

KALEIDOSCOPE

Youth Initiative High School

Winter 2013

TEACHING TO THE TEST OF LIFE

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What is the purpose of education? What should it awaken in the learner? What gifts should it bestow upon the graduate? These are the questions that pedagogues and epistemologists have asked themselves for centuries. But in today's world there are other questions that society asks of its educators as well: What is the standard that is expected of every student? How will you ensure that this standard is met? What proof will you

provide that our young people have "received an education"?

In alternative education circles these utilitarian questions are often dismissed as vulgar, bureaucratic, and counterproductive. Those prejudices may be justified but the value of these questions remains. Simply having lofty goals like 'character', 'inspiration', and 'social consciousness' does not absolve us from having to show that we are in fact succeeding in what we set out to do. So how do you test for inspiration? The same way that you teach it: by looking at the whole person, by constantly challenging all the faculties of the student and observing the response. We base our curriculum on the premise that school is a dry run for life.

Life is full of tests that cannot be completed by filling out bubbles with #2 sharpened pencils. Making meaning out of adversity, building strong relationships and networks, finding purpose in your work, confronting your own foibles—these are the kinds of tests that we at Youth Initiative want our students to pass.

The national concern of meeting standards and "teaching to the test" is that teachers shrink their curriculum so that students can perform well on standardized tests. The test, the standardized one, cannot match the complexity of real tasks in life. Therein lies the problem: it's not that tests are bad, it's what they're testing. At Youth Initiative we want to find tests that not only capture a narrow set of knowledge or skills but also reveal potential vistas of growth.

In the end, tests are not about what you've learned—the past. Tests reveal aspects of ourselves: what we want, who we are, where we're going in life. Tests, like destiny's road signs, point to our future.

PASSING YOUR OWN TEST

Jacob S. Hundt, Program Administrator & Faculty Chair



As a teacher and booster of the Youth Initiative High School, one of the questions I often hear when speaking to people who hear about YIHS for the first time goes something like this: “Well, the school sounds awesome.... But are the kids really ready for when they go out into *the real world*?” My first impulse upon hearing this is often a desire to question some of the assumptions upon which the question seems to be based, such as that “the real world” necessarily means immersion in some kind of deadening corporate or bureaucratic hierarchy, for which the creative, flexible, collaborative, and personally enriching environment at YIHS would perhaps be poor preparation. But this response is uncharitable – the plain meaning of the question is excellent and relevant – how does YIHS prepare graduates to meet the great challenge of crafting a productive and fulfilling adult life? In many cases, this is a question the students themselves begin to raise as they contemplate the momentous and daunting next steps beyond graduation. As the YIHS Counselor, I work actively with our junior and senior students to answer this question head on.



The ways in which we measure our success as adults fall into two major categories. The first category is that of the formal, objective benchmarks of achievement that are accessible to the external world. This would include success in a chosen career, financial security, and credentials in higher education, starting with participation in college entrance exams like the SAT or ACT. As students move towards graduation, these issues often begin to move higher in their list of priorities and at YIHS we have the luxury of working actively and personally with students as they chart their life path. For many students, this begins with the College Tours.



Each spring and fall, I take the junior and senior students on the road for a week to visit colleges and universities throughout the upper Midwest. The goal of these trips is to jump start the students’ college searches by exposing them to a wide variety of different kinds of

Counterclockwise from top: Luke Skywalker, Lucy Pevensie, Jesus Christ, Frodo Baggins, Heracles & Odysseus. All of these people famously passed non-standardized tests.

