Cases

Our definition of "character" and our analysis of the various approaches to character education led us to consider the use of case studies in our literature classroom. A well-written case provides specific details about individuals and about the ethical dilemma they are facing. We therefore thought that a series of well-written cases might help students learn to apply their judgments about character flexibly, from case to case, thus developing principles, standards, and codes of ethics to help guide their responses to various situations. Hillocks (1995) argues that the goal of constructivist teaching is "interpretive understanding" (p. 41); our hope was that students might emerge from case analysis, not with a set of fixed rules, but with enhanced ability to interpret multifaceted dilemmas and to relate to the human beings who face those dilemmas. And our hopes were strengthened as we discovered the extent to which cases have been used successfully across the curriculum.

Case Analysis in Other Disciplines

Teachers and scholars in many disciplines have advocated case study analysis as a way of helping students to consider the complex moral context surrounding discipline-specific ethical dilemmas. For example, Tomey (2003) writes that cases have a long history in the study of law and medicine, and she argues that the analysis of actual and hypothetical cases in nursing education "facilitates problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking, self-directed learning, self-evaluation, and interpersonal communications as well as the retrieval, access, and use of information" (p. 34). Similarly, Sirias (2002) has found case study analysis to be a highly effective way to engage students in the ethics of Information Systems Management. In addition, many teacher educators have found cases to be vital to the preparation of future teachers (e.g., Campbell, 1997; Griffith & Laframboise, 1998; Johannessen & McCann, 2002; Roeser, 2002; Shulman, 1992; Strike & Soltis, 1985) and educational leaders (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). Campbell (1997) presents a compelling case for case studies in teaching and learning, arguing that they provide an "irreplaceable opportunity to become familiar with moral and ethical complexities. . .in possibly controversial and confusing value-laden situations" (p. 259).

The Unique Potential of Literature

As the preceding paragraph makes clear, teachers in many disciplines make use of cases to help students consider and respond to a variety of ethical dilemmas. Certainly, character education can happen across the curriculum. However, we believe that the literature classroom is perhaps the most important place for character education to take place in school. We say this in part because of the power of narrative. As Wilhelm (1997) has noted,

> Narrative. . .is a primary way of knowing and organizing our personal knowledge of ourselves and the world. Storying defines humanity, makes us human, empowers us in being who we are, and makes it possible for us to conceive of being more than we are. As Bruner (1986) tells us, storytelling is a unique way of knowing that cannot be replicated by any other epistemological form. . . .

> Literature is more profound, even at its simplest level, than any other form of words. . . . Literature is transcendent: it offers us possibilities; it takes us beyond space, time, and self; it questions the way the world is and offers possibilities for the way it could be. . . . It is unique in the way it provides us with maps for exploring the human condition, with insights and perceptions into life, and with offerings for ways to be human in the world. Literature helps us to define ourselves as we are, and to envision what it is we want ourselves and the world to be." (pp. 38-39)

Because of its unique power to help us consider the actualities and the possibilities of life, literature is an excellent companion of and vehicle for character education. Perhaps more than any other subject matter, literature presents students with a wide range of moral and ethical complexities and with a plethora of potentially controversial, confusing, and value-laden situations. We would argue that the study of literature provides an indispensable opportunity to prepare for the living of one's own life by considering the moral choices faced by literary characters; we would also argue that case studies can prepare students to respond to those characters with greater understanding and empathy.

The Importance of Literary Characters to Education

According to Booth (1988), the plots of great stories "are built out of the characters' efforts to face moral choices. In tracing those efforts, we readers stretch our own capacities for thinking about how life should be lived. . ." (p. 187). Similarly, Smagorinsky & Taxel (2005) note that "the study of . . .literature—[which is] rife with a vast array of characters involved in complex, often profoundly ambiguous situations—provides ripe contexts in which to explore the way that the development of character is informed, and often shaped, by the particulars of time, place, and circumstance" (pp. 357-358). This resonates with Santayana's often quoted maxim that reading literature provides "imaginative rehearsals for living" (as cited in Booth, 1983, p. 212). As Booth (1988) has argued, those rehearsals are usually explicitly moral; he reminds us that

> until quite recently in our history, everyone who talked about character would have assumed. . .both that one could make distinctions among good and bad characters—whether in literature or in life—and that the ultimate point in talking about character was to improve it. . . .People generally assumed as a corollary that anyone's character could be genuinely corrupted or improved through contact with literary characters. (p. 230)

