

## TEACHING SITUATION:

### OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL:

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools were founded by John Dewey in 1896. The original school had 16 students and attempted to prove the idea that a school could be a cooperative community. Dewey believed that students learned best engaging in activities that involved creative problem-solving. There was a sense of responsibility to fellow students. In this community, each member had roles, performed tasks, and learned what it meant to be productive citizens.

Since 1896, the Lab Schools have grown to include over 1770 students in nursery through grade 12. Over half of the students are from families employed by the University of Chicago. The students come from all over the city and surrounding areas. They come from a broad spectrum of religious faiths and socio-economic backgrounds, and represent the ethnic heritage of 65 countries. The students at the Laboratory Schools have a diverse background of experience. Some students are incredibly well-traveled, and others have never left the Midwest. Some students run their own small businesses and others are champion athletes. The thread that ties all the students together is a love of learning and an interest in the world around them.

### HUMANITIES CURRICULUM:

The Middle School experience at Lab includes a three year program in Humanities. The seventh and eighth grade Humanities curriculum explores how people in the past and present express themselves in thought, in the arts, and in action. The Humanities curriculum integrates history and literature and uses the tools of anthropology, sociology, art, music, geography, philosophy and law to help students understand American history. The eighth grade curriculum comprises the second half of a survey course in United States history, examining the American experience from Reconstruction through the Civil Rights Movement with the Constitution as a foundation. Chicago provides a case study approach to urbanization, industrialization, and immigration at the turn of the century. Students explore America in the world as they study imperialism and World War I. By reading both historical non-fiction and fiction that parallel the topics and periods studied, students make significant connections as they ask meaningful questions about history, literature, and humanity. In humanities, they learn how to ask effective questions and to evaluate primary and secondary sources; how to detect point of view; how to use evidence to support an argument; how to find, define, and research a fruitful question; how to write an analytical essay with a thesis statement using evidence and sources to support their claims. Various types of writing, such as research papers, interpretive essays, and creative pieces, including poetry, drama, journals, and personal narrative, encourage student development as diverse writers.

Discussion is an important component of the humanities curriculum because it allows students to develop their capacities to reason, to marshal evidence for their arguments, and to defend their ideas orally. As a result, students are encouraged to listen and respond to the ideas of other students. They recognize important issues and interests and engage

in problem solving during discussions. Student ownership of discussion grows progressively from small group, student-led discussion in 7th grade to whole class, student-led discussion in 8th grade. Teachers carefully work with students to develop analytic questions and to hone students' listening and responding skills.

#### MY CLASS:

There are currently three humanities teachers at each grade level. While the same content is covered in each eighth grade class, each individual teacher is encouraged to make the class her own. The schedule is comprised of three block classes a week, each 90 minutes in length, and two single period classes, 45 minutes in length. I teach two classes of approximately 20 students each. In the 45 minute class periods I focus on grammar once a week and poetry once a week. The other three block classes focus on intense study of literature and history, analysis of text and primary sources, discussion and writing.

The goal of my course is to help students understand people in their historical time periods, the complexities of the individual and the role of circumstance on decision making. I encourage my students to connect the constitution to each time period we study in an effort to understand the ongoing American experiment. Additionally, I want to students to understand themselves, discover who they are and who they wish to become. I want students to focus on character and integrity through the study of history and literature. Literature especially allows students to delve into questions of morality and ethics as the issues presented are many-sided and require students to struggle with the complex motivations of individuals, their fears and their prejudices. History is nothing if not the story of human ambiguity.

What I have found missing in the curriculum is a complex tackling of religion. The students seem to discuss religion in a very detached way – even those who consider themselves religious – as if it something for “them” and not “us”. They fail to understand the motivating force of religion in compelling historical action – even current action on the part of individuals. Secluded in a world of intellectualism, students find the study of religion to be anti-intellectual, that those who “believe” are often missing the ability to engage in serious debate or discussion. They discount religion. They are often appalled by the use of God in political speeches, as if political leaders turn off their person to be the office. When we read about Jane Addams, they hail her good works but never tie that to her religious upbringing. In reading literature, they cannot pick out the Biblical allusions and miss important aspects of the meaning of the text. In attempting to help students understand that history is the study of the individual’s impact on the community and the world, I think it is necessary to understand the religious motivations behind individuals, their communities and how those individuals and communities have played an important role in shaping the current world.

## DEVELOPING A SYLLABUS:

- Fall Semester:           *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* – Salmon Rushdie  
                                  *Warriors Don't Cry* – Melba Pattillo Beals  
                                  Declaration of Independence  
                                  Articles of Confederation  
                                  U.S. Constitution  
                                  *The Words We Live By* – Linda R. Monk  
                                  Selected Federalist/Antifederalist Papers  
                                  *Fahrenheit 451* – Ray Bradbury
- Spring Semester:        Civil War/Reconstruction  
                                  Research Paper  
                                  Short Stories: “The Gift of the Magi” – O. Henry  
  “The Necklace” – Guy de Maupassant  
  “Blight” – Stewart Dybek  
  “The Rules of the Game” – Amy Tan  
  “The Masque of the Red Death” – Edgar Allan Poe  
  “The Lottery” – Shirley Jackson  
                                  *The Jungle* (excerpts) – Upton Sinclair  
                                  *Devil in the White City* (excerpts) – Erik Larson  
                                  *The Pullman Strike* – R. Conrad Stein  
                                  *Jane Addams* – Jane Hovde  
                                  *All Quiet on the Western Front* – Erich Maria Remarque  
                                  *Inherit the Wind* – Lawrence and Lee  
                                  *To Kill A Mockingbird* – Harper Lee

We start the year with *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. This book was written by Rushdie during the fatwa and is an allegory for censorship of writers but contains a religious theme throughout about the source of stories and the neglect of the historical writings. As an introduction to religious symbolism, I would like students to discuss what they think the religions of the two societies are and how they play out. I would like to access their background knowledge on religion – if they find openness or censorship within their own experience, and if they can compare *Haroun* to religion in American history.