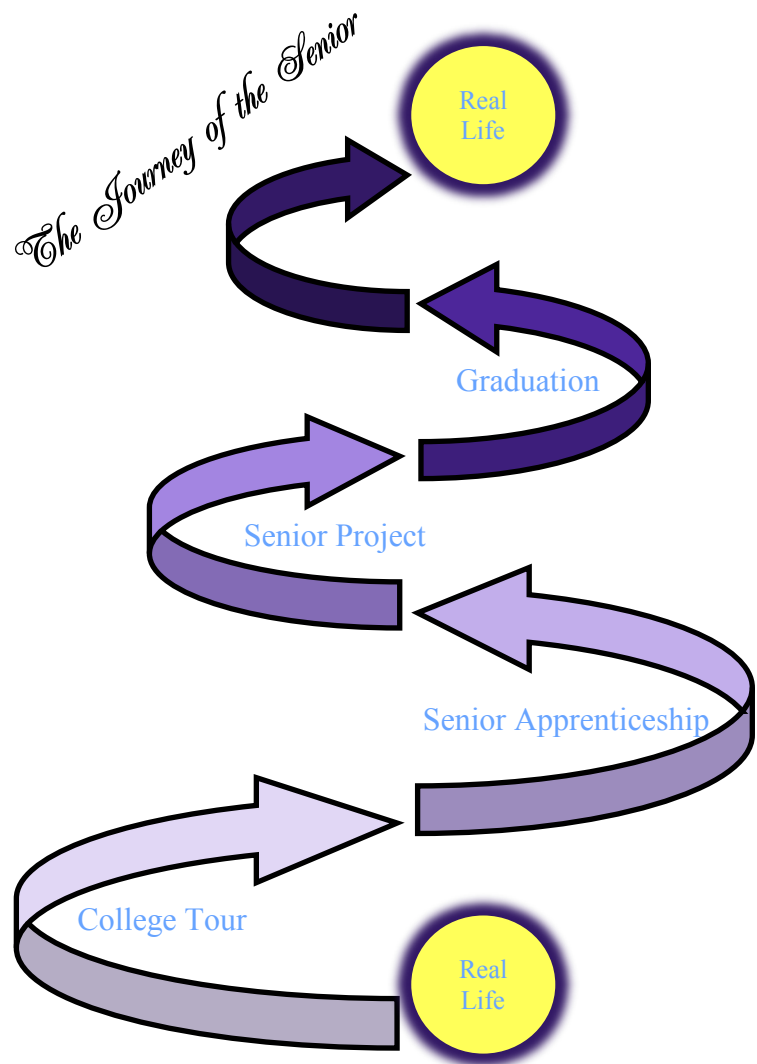


institutions, as well as to give them a chance to represent themselves in person in a series of formal, “real world” interactions with official people, in this case college admissions officers. Students learn how to introduce themselves and, importantly, to describe YIHS and Viroqua to people with no familiarity with their background. Back at school, I also work with students preparing to take the SAT or ACT, usually in the context of after school prep classes and during the first couple of months of their senior year all YIHS students learn how to craft a professional resume detailing their work and volunteer experiences, as well as some of the unique aspects of YIHS. The resume is a different, highly formalized, exercise in personal presentation and becomes a part of all students’ college application materials, as well as job applications.

The other major kind of benchmark against which we are all tested as adults includes our own interior values, passions, and sense of self. Success in this arena depends not only upon diligence, perseverance, and focus, but also on discernment, reflection, and self-knowledge. There are many places throughout the YIHS curriculum where students have a chance to practice these skills,

ranging from the work with masks in the 9th grade Comedy and Tragedy block, to the explorations of courage and coming of age in the 11th grade Parzival block. With the seniors, this year we began by reflecting on biography, proceeding from the ancient Greek principle of “Know Thyself.” A number of guests from the community came to share their life stories with the class and then each senior student shared a narrative of their own life with the class as well. These narratives were frank and powerful and it was clear that this sharing added greatly to the cohesion of the class. A major focus of this exercise was to encourage students to identify moments of deep engagement in their lives, times when they were so immersed in whatever they were doing that they forgot the passage of time or when they couldn’t stop thinking about some puzzle or project at hand. Hopefully, identifying these experiences can point the way towards a true sense of vocation, or a sense of individual calling that can give structure to decisions about college, career, family, and life path.

As a teacher, one wish I have for my students is that their exterior and interior benchmarks for success will be closely aligned. If all goes well, their future education, their work life, and their family life will resonate harmoniously with their values, their aesthetic passions, and their senses of self. The capstone test of the senior year – the Senior Project – in many ways brings the exterior and interior together. Beginning before the 12th grade year, rising seniors work with the Care Groups and mentors to craft a year long project that allows them to explore and develop some passion or life-long interest. Projects can be artistic, service-oriented, career-oriented, or academic in nature, but they must include both a written and a visual or performance component. And all senior projects lead to a very public presentation, in which the student shares the fruits of his or her study and hard work to the members of the community. The process of selecting, planning, executing, and publically presenting a year long project is a test that sets a very high bar for achievement and demonstrated each graduate’s ability to chart his or her own course and thrive in the real world.



SERVICE TEST

Youth Initiative's Annual Service Week



"Great listening skills, understood directions, and were motivated! Great help and we appreciate it!"

-YIHS SERVICE
RECIPIENT



"All of the kids were amazing! They were very self motivated and hard-working. They would definitely be great role models for other youth in our community!"