Characters are people, too. But does reading alone provide the necessary "contact with characters?" Smith & Rabinowitz (2005) propose that encountering characters is more complicated and more ethically demanding than meets the eye. They argue that readers, in order to fulfill their ethical responsibilities to both author and characters, must provisionally join two audiences: the "authorial audience," which recognizes the story to be fiction and treats the characters as constructs; and the "narrative audience," which accepts the story as "true" and treats the characters as real human beings (p. 12). Joining both audiences is crucial because, as Rabinowitz (1998) argues, treating characters as mere constructs can lead to "arrogance and a dehumanizing view of other people," as when readers of *Heart of Darkness* turn "the suffering of the Africans so vividly described in the novel into a mere instrument for something else" (p. 27). Smith (1998) adds that, unless we join the narrative audience, unless we treat the

characters as real and pay them at least provisional respect as people, we cannot be said to have understood the text which the author has written and we will therefore be unable to resist the author or the text. For Smith, paying respect to characters as people is the very "foundation for the ethical implications of literature" (1998, p. 34).

Constructing Responses to Character(s)

If Smith (1998) is right, and we think he is, then this is an important question for teachers: How can we help and encourage students to treat literary characters as people and to pay those characters ethical respect? That is, how can teachers help students to consider literary characters as moral agents and to reflect upon the ethical results of the characters' actions and decisions? In our zeal to inculcate particular values and character traits, should we simply point out what we want our students to see and think about when they encounter a literary character? As we have already argued, a teacher-centered, didactic approach to character education in the literature classroom simply will not work: character qualities and ethical judgments cannot be "transmitted" from adults to adolescents, as though students of literature were empty, passive receptacles.

Wilhelm (1997; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001) and, of course, others (e.g., Hillocks, 1995, 1999; Hynds, 1997) would certainly concur. In *You Gotta BE the Book* and in *Strategic Reading*, for example, Wilhelm and his colleagues argue that students must be deeply and personally engaged in considering issues of moral character when studying literary characters. For example, in explaining the Vygotskian concept of zones of proximal development, they write, ". . .our students clearly possess not only cognitive zones of proximal development, but also social, emotional, and moral zones of development" (Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001, p. 21). Wilhelm and his colleagues suggest that if the teacher will arrange the environment and provide the scaffolding students need in order to construct their literary and ethical understandings, students will be much more likely to consider questions of ethics and of character as they study and respond to literary characters. Such scaffolding is perhaps most important when there is a great gap in culture between the students and the texts, authors, and characters they are asked to respond to (Hamann, Schultz, Smith, & White, 1991; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994).

Often, when students encounter characters whose lives seem very different or distant from their own, they respond by distancing themselves even further from the text and the characters, calling the stories "stupid" or "boring" and the characters "dumb" (Hamann et al., 1991). One challenge for teachers is to help students to recognize some of the bridges, the connections between seemingly distant characters and the students' real lives. Once those bridges have been recognized (or constructed), students are better able to apply their real-world interpersonal skills when responding to literary characters (White, 1995).

Hynds (1989) has noted that, although interpersonal, social-cognitive abilities are essential to literary response and understanding, "readers differ on the degree to which they bring the full range of interpersonal constructs to texts" (p. 31). Hynds (1985) argues that readers who tend to employ simplistic reference axes when interacting with and making judgments about other people (e.g., "good or bad") are likely to respond in similarly shallow and simplistic ways to literary characters. Readers who employ more sophisticated and complex construct systems are more likely to be ". . . [predisposed]

toward questions which involve the 'why' of literary characters and their real-world counterparts" (p. 396). If, as is true of other schemata, interpersonal complexity is not automatically retrieved and applied to text (Anderson & Pearson, 1985), then activities which focus students' attention upon their own ideas and interpersonal constructs in relation to the text could help to facilitate depth of understanding and response.

The Connection Between Case Studies and Concern for Character(s)

We have found that if we want our students to develop their interpersonal complexities and to apply those interpersonal constructs to the study of literary characters, if we want our students to approach literary characters and those characters' moral dilemmas with ethical respect, then we must prepare them to do so. Several studies have demonstrated the efficacy of carefully designed pre-reading activities upon students' responses to literature and literary characters (e.g., Curry, 1987; Haberling & White, 2004; Johannessen, 2001; White, 1995). The analysis of case studies prior to reading promises to be especially effective in introducing students to complex ethical and moral dilemmas to be faced by literary characters in upcoming texts (Johannessen & Kahn, 2005; Smagorinsky, 2002; Smagorinsky, McCann & Kern, 1987).

