



Philosopher Shrines Salon Night

Peter Jana, English, High Tech High

Jeff Robin, Art, High Tech High

How is social order maintained? Students explored this question in a study of early modern political philosophy where they decoded complex texts and shared ideas in Socratic seminars. Contemporary texts, simulations, skits, and creative writing supplemented core readings from Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Adam Smith. In a salon night exhibition, students displayed philosopher shrines and engaged in philosophical discussions. The shrines housed objects representing key ideas from the philosophers, in front of a backdrop designed and painted in art class. Students explained the objects, performed skits illuminating the concepts, and participated in Socratic seminars where parents also took part.

Teacher Reflection

This was my third philosophical salon, but the first to include philosopher shrines. The shrines—along with the simulations, skits, and seminars—were an essential means of engaging students with the primary sources. The highlight of salon night was when parents got a chance to “roll up their sleeves” and get in the trenches with their kids, and kids demonstrated they could engage in analytical adult discourse.

—Peter Jana

Student Reflection

We held seminars after each text. We would spend days reading and taking notes, asking questions and trying to understand the text. Then all of our hard work was put to use in seminars. Your perspective was tested and what was said either strengthened your belief or sometimes changed your mind completely. The seminars helped connect the readings to each other, and helped tremendously with constructing the shrines. The shrine objects made us think and connect to the readings on a deeper level.

—Pauline Vela, 10th grade

To learn more about this project and others visit www.hightechhigh.org and

Peter Jana’s and Jeff Robin’s digital portfolios at

<http://staff.hightechhigh.org/~pjana> & <http://staff.hightechhigh.org/~jrobin>