-YIHS SERVICE RECIPIENT

THE KID TEST

"Miss" Kenzie Burke, Class of 2014



My name is Kenzie Burke and I am a senior here at Youth Initiative. I feel so blessed to have had this school be my source of education for the past four years. I have been able to bring work that I love into my school day. Toward the end of my sophomore year I was asked to work in the Rosemary Kindergarten at Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School as a lunch relief person where I would wash the lunch dishes with two children from the class as my helpers everyday. This position took place during school hours and with the help and support of teachers and parents I was able to work it into my school day. This job I have has taught me a lot over the past year and a half. It's taught me more about working with children. I have been immersed in the Waldorf kindergarten and since this is a paid internship I learn the responsibility of upholding a job that I love. Having this experience prepares me for real life and gives me a closer connection to working with children which I know is in my future. Not only is this a great everyday learning experience but I love being known as "Miss Kenzie" to the young children of this community.

TRIAL BY FUEGO

The International Experience

Students from all over the world come to YIHS to take advantage of our creative and cutting edge program. In so doing they put themselves to the test each and every day. This year's group of international students, like those before them, have shown amazing resolve in the face of challenge, and have offered our domestic students an invaluable perspective along the way.



Youth Initiative's International Brigade: From left to right: Sebastián Cervantes (Mexico), Maël Jourdan (Switzerland), Mario Enrique Arellano Carranza (Mexico), Amelie Wiesholler (Germany), Jean Claude Twizerimana (Rwanda), Mailys da Silva (France), Namthip Nilawong (Thailand), Sachar Goncaruk (Germany) Not Pictured: Adi Elul (Israel), Hélène Bartoli (France)

ARE YOU YIHS READY?

Take this test to evaluate YIHS Readiness

1. Which is worse:
A) Failing B) Never trying C) Succeeding D) Plums
2. How old do you have to be to think for yourself:
A) Apricots B) Over 30 C) People can't think for themselves D) Old enough to ask questions
3. When I spill something I:
A) Walk away quietly hoping no one noticed B) Peaches C) Weep D) Clean it thoroughly and immediately
4. When I grow up I want to be:
A) Rich B) Famous C) Nectarines D) Philosophically Responsible
5. I love to take an active interest in my own education.
A) True B) False C) Cherries

- | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) |
| 2 | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) |
| 3 | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) |
| 4 | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) |
| 5 | (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) |

Answer Key: 1.B, 2.D, 3.D, 4.D, 5.A; if you chose D,A

THE EXPEDITION OF LIFE

Dave Hubbard Rode, Development Assistant and Expedition Leader

"...Education must enable young people to effect what they have recognized to be right, despite hardships, despite dangers, despite inner skepticism, despite boredom, and despite mockery from the world."

-Kurt Hahn, Founder of Outward Bound, United World Colleges, Round Square Schools, and Atlantic College

This year is the first for the Land Ethic Curriculum; a four-year, expedition-based curriculum focused on developing leadership, initiative, and resilience in students while deeply exploring the Driftless Region and the ways it is currently being "used." In our daily existence we are always in some sort of relationship to our environment. What is the nature of this relationship? Is it abusive? Honest? Reciprocal? Is it like those insidiously destructive romances wherein we only care about the other so much as we can use him or her and, once used up, move on?

There is not, at large in our society, a land ethic. What exists, at the present moment, is some form of manifest destiny—that we have the right to own, use, and manipulate the land as we see fit. The mere fact that we feel it is our right to "set places free" in various forms of wilderness preservation only goes to show how completely we believe that we own the land. A land ethic asks us to reconsider our connection to our environment and to embody a correct relationship.

But we cannot simply think our way into a correct relationship. No matter how many books on parenting we read there is no replacement for being wrist deep in baby poop and madly in love. To know something deeply, we must immerse ourselves in it. And, once immersed, we are confronted with our limitations, our strengths, our edges. We are asked to look sincerely at ourselves. A disrespectful person cannot expect a respectful relationship. An unhappy person cannot expect a happy relationship. If we are to embody correct relationship with the land, we must also connect with our deepest selves, the very limits of our being, the quality of our fiber.