For example, Johannessen & Kahn (2005) present a pre-reading case study designed to prepare students for Tim O'Brien's (1990) "On the rainy river," a chapter from *The Things They Carried*. In "On the rainy river," O'Brien discusses the agonizing inner conflict many young men experienced when trying to decide whether to report for duty in Vietnam or to escape to Canada. The pre-reading case study described by Johannessen & Kahn (2005) is set in 1969 and focuses on a young man who believes deeply that the Vietnam war is wrong. When he receives his draft notice, he first decides that evading the draft by going to Canada is the right thing to do. But, he considers the fact that his father and many other family members had served their country honorably in previous wars and that many people who are important in his life would consider him a traitor if he were to evade the draft. The case ends by asking students to decide what this young man should do, to explain their reasoning, and to discuss which course of action would be an act of bravery and which would be an act of cowardice.

According to Johannessen & Kahn (2005), "the case functions as a kind of question a teacher might ask in a [pre-reading] class discussion, but it is much richer than a simple query like, 'What should a person do when faced with the choice of being drafted to fight in a war that he or she believes is morally wrong?'" (p. 111). They note that teachers could ask a more personal, hypothetical question like, "If you believed the Vietnam War was morally wrong and you were drafted to serve, would you go to Canada to avoid having to serve in Vietnam or would you report to the draft board to serve your country as ordered?" (p. 111); but they explain

> One difference between the case and asking a series of questions is that questions provide no data regarding the moral choice in the question. Asking the questions assumes that students have adequate knowledge of the moral dilemma a young college student might confront in the late 1960s if he were drafted to go to Vietnam. Without more data, and the context of the moral issues of the time, students have little basis for making a decision or wrestling with the moral ambiguities involved. (p. 111)

Johannessen & Kahn (2005) argue that the prereading case study provides the data and the complex moral context students will need in order to understand and respond to the dilemma faced by the character in the upcoming text.

In the remainder of this paper, we would like to demonstrate the ways in which we used a series of case studies focusing on discrimination to help our students prepare for and respond to issues of character, the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by characters in literary texts. To our delight, the cases served as excellent preparation not only for literary understanding but also for mutual understanding. The collaborative case analysis activity paved the way for our students' entry into the narrative audience (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998; Smith & Rabinowitz, 2005) as they learned to treat the characters as people; and it also paved the way for demonstrated growth in character as they learned to pay attention to specific variables, to develop standards for personal conduct, and to treat one another with greater respect as human beings.

Six Cases of Discrimination: The Story of an Hour

Our Teaching Context

The community in which we teach, Hudsonville, is generally regarded as rural, although more and more farmland is disappearing beneath the bulldozers of housing developers and shopping mall builders. The vast majority of our students are white and most (but not all) of them resent the fact that students in surrounding districts consider them to be "hicks." While many teenaged residents of Hudsonville might see themselves as modern, the conservative values and closely held morals of the community shine through in the attitude of most of the members of the student body (See Haberling & White, 2004 for a more complete description of the community).

The lesson we are about to describe took place in a relatively troublesome, team-taught, 10th grade American Literature class (see White & Haberling, 2005). From the outset, we struggled to get our students to respond to one another with some degree of civility. In the early weeks of the semester, class discussions were becoming increasingly tense and frustratingly quiet as various "bullies" in the class made fun of and intimidated classmates who tried to participate in the discussions. Students who strayed from the norm in this largely homogeneous community (see Haberling & White, 2004) were especially at risk, including one North American student of color and two foreign-exchange students, one from Japan and one from Mexico. We had tried a number of pedagogical and interpersonal strategies to alter the chemistry of the classroom, but early on, things were becoming worse instead of better; we were dreading the upcoming literature unit entitled "American Attitudes and Differences" because we believed that the texts would highlight some of the very differences our class bullies delighted in exploiting.

Our curriculum required, for example, that we teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*—a perfect novel for our unit on differences but a potentially risky choice for our particular class. We had our work cut out for us. How could we prepare our students to consider the moral and ethical dilemmas encountered by Scout, Atticus, Tom Robinson, Boo Radley and the rest while at the same time engendering and promoting more thoughtful, more respectful consideration and interaction in the classroom? How could we help our "students of difference" to feel safer and how could we encourage our bullies to walk a mile in someone else's moccasins?

