



COMMONWEALTH SCHOOL
Film Festival

★ ★ ★

November 7–8, 2009

Featuring work by

Mikaela Beardsley '87
Theodore Braun (Former Faculty)
Roy DeBerry '66
Sarah Feinbloom '83
Stephen Ferry '78
Stefan Forbes '84
Deborah Fryer '81
Peter Hall '10
Jenny Kane '78
Jamie Kravitz '84
Richard Landes '67
Brian LeBlanc '94
Kasi Lemmons '77
Eric Meza '71
Robb Moss (Parent '06)
Emily Murphy '10
Myra Paci '83
Jesse Peretz '86
Tamar Salibian '94
Hanna Rose Shell '95
Sarah Sofia '10
Eric Stange '71
Melissa Lohman Wild '88
Leora Winston '10

and more....

go to commschool.org/film
for details.

Ethics and Language

WILLIAM D. WHARTON

FOR THE LAST EIGHT YEARS I have taught all 9th and new 10th graders twice a week in a 10-week course I call Language and Ethics, and met with seniors weekly through the year in a seminar called Readings in Ethics. The younger students read Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and Fugard's *Master Harold...and the Boys*, and study the rudiments of rhetoric—reasoning and fallacies. My aim is that they learn to distinguish between an opinion and an argument (and between a good argument and a bad one) and to see how words—with the social and political baggage they carry—shape human relationships. By encouraging students to care about words and their use, about reasoning, and about the blind spots all of us share, my hope is that we can teach them to listen better—attentive listening is an ethical act—and to think better.

It would be wrong to suggest that this short course for new students is central to Commonwealth's being (as one senior put it to me a couple of years back) a school that cares about the kind of person you are. At best it outlines our community's standards for new students: you can challenge even the Headmaster if your arguments are sound, your motives honest, and your listening as thoughtful as your speaking. But in fact, attention to words and arguments informs the academic work across disciplines: my introduction to deductive reasoning is, each year, a review for those taking geometry. Outside the classroom, life in our school's tight spaces occasions countless opportunities for talk and admonition about courtesy and consideration. That your shouting is disturbing Ms. Brewster's English class carries greater weight than any statutory prohibition (though, to be

honest, this argument does not always prevail). That your prevarication suggests you take Mr. X—whom you've known and liked for two years now—for a chump lends a persuasive particularity to a discussion of honesty. And during lunch cleanup, students see concretely the costs of others' free riding. With rare exception the jobs program works. Life at Commonwealth is an ongoing seminar in ethics.

The thoughtfulness, conviction, and willingness to give as well as take, evident in the following essays, signal, I hope, that we're doing something right. The concern shared by students and faculty for justice, service, and the Big Questions makes clear that Charles Merrill's founding principles continue to flourish and, for each generation, take on new energy and life.



Marielena Toro '10