There is no better place to do this than on an expedition. An expedition is a journey with a goal of getting somewhere. The existence of a goal is essential so that when it gets hard, when it's cold and raining, we still wake, pack up camp, and move forward. Expeditions literally and figuratively force us to leave a lot behind, to forget all the fluff and to find that we are okay with less. Without the clutter, we are more able to reconsider ourselves, are more willing to leave assumptions behind with the cell phones and search for authenticity. An expedition must also be challenging. If it's not, it's not an expedition. We put ourselves out in the cold, the heat, the bugs, the rain, the wind, the mud, and right into the heart of being sensually alive in the world. Making



On the cusp of adventure; the tenth grade class prepares to embark on the first ever YIHS expedition.

progress is intimately linked to our effort. There are long days and sometimes unbelievable difficulty. We are called to actively bring forward our better selves. Being passive to life does not fly on an expedition. If we are hungry, we must cook. If we are tired, we must make camp. If we are losing motivation, we must encourage ourselves.

For many, it is truly the first time they have stood on their own two feet and felt how sturdy they really are.

There are no drugs, no alcohol, no technology, no rooms to hide away in, no television shows to get lost in; there is no escaping. We must figure out how to get along. We must face conflict and work through it. We cannot hide from challenge. And we are also forced, by simple proximity and the awareness of our group members, to not hide from ourselves, to accept that we are a part of the conflicts and must also be an active part of the solutions.

There have been times I have stood waist deep in mud, surrounded by miles of swamp, frigid in my useless raincoat after ten days of non-stop rain, carrying an eighty pound food pack and a ninety pound canoe on my shoulders, in the midst of the fifth mile of portaging on that day alone, hundreds of miles from the nearest town, swarms of mosquitos so thick they blocked my vision, that I could feel I was on an edge that was sharp and required me to choose which side of myself I wanted to be on: to despair or to persevere? An expedition cries out to you: *You are here. This is your life. Who are you going to be in it?*

Paddle strokes. One foot after another. Set up and take down. Set up and take down. Sit and sit and sit in the cold. It's almost numbingly simple. You cannot change the weather or dry the mud and you cannot run from your companions. If you want to thrive, it is entirely up to you. You stand taller. You paddle harder. You tell jokes while setting up camp. You look at yourself in the mud and you feel a deep laughter rise in your belly and you roar with life and begin working your way slowly onto dry land. The difficulty is dissolved by the simple magic of your willingness to face it, as an equal.

An expedition is a journey, traversing inner and outer terrain, with a goal of getting somewhere. It requires us to stay true in difficult times. We can see then that our most deeply held and cherished expressions of meaning are expeditions; marriage, education, friendship, career, parenting. These expeditions help us find our purpose. And whether it's the land which sustains us, our workplace, our family, or our trust in ourselves, we can see that seeking correct relationship on these journeys leads us to health.

And it takes practice. Many of us buckle and stumble, find ourselves lost or defeated by the relentless challenges in our lives. We yearn for guidance and sometimes find it within a book, at a church, or from another human being. But we must also find it within ourselves. We must know our ability to stand. An expedition is a metaphor. It is a preparation for life. A life which asks us, daily: *who are you going to be?*

"There is more in us than we know if we could be made to see it; perhaps, for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less."

-Kurt Hahn

2013-2014

Land Ethic Expeditions:

Grade 9: *Hiking through the Driftless Region we will observe, journal, draw, read, discuss, play, and explore what makes the Driftless Region unique. Special focus will be put on the visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile information we receive.*

Grade 10: *Paddling down the Wisconsin River, students will explore the nature of our relationship to resources of the Driftless Region. Through reading, discussion, and the immediate experience of the environment students will wrestle with the complexities of resource management, land use, and the underlying assumptions of our society's relationship to resources.*

If you want to learn more about the Land Ethic Expeditions, go to our website at www.yihs.net

THAT WHICH ENDURES

An Interview with Guthrie Knapp, Class of 2006

I interviewed Guthrie Knapp, class of 2006, at the Driftless Cafe, a place that he helped build 8 years ago while a student at YIHS. Guthrie finished a degree in Architecture at UW-Milwaukee in 2011 and since graduating has been working as a landscaper and builder and most recently is starting a new business called, Shade Haven. The Shade Haven (pictured below) is a portable, retractable shade structure for rotationally-grazed cattle. He and his partners have started constructing a manufacturing site here in Viroqua and are moving into an intense season of production and marketing. I borrowed an hour out of his busy schedule and asked him to reflect on his YIHS experience and how it's affected his post-graduate efforts. --Shawn Lavoie

SL: Do you think YIHS teaches for the test of life?

GK: YIHS doesn't teach to the test per se. You get to set your own goals. I learned how to set goals and how to meet the expectations of my peers and teachers. Throughout the whole process you are challenging yourself.