We were aware of and had used several different kinds of preparatory activities, including autobiographical writing (White, 1995), opinionnaires (Johannessen, 1992; White & Johnson, 2001), and scenarios (Smagorinsky et al., 1987; White, 2004). Each type of prereading activity provides for a different type of preparation and encourages reflections of particular kinds (see White, 2004 for a discussion of when and how to use each of these strategies). We are certainly not arguing that case studies are the best approach to prereading preparation in all circumstances. We decided to try cases in this instance because of their "fit" with our focus on character: unlike our other prereading options, case studies give students an opportunity to examine the details surrounding the lives of individuals faced with ethical dilemmas and encourage students to develop thoughtful, flexible standards to apply to various, conceptually related vignettes. Case analysis seemed the perfect way to help students consider issues related to "character" and to prepare them for the dilemmas to be faced by literary "characters" in the upcoming novel.

Some might argue that a set of conceptually related case studies used as prereading preparation actually prevents students from responding freshly and authentically to the upcoming text—that is, that the case study exercises "cue" a particular reading and inhibit students' ability to transact with the text and to produce their own interpretations. However, as will become clear in the following description of our case study exercises, our students did not arrive at a "single correct reading" of the cases; as a result, no single reading of the upcoming text could have been cued. In fact, we believe that the varied responses generated and discussed at the prereading stage actually helped to engender multiple, supportable interpretations of the subsequent text because students were able to approach the text more flexibly, with greater understanding, and with a larger repertoire of responses at their disposal.

Cases Focusing on Differences and Discrimination

In order to focus our students' thinking on important moral and ethical dilemmas and to help them access relevant memories and opinions, we created a series of case studies (see Appendix A) dealing with a variety of forms of oppression and discrimination. We thought it likely that all of our students would have had experiences involving discrimination but we weren't sure they would recognize their experiences as related to our theme. In order to access some of their applicable prior knowledge, we crafted the cases to tap into a variety of relevant circumstances. For example, racial discrimination is certainly at the center of the novel and an issue in our high school, so we created a case in which a short-but-gifted basketball player is rejected by a coach because of racist perceptions (Case #2). Similarly, Scout wrestles with issues related to sexism, and some of the male students in our class had been doing a good job of silencing their female classmates, so we designed a case in which an expert engineer becomes the victim of sexual harassment (Case #4). We crafted some other cases to reach a wide variety of our students, including the "bullies," who might sometime have felt discriminated against because of their age (Cases #1 and #3), their religious beliefs (Case #5), or their leisure interests (Case #6). We hoped that studying and responding to these cases would focus students' attention on issues of character and would prepare them to interact with the characters in the novel.

Using the cases: Individual ideas, group gathering. To begin, we color-coded the cases (all copies of Case #1 in blue, #2 in red, etc.) and distributed them randomly with each student receiving one case; each case was thus randomly assigned to about five students. We instructed our students to read through the case before them, to pay close attention to the details of the case, and to write marginal notes and comments about the characters as they read. Then, their task was to respond to the guiding questions at the end of the case, writing their responses on the back of the case itself. We encouraged them to support their conclusions about what the character should do by referring to details drawn from the case and from their own lives. After about 12 minutes of reading and writing, the students swapped cases with a classmate who had a different case (it was easy to distinguish because of the color coding). Their next job was to read the new case and their classmate's response to that case. Then they were to focus on two different questions in writing: first, "What might happen if the people described in this case were to follow your classmate's advice?"; and second, "What else could be done in response to this kind of oppression?" We repeated this process one more time so that each student had read and responded to three of the six cases.

After this individual thought and reflection, it was time for our students to engage in some small group discussion. We divided the groups by the cases to which they had most recently responded (so, the four or five students holding green cases congregated in one corner; the four or five holding white cases moved to corner two, and so on). The groups' task was to make a list of the possible responses to the case they had before them, both ideas they had and ideas other respondents had shared in writing. After about 15 minutes of sharing and discussion, they were to try to come to a consensus about which response they thought would best solve the problem in the case; we reminded them that, in the presence of strong opinions, consensus might be impossible to achieve, but we encouraged them to try.

