

Let Your Light Shine Before Others

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“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 (NRSV)

There have been those in the past and present who have chosen to let their light shine and these heroes, for that is what they truly are, can be important, inspirational models for young people. There is a Social Studies exercise that I have made use of many times to encourage my students to become more personally engaged in Social Studies. It is also one way to integrate Faith into the Social Studies class. The project has its origins in a story, by Arthur Maxwell, that inspired me when I was younger, called “The Hall of Portraits.” In this story a young nobleman who was about to leave his home for boarding school, was taken by his father to the hall where his ancestors’ portraits were hung. Noting that these ancestors never brought dishonour on the family name, the father admonishes his son to follow their example and never do anything that would incur shame. Maxwell suggests to the reader that he or she should create his/her own hall of portraits in his/her imagination and fill it with purposeful people of integrity; people who allowed their light to shine.

To begin this exercise, I place pictures of ten of my heroes on one of the bulletin boards in my classroom to create a “gallery,” along with the quotation from Matthew’s gospel. Each portrait is accompanied by the name of the individual, his or her birth/death dates, and a quote from the individual or about the individual. Once each week, for ten weeks, I give a miniature, analytical biography on one of the portraits explaining why he or she has a place in my gallery. On the bulletin board, after the presentation, I attach a printed, short summation of the individual’s accomplishments. Two of my portraits, this year, are Lady Jane Grey and Martin Luther King, Jr., so when presentations take place, since the heroes are all from different time periods, I give a brief background on their historical period as well. As I discuss each portrait, I also explain how one acquires information about each one and I have some books and/or articles available for students who want to know more about the hero that is being presented (usually this results in at least one student taking either a book or an article to read). After the brief presentation, we discuss what virtues, characteristics, and accomplishments make the individual presented a hero. My final and tenth portrait is always one of Christ. When I do the presentation on Christ as the ultimate hero, I always ask the students to tell me why He is different from the other heroes that I have in my gallery. The answer I seek is that the accomplishments and noble deeds of the other heroes are a response to Christ as they are reflecting Him and His goodness. After modeling to the students just how the selection, research, and presentation is done, then it is the student’s turn to select his/her personal ten heroes and present his/her gallery to the class.

With this year’s group of students there has been an added dimension to this learning exercise; we have been following the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s search for the “Greatest Canadian.” After listening to the arguments for each candidate, we, then, discussed the candidate’s virtues and accomplishments. We had very lively discussions

over the merits of several of the finalists. The class took the opportunity to vote on the name they wanted to see be given the title of “Greatest Canadian.”

Resources:

- New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible. 1989. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993. 5 (“New Testament”).
- Maxwell, Arthur S. A Hall of Portraits. Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories. v. 4. 1941. Washington, D. C. : Review and Herald, 1950, 378-384.