Outside of school, when I was working for carpentry crews, I had to set my own standards, and set them as high as possible. Just like at YIHS, I learned to set my personal standard and then to follow through and give all my effort.

SL: Was college a shock?

GK: In tests in college I did fine. I wasn't used to standardized tests, so I studied harder. I asked myself, how do I maximize this class? I went to office hours with professors, I raised my hand. At YIHS, with small classes, you learn that your questions have

value, your answers have value. If you are an active student, you can only do so bad. Teachers can see effort and that effort will be recognized. The tests aren't the point.

SL: What about after college, when you didn't have teachers to recognize your effort?

GK: Out of college, my first project was building a retaining wall. You want a wall to last forever. There's a right way to do that. My goal was that it would last. I wanted to ensure that it would. I drew on my experience as a landscaper and was now my own boss, managing one other worker. When it was done, it felt good.

With my second project, the Shade Haven Company, I'm interacting everyday with professionals. With professionals, you want to have



Mr. Knapp has been heralded as a humanitarian hero by cows all over the treeless plains.

answers and you want to receive answers. Dealing with so many different professionals, I have to maintain a high level of quality and it's hard to know how to excel at that. Like at YIHS, there are a lot of out-of-the-box challenges. Your and your high school's success is on the line and you have to do something. There are real consequences. If students don't cooperate and don't fundraise, the school fails. College and post-college life is the same; if you can't figure out how to be professional and function at the level, you fail.



Guthrie Knapp, Shadesmith, YIHS Graduate

I got a taste of the professional world while in college in my Architectural degree. It was a project-based approach so I had to work with engineers, designers, and design software. Building buildings is a holistic process. You set a high goal, but it has to come through in the product. The professor doesn't care how much time you put in; they care about the quality of your product: does it meet its goal, and how well. Shade Haven is a holistic challenge. YIHS is as well.

SL: *Do you think YIHS prepared you for starting a business?*

GK: In college I understood that learning is not simply done in the 1 1/2 hours of lecture. Some people treat college like a lecture series and do fine on the test. You have to take a step further, to let professors understand you, to make time to build relationships. From being a student at YIHS, I was used to that. You raise your hand in class. It becomes expected. You realize that class doesn't function when people aren't interacting. Business is like that too. It takes the extra conversation, extra effort.

SL: *Tell me a little more about Shade Haven, your current business venture?*

GK: What's nice about Shade Haven is that it's a unique design that accomplishes its goal in an elegant and functional manner. As a business, there's no gimmick. It performs and functions well, that's the point. It makes the life of cattle, who need shade, more pleasant. For farmers, it increases profit margins. As a business, it's an honest product, which means I can believe in it. It's also a new thing that doesn't exist in any other form yet. It's revolutionary, yet it's still easy to relate to people.

We all have been hot, uncomfortable during the summer. It facilitates rotational grazing (an ever popular way of raising livestock) especially grass-fed beef. Shade Haven allows you to manage the fertility of your pasture. By moving the Shade Haven you, in a sense, control your nutrients. If there's a thistle patch, move the Shade Haven over them, and the thistles will be gone. Cattle need shade and being in the shade lowers their heat stress, and increases their productivity. Shade Haven allows you to maximize the energy out of your pasture. It simply makes natural and organic farming practices healthier, easier, and more profitable.

SL: *What are some enduring lessons or take-aways from being a YIHS student?*

GK: At YIHS I felt like I had to represent my school. I felt very responsible for the school in my four years. What I took away from YIHS was being competent, capable, and not afraid to represent myself. So many kids are a single point in high school, just focused on themselves. At YIHS, you are so much bigger than just you. You fill the void. Sure, you get to wear what you want to wear, sit on a couch or chair, but you still have to show up to a fundraiser and represent yourself and the school. It can be both: you and the school.

Youth initiative, it's in the name. You know why you're there and you make meaning out of your experience. Honestly, I don't remember that many specifics from high school classes, but I did learn how to be a student, how to be a person who could start a business like Shade Haven, and how to learn.

TO STAND BESIDE THE MEASURING STICK

Matthew J. Voz, Administrator

The images in this article have been deliberately redacted in order to make it more boring, like a test.