These small-group discussions were marked by amicable-but-contentious negotiation. For example, in one small group, Sara and John discussed case #6, the story of the skateboarders in Colenda. As a skateboarder himself, John was passionate about this case since it related to his own life. While discussing, John suggested that it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission—the boarders should just go ahead and develop the vacant lot to show the mayor and the town that they could be successful. Sara disagreed. She argued that this kind of behavior could hurt the boarders and their reputations more than help them. John's rebuttal surprised Sara and clearly got her thinking: What if Martin Luther King had asked for permission to say and do the things he did to further civil rights in our country? This question started a discussion about whether all restricted activities and actions are intrinsically bad. The group began to discuss whether people's stereotypes often get in the way of how they see the world around them and the decisions they make based on those stereotypes. While Sara was not willing to change her stance on the skateboarders, she agreed that John was right—there are times when it is just to ignore the restrictions authority figures may give. It was perfectly legitimate for this group to end without coming to a consensus, but because we had requested that they try to do so, their discussion was deeper than just picking the answer they thought we were looking for. Sara and John actually went well beyond the surface of the case, connecting the data to their own lives and to history.

Sara's experience in her group demonstrates that, in trying to achieve consensus, no one was forced to abandon a deeply held conviction. In fact, most of the groups had trouble agreeing on the best response to their case. We should emphasize here that that was fine with us. Consensus was not the goal of the activity, but because they were asked to try to achieve consensus, students argued and discussed more personally and often more passionately. If they had not been asked to move toward consensus, there would have been no reason for them to move beyond "sharing" their initial responses to the cases. The move toward consensus did not require Sara to abandon her position, but it did give her the opportunity to explain, defend, and, eventually, to modify it. Trying to achieve consensus led to deeper engagement with each other and with the cases.

Perhaps their deeper engagement resulted from the fact that their own personal, varied experiences formed the basis of many of their ideas. In the small group discussion of case #1, our students readily pointed to examples of being followed and questioned in a local hardware store if they were shopping without a parent. Some even shared stories of being asked to leave a well-known store in the mall if they were among a small group of their peers. Their experiences seemed to help them better understand Karina and the discrimination demonstrated in this case. Some decided that the best route for Karina was to take her business elsewhere. Others argued that it would be better for Karina to confront the store manager respectfully in order to persuade him that not all people her age were thieves. Still others stood firm in their belief that she should just follow the rules and return later with her dad. While all of these ideas are feasible and could help solve the problem, one does not stand out as more correct than another. Discussing the ins and outs of each possibility gave the students an opportunity to consider more than just their initial response; in fact, the discussion often left more questions than answers. During the discussion, we frequently heard students saying things like, "Well, if this were in real life, I think I would…" or "I had a situation similar to this where. . ." or "This same thing happened to my brother and he. . . ." When class ended, our students walked out the door arguing, discussing, and applying what they had read. We encouraged them to return the next day ready to talk to the large group about the case they had been considering in small groups.

At the beginning of the next day's class, our students returned to their case study groups for a few minutes of planning. We told them that each group would be presenting their case to the class, detailing some of their responses to the case and the conclusions they had arrived at. After about ten minutes of planning, reviewing the case, and refreshing memories, we came back together as a large group to examine the cases, one-by-one. Each group had appointed a member to retell (not just re-read) the case and to explain the ins and outs of the situation to the class. We asked the students to retell the case because we wanted them to emphasize the things that stood out to them as a group, based on their own values, opinions, and judgments. During these retellings, we posted the case in question on the overhead so that everyone could compare the "facts" of the case to the group's retelling. Following each group's retelling, we began a large-group discussion by asking questions like, "What did you decide?" and "Why would that be better than the other options?" Gradually, however, the students began to speak to one another, leaving us to play the role of interested (and grateful) facilitators.

Invaluable results. In the large group setting, the students argued and negotiated with one another, rarely agreeing unanimously on any one response. For example, in one

rather heated small-group exchange the day before, Gabrielle had tried hard to convince Dan that responding to oppression by lashing out or striking back was not the best response under any circumstances, but Dan had argued that sometimes force is necessary to right a wrong and cited the concept of a "just war." During the large-group discussion of this situation, John, one of Dan's best friends, took Gabrielle's side in the argument, much to Dan's surprise. The students did not seem to feel threatened by the differing opinions. Even though some of the exchanges were heated, we were pleased to note the degree of respect with which the students treated one another. They did not interrupt one another; they did not make fun of one another's ideas. They listened. They thought. They responded. Some changed their minds after listening to a classmate's persuasive opinion; some refused to give any ground but did not seem to resent or resist the fact that their classmates disagreed with them. We had never seen this class behave this way before. Even Shaun, one of the resistant students who was seen as a bully by others in the class, said, "This is really hard, but this is fun." His statement sent an important signal that "the bullies" would not undermine the discussion by mounting personal attacks; so after he spoke, the tone of our discussion became even more personal as students felt more free to share examples of discrimination from their own lives.