*Warriors Don't Cry* is Melba Pattillo Beals's memoir of her experience as one of the Little Rock Nine. She consistently recites the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as a source of strength. She writes diary entries to God. Church leaders maintain certain power within her community. A discussion of lived religion can compare how Melba's community in search of equality and integration lives their religion different from those who would have segregation and how Melba's lived religion shapes her experience at Central High.

Constitution: Studying the constitution involves studying those who wrote it, the debates involved, the push for ratification and the ultimate addition of amendments changing the constitution over time. We start with the Declaration of Independence as a social contract and a covenant, differentiating between the two and the importance of both. As

we move into the constitution, we will spend time on the founders' thoughts on religion using the packet of quotes on the founders and religion as well as discussing how they are products of the Enlightenment, studying Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Locke and Smith. Students will be asked to determine why the founders would seek separation of church and state – why the first amendment would be written this way. How do the founders' religious beliefs shape their world and how are they shaped by their world?

*Fahrenheit 451* centers around Montag's growth through knowledge, triggered by the question, "Are you happy?" Montag begins to examine his life and his society. He saves a Bible from a burning home and attempts to read it. He cannot retain the knowledge and seeks guidance from an old English professor. He finally leaves his society and joins a group of men who are saving literature by memorizing the books. They are going to rebuild society when it finally implodes. Bradbury uses numerous biblical allusions throughout. Students will read the full passages from the bible – Wedding at Cana, Joseph and the coat of many colors, Ecclesiastes (a time for everything) and Revelation (And on either side of the river was there a tree of life . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations). Students will attempt to understand why Bradbury uses these allusions – what message is he trying to portray? Additionally, students will be introduced to pre-millennialism and post-millennialism and should analyze what point of view the novel reflects and why.

**Civil War/Reconstruction:** Students study events leading up to the Civil War, beginning with constitutional causes and ending with the election of 1860. Students will discuss how lived religion played a role in the actions of major players in the Civil War? More time will be spent on the abolition movement and highlight different figures – Nat Turner, John Brown, Frederick Douglass and Lincoln – discussing gradualism and immediatism in abolition. In discussing the war, students will look at pre- and post-millennialism as it relates to the war using Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural and The Battle Hymn of the Republic. After the war, students will explore how the ideals of the Declaration are extended in the Reconstruction Amendments. Additionally, how is the concept of government changed – once the amendments protected citizens from the federal government, now congress is authorized to enforce new amendments protecting citizens from the states – how does this mark a start in American civil religion as it relates to inclusiveness in the American experience?

**Gilded Age/Labor Movement:** Students look at Chicago as a microcosm of the United States during the Gilded Age and as part of the Labor Movement. Students study the Pullman Strike, the World's Columbian Exposition – the World's Parliament of Religions - and the rise of the Progressives, including Jane Addams and Hull House. In studying these times, students look at the concept of anonymity changing urban society, immigration affecting labor, the concept of what it means to be American and the role of the settlement house in urban areas. Students will again look at lived religion, the role of different leaders – Reverend Carwardine of the First Methodist Church in Pullman, Pullman and his patriarchal ideas as his lived religion, Jane Addams starting Hull House. Additionally, students will be asked to find instances of civil religion during this period.

World War I: Students spend time discussing the causes of World War I and the entry of the United States into the war. Additionally, students read *All Quiet on the Western Front*. A discussion of civil religion/lived religion as it relates to the men's experiences in war will highlight the use of civil religion in propaganda. Students will also look at the religious justification for war and for Wilson's plan for peace after the war. Students will read Mark Twain's *The War Prayer* while watching a video adaptation of the text to highlight a literary comment on the use of religion in war. *The War Prayer* can be found in two parts on YouTube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJsZCpp8hR4>.

1920s – Return to Normalcy vs. Modernity – *Inherit the Wind*. In addition to reading the play, students will read excerpts from Moran's *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*. Students can gain understanding of the creation story by reading the Biblical texts and excerpts from Darwin to gain an understanding of evolution. Students should discuss how the Scopes trial highlighted the differences of the day with respect to lived religion. Additional information can be found on the Scopes trial on the following site: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/scopes.htm>.

Depression/*To Kill A Mockingbird*/Scottsboro – Students study the Depression through the reading of *Mockingbird* and studying the Scottsboro case. At this point, students should be able to deconstruct gender roles based on religious views in *Mockingbird*, the hypocrisy Lee shows between “Christian” values and societal norms. Additionally, students should be able to see how religious prejudice plays a role in the South during Scottsboro – reaction to the case, the sanctity of white women, distrust of Liebowitz and the ILD. Scottsboro information can be found on the following site: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/FTrials/scottsboro/scottsb.htm>.

Ideally, students will gain an understanding of how religion plays a role in society and influences politics, social change and social norms. Students will work with the First Amendment to understand the legal parameters of free exercise and establishment, but should delve further into an analysis of people as political actors governed by their religious beliefs in one way or another. Ultimately the study of history is the study of people in a given time period and how they act based on their most deeply held beliefs. At times those beliefs are religious and to ignore this is to not truly learn the history of American society.