One of the most charming parts of buying an old home is finding the door jamb (and there almost always is one) which catalogs the evolving heights of whatever children inhabited the house before you. Little marks crawl up a door post or a closet wall labeled with the children's name and a date like an archaeological record of the near past. It is a ghostly and fantastical exercise to imagine where these children are now, what they are doing, and how tall they are. My wife and I live in an old house and are in the process of creating such a door jamb with our own four children. Each year around the holidays, which roughly coincides with all their birthdays, the children stand straight and barefoot against the door frame of our bedroom, look straight ahead,

and, after being reminded to get off of their tip-toes, for a moment, they are still. And the mark is made. They step back excitedly to see the mark, to measure it against their siblings and their former selves. Sometimes they are proud, sometimes they are disappointed, but always they want to be measured, they want to know (in this case, literally) where they stand.

People don't grow out of this secret craving to be measured, and it is perhaps never more pronounced in adolescence when the desire to place oneself in context can reach almost monomaniacal proportions. Working at a school that does not have letter grades and does not rank students, one might forecast that this inclination would be less pronounced in our students; I would suggest that this is not the case. Our students are flesh-and-blood teenagers like any others: trembling egos behind a paper thin chrysalis of self-defense, peeking out to learn if it is safe to emerge. Part of learning whether or not it is safe to emerge is learning whether or not one is strong enough to exist in what students intuitively understand to be a potentially harsh world. Can I do this right now? The answer is not always "yes".

But that's the point of school, to discover the areas where one is weak and to move towards strength. How do we as teachers and adults, help adolescents to do this? We can do this by holding together two things that most high school students (and most adults) see as diametrically opposed. We must be unwaveringly objective while simultaneously cultivating empathy, respect, and compassion. By being objective we must not be robotic in our judgments, remembering that true equality means doing something different for everyone, but by being compassionate and empathetic we must not allow ourselves to be tempted by the convenience of kind white lies which merely allow students to perpetuate their weaknesses.

Of course, there is no Swiss Army knife in our tool box. We need to synthesize many different methods (and know when to throw methods out the window) in order to reach our objectives. The type of balance that we pursue in our evaluation of students can come only from an intimate knowledge of the student as an individual, but that individual must also be measured against more than just themselves. It often gets a bad rap in alternative education settings but one very important tool at our fingertips is the good old-fashioned pencil-and-paper examination. It doesn't win a lot of points for originality but it serves a number of important pedagogical functions:

1) **It puts students under stress.** No pain no gain, they say. While this objective can seem a little sadistic and can be achieved by many other means, the traditional test crystallizes the moment of performance into a compact, irreversible exercise. Because the results of a test are far less important than say a job interview or a pregnancy, tests can help mithradatize students against the inevitable moments of stress that life provides for all of us.

2) **It builds a sense of temporal perspective and responsibility** by linking a concrete moment in the present with countless "tiny" decisions in the past. Did you prepare for this test? Did you pay attention and engage with the material in class? If the answer is no then there is a good chance that the student will meet with failure. As in life, every decision, however seemingly insignificant, can have an impact on the future.

3) **It provides objective, impersonal feedback.** Remember when your mom told you how handsome you looked with that new haircut or how talented she said you were at the trombone and you never really believed her? People have a tendency to tell us what we want to hear but unlike the feedback about a work of art or a performance, there is little or no subjectivity involved in what a test tells us—it's just the truth. Surely, it's the narrowest of truths, but pure truth, like gold, often comes in flakes rather than big nuggets.

4) **It places the student beside a culturally valued body of knowledge.** Tests announce to the student that these are the important parts of a subject that the student's community values and then lets them know if they are meeting the community's standards regarding this valued subject matter. That's why it's so important to really think about what educators teach and what we test, because we are literally creating a cultural consciousness with our choices.

5) **It puts every student on an island.** Just like the internal struggles that each of us encounter in our life, during a test there is no one to help you and no one to blame if something goes wrong. Tests are pretty excuse proof. Excuses fall into two categories, those that reflect back upon the student and thus reinforce some of the other lessons above (*I didn't pay attention, I didn't work hard enough*) or those that dismiss the process as a whole (*School is stupid!*). It's our job as parents, educators, and community members to ensure that the former line of justification for failure is used as a positive tool for improvement, and that the latter does not become an accurate indictment.

The act of test taking is a specialized (and fairly useless) skill, but the skills and knowledge that are acquired in pursuit of "the score" should not be minimized. After all, it is not the marks on the door but the spaces between them that signify true growth.

SUPPORTING SUCCESS

The 2013-2014 Matching Gift Circle


These matching gift members have given generously to support the efforts of YIHS students, who each year raise about 5% of the school's budget.

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