Some students' personal experiences had powerful effects on the entire class. For example, Pablo, our exchange student from Mexico, blew apart the stereotypes that many of our students had previously held about Mexicans. Prior to our case study exercise, Pablo had been treated poorly by many of the students; his ideas, whenever he dared to share them, were frequently discounted or contradicted. To many of his classmates, he was "only a Mexican"—perhaps in part because he was the only Mexican most of our students had ever met. Their lack of experience with people from other cultures led them to stereotype Pablo and encouraged them either to ignore him or to reject him more openly and confrontationally. During our large-group discussion of the cases, however, Pablo conveyed a completely new perspective for our students to consider; he went to the heart of the matter by speaking openly about what it feels like to be oppressed because of skin color, accent, and cultural differences. He opened the eyes of many of the students in this class because he was willing to help his classmates confront their misconceptions. He facilitated a discussion about stereotypes and gently persuaded them to look at each person as an individual; he urged the class not to pigeon-hole people (and people groups) whom they do not even know. "These cases we're reading," he said, "are like real life to us."

This was character education at its finest as our students talked to one another, listened to one another, taught one another, and learned with one another. Together, they constructed, articulated, and reconstructed their views about important moral and ethical problems. At the end of the hour, we were all amazed to hear the bell; it almost seemed as if we hadn't been in school for the previous 50 minutes.

Bridging to the novel. As a result of this focus on issues of ethics, morality, and character, our classroom atmosphere had changed drastically. The lines of division were blurred and, in some cases, obliterated. Previously, some students had been quick to lash out at others or make fun of anyone who took our activities and work seriously; but now there seemed to be a refreshing sense of collective and collaborative purpose. Our students had clearly bought into the discussion of the cases and made the situations come to life for one another; issues of character were much more central to their thinking

because of the case studies. But we weren't sure that they were ready to jump into *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We wanted to build a bridge between the pre-reading cases and the novel so that the students would be even more likely to carry their discussions of "character" into their discussion of the moral and ethical situations confronting the "characters" in the upcoming text.

So on the day after we finished our large-group discussion of the cases, we read together an essay by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. entitled "Three types of resistance to oppression," an excerpt from his 1957 book, *Stride Toward Freedom*. In this essay, Dr. King explores three options available to oppressed people: the way of violence, the way of acquiescence, and the way of nonviolent resistance. After reading the brief essay aloud with our students, we had them summarize each of the three responses King describes. Students noted immediately that the essay related directly to our previous discussion of the case studies and that Dr. King's "three types of resistance" had played major roles in their own responses to the cases. The students appeared to have grasped the meaning and the ramifications of King's ideas, in spite of the essay's rather difficult vocabulary and seemingly distant social context. The cases prepared our students to understand and appreciate Dr. King's argument, and Dr. King's essay shed even more light on our discussion of the cases. King's essay also eased our students' entry into the world of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Throughout our reading of the novel, students referred to the pre-reading cases and the possible responses they had brainstormed. When Tom Robinson was falsely accused, students discussed his reaction as if it were a case, focusing on the historical, contextual realities and arguing about the options available to him as a person of color in the rural South. When Scout learned of the treatment of the African Americans in her town during Tom Robinson's trial, students discussed how she might react to the situation in a way that would lead to lasting change. And when Atticus faced down the would-be lynch mob outside the jail, the students analyzed the motives of all of the characters involved and discussed the ramifications of the way of violence, the way of acquiescence, and the way of nonviolent resistance. They sifted through the potential outcomes of each decision. They drew the lines connecting Scout, Tom, Atticus and themselves much more readily and independently. The students had joined the narrative audience (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998): they treated the characters in the cases and in the literature as people, paying them ethical respect as moral agents and decision makers in difficult contexts (Smith, 1998).

At the end of the school year, we learned what the students really thought about our tactics and about our classroom atmosphere when they completed their end-of-year evaluations of their teachers. Hannah, one of the quiet girls in this rambunctious class, expressed that "learning using the cases helped us with our lives." Jalen, a boy who rarely made eye-contact or engaged in class discussion without prompting, responded that "this is a class to pay attention to. You can learn a lot about yourself if you pay attention to what you are doing in this class." Sara agreed when she reflected, "In English 10, you learn about the most important subjects in life, like how to treat others who are different than you and where you stand on important subjects." Shaun, our bully, responded that the teachers "teach in a way that relates to my everyday life. They let us tell stories that connect to the topic so we understand the topic better and so we can pay attention to the characters more, like in To Kill a Mockingbird. I could relate to Tom better because we

talked about our own struggles in class." One student who did not write his or her name on the evaluation, said, "One of the things I liked best about this class is that you let us find out things for ourselves. You didn't tell us what to think or what the 'right' answer was. We had to do the work ourselves, compare it to our own lives, and figure out what we each had to learn from the stories we read. You did a great job of mixing our world and the world of the books we read. The activities we did, like the opinionnaires and cases, helped me to figure things out without giving away the answers."

As a constructivist approach to character education and to preparation for the analysis of literary characters, the case study exercise seems to have worked in memorable ways. Although the exercise took place in October, it was evidently on the students' minds at the end of May when they wrote their evaluations. And recently, we were treated to some powerful evidence that our discussion of the discrimination cases had even more far-reaching and longer-lasting effects.

Not long ago, Pablo returned from Mexico for an impromptu visit, traveling light with only a backpack and a motorcycle. As he embraced us, the words that tumbled from his lips told us that character education in the literature classroom can bear fruit in society, even across cultures. Pablo said, "Remember that fourth hour class? At first I was scared to be me in that class because of what other people thought and how they acted. Well, by the end of the class, after the cases and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, being from Mexico didn't matter anymore. We all were the same in that classroom. We all learned together; we learned that we had more in common. Even Shaun hugged me on the last day."

Evidently, our collaborative analysis of case studies and of literary texts provided "imaginative rehearsals for living," rehearsals that led to an exquisite and long-running performance beyond the classroom. Would Pablo have made the trip from his home in Mexico to his home away from home in the Midwest had his classmates continued to ostracize and wound him? We doubt it. It seems that our troublesome, contentious, fourth-hour literature classroom became the perfect place to cultivate concern for character: case study analysis prepared our students both to treat literary characters as people and to treat one another with greater respect and civility.

Appendix A

Oppression Case Studies

1. Karina is 15. She has been saving her money to buy two CDs, one for her brother's birthday present and one for herself. She's had the money for several weeks now, but she hasn't been able to buy the CDs. Last weekend she had too much homework, and two weekends ago she couldn't get a ride. Finally, her dad has agreed to give Karina and two of her friends a ride. Dropping them off outside the mall, her dad says, "I'll be back to pick you up in a couple of hours." The three girls go directly to the music store and walk in. As soon as they enter, the manager stops them and says, "Wait, girls. How old are you?" When he finds out that they're only 15, he ushers them back to the entrance and points to a sign which reads: "CHILDREN 17 YEARS OF AGE AND YOUNGER MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN." The manager, explains, "We just put this sign up this morning. Some people think some of our music is too 'mature' for you; and besides, teenagers have been stealing us blind. Come back later with your mom or dad."

What do you think about the store manager's actions? How should Karina and her friends respond?

2. Kim Jung Soo was born in Seoul to Korean parents, but he is now an American citizen. He has lived all but the first six months of his life in California. Now he's 17. More than anything else, Jung loves to play basketball. He has spent the past two summers at basketball camps, doing drills, playing in organized leagues and pick-up games at his school. He is only five feet nine inches tall, but he can dunk a basketball. Last year, he was second-team all-conference as a junior. But now his parents have had to move to the Midwest; Mr. Kim has a new job as a research scientist at a company that makes medicines and vitamins. It's June, and the basketball coach at Jung's new school is starting up an invitation-only summer league for his players. When Jung learns about the summer league, he sends the coach a note asking for a try-out. The coach never responds, so Jung goes to the school, finds the coach's office, and knocks on the door. When the coach answers, he looks down at Jung and says, "Yeah?" Jung explains that he is the one who sent the note asking for a try-out for the summer league. Frowning, the coach replies, "Look kid. My league is for my players, for serious basketball players. I'm kinda busy right now, so have a good summer." With that, he closes the door.

What do you think about the coach's response to Jung? How do you think Jung should respond?

3. Robert Ebert has been a firefighter in Detroit for over 30 years. Like all firefighters, he began his duty on the department as a "private"; but over the years, he was promoted through the ranks until finally, 10 years ago, he was made Chief. One of the reasons for his many promotions was his bravery. He has received awards from the fire department and from the city for saving the lives of many, many people. Sometimes he rescued other

firefighters who had been trapped in collapsed buildings; other times, he rescued children and entire families from burning homes. He has been a dedicated employee and a leader in the department. Through the years, he has remained fit and has kept up on the latest development in techniques for fighting fires and rescuing victims. Last week, the city council called for Chief Ebert's resignation. Although he has never done anything wrong, he is now in violation of the city's regulations for firefighters: when he turned 55, he became too old. They gave him a couple of months to prepare for retirement, after which he will be forced to resign.

What do you think of the city's regulations? How do you think Robert should respond?

4. Dr. Louanne Kaminsky is an engineer for one of the "big three" auto makers. She received a bachelor's degree and a master's from Stanford University's prestigious mechanical engineering program; then she received a Ph.D. in automotive design and engineering from the University of Frankfurt in Germany. Mercedes Benz of Europe offered her a high paying job, but she wanted to return to the United States to work. She has been on the job as a research engineer in Detroit for almost 10 years, and many of her designs have won international awards. She has saved the company millions of dollars by catching and fixing difficult design flaws prior to production, and she has made the company millions more by improving the appearance and performance of the automaker's more popular designs. Although she has received a substantial raise every year, she has never been promoted to the rank of Senior Researcher or Project Director. She has applied for promotion several times, and each time, other, less capable male engineers have been promoted. Last week, Louanne went to see her supervisor to discuss her record of achievement and to ask why she keeps getting passed over for promotion. Her supervisor, a man in his 50's, smiled at Louanne and said, "Louanne, your record is very strong, as strong as just about any other engineer in this company. But we've been a little concerned about bringing you onto the leadership team; we're concerned about the chemistry of the group. The men on the team form a very tight-knit circle, and it's crucial that we be able to work together effectively. Adding you to the team could, well, change the way we all relate to one another." Louanne was struggling to understand what her boss was saying--and then he said, moving a bit closer to her, "Of course, Louanne, sometimes we just need to know how badly you WANT to be promoted. Would you be willing to do, say, just about anything to see that your case would be given more serious consideration next time?"

What do you think about the way Dr. Kaminsky's company and, specifically, her boss are treating her? How do you think Dr. Kaminsky should respond?

5. Trent James grew up on a farm and has worked hard there every day, taking care of animals, fixing broken machinery, planting, and harvesting. He loves the farm but he knows he doesn't want to stay there forever. Toward the end of his senior year, he asks his dad if, in the coming summer, he can get a job at a local restaurant to earn money for college. His dad is open to the idea, especially because Trent's little brother can take on some of Trent's chores.

“But Trent,” says his dad, “Remember that you can’t work Sundays.”
“We always work on Sundays, Dad,” replies Trent.
“Right, but this is a farm and we have animals to tend. That’s the only work we do. And we never miss church.”
Trent is a strong Christian, and he doesn't want to miss church either. When he interviews for the job at the restaurant, the manager says, “Trent, you’re just the kind of worker we’re looking for. We’d like to hire you. When can you start?”
Trent replies, “Mr. Wells, I really want this job, and I know you won’t be sorry if you hire me. But there’s just one thing--I can’t miss church on Sundays.”
“Oh,” says the manager. “You’re one of those. Look, I really wanted to hire you. But we all have to work on Sundays. If you ever decide that you really want to work here, come back and see me. And here’s a word of advice: just keep your religion to yourself if you want to get a good job.”

What do you think of the manager’s actions? How do you think Trent should respond?

6. Colenda is a mid-sized town in a rural district. Everybody in the area comes to Colenda to do their shopping, to stock up on supplies, to go out to eat, and to see movies. The business district is busy and sometimes, especially on Saturdays, it’s crowded. That’s why the town has outlawed skateboards and roller-blades from the business district. In the past few months, skate-boarders taking advantage of the business district’s sidewalks, steps, and inclines have knocked over some shoppers, frightened some small children, and nearly caused some traffic accidents. The boarders weren’t trying to hurt anybody; they were just looking for the best place to board. But it wasn’t safe for the boarders or for the pedestrians. The mayor finally told the police department to “get rid of those hoodlums” and to make the streets safe again. The police worked hard to get the boarders off of Main Street. Now there are signs up threatening the boarders with heavy fines and even jail time. Several blocks away from the business district, at the end of a dead end street, is a vacant lot. The boarders and their families have offered to clean up the vacant lot, get rid of all of the junk that people have thrown there, and create a “skaters’ park” with jumps, half pipes, rails and steps. They have offered to do all of the work and to pay for all of the materials themselves. But the city has refused, and they’ve given no explanation. The boarders have asked several times, but the answer is always “No!” Now the mayor has told the boarders not to ask again.

What do you think of the city’s actions? How do you think the boarders should respond?

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