

Personal Creed Project

Spring 1999

"If you don't stand for something,
you just might fall for anything."

Vern Bennom Grimsley,
radio commentator

Dear English 10 Student,

With this quote, we kick-off the first of the year's two final projects: your Personal Creed Project. One thing I hope this course will do for you is to help you begin to understand the surprising way our lives flow directly from our vision of reality. Your personal vision is like the headwaters of your life. Not far downstream from your vision of life your values form, further along your viewpoints, then your attitudes and, only then, bobbing along sometimes far from their source, your actions.

I hope you can see how important it is for each of us to devote some time and care to the search for a personal vision. (Remember the title of this course?) If it is to serve us well, a vision of life must help us harmonize the conflicting outer realities of our world and universe with the inner realities of our hearts, minds, and spirits. If this course does anything to help spark or renew your interest in your own personal search, I am grateful, and my hopes are fulfilled.

Two main purposes drive this assignment. The first is to offer you the chance to think back over your life so far, including this year we've spent together reading books, writing, and discussing many things under sun and stars. You'll reflect--that is, think back--on characters in books, characters who have made some impression on you. You'll reflect on family members, friends, neighbors, community members--real people in your life who have influenced you in various ways. You'll consider whether your life has been impacted by public figures like sports and entertainment personalities.

You will then ask yourself the question:

What visions of life, what values, do these literary characters, these real people, these public figures, seem most to stand for?

You'll reflect on which characters and real people, which visions and values you admire and which not. You'll think about characters and people whose visions or values you've seen *change*. You'll consider what forces and conditions cause *our* visions of reality and *our* characters to change.

With these characters and real people in mind, the second purpose of the project is to provide an occasion for you to ask yourself some simple questions about how you yourself see reality. You will then form a tentative statement of your own values--your personal creed. I say *tentative* (meaning "for the time being"), because it takes time to develop ideas you feel strongly enough about to base your life on. Actually, creating your own personal vision and value system is a lifelong process. As your vision develops, some of your values will change; others will remain constant.

The assignment will give you a chance to consider what values you now hold in highest esteem. It will help you decide what values you believe are also important, which ones you feel no longer fit your vision, and which you might set out on the curb someday and recycle. Once you have a preliminary statement of your creed, I will ask you to examine it critically in preparation for your project paper and your creative visual presentation. More later on these. As always, I'll appreciate any input you offer along the way.

Steps I through IV below will be extended inquiries, each one *a full page to a page and a half in length*. Respond to your choice of the questions accompanying each set of instructions. *Idea for a creative alternative?* Please discuss with me first.

I - Influences and Inspirations: Real People and Literary Characters--

Make a list of seven to ten people in your life--real people like family, friends, neighbors, community members, public figures (celebrities, singers, athletes), and fictional characters from books--who have influenced or inspired you in some way, positively or negatively. Try to include at least one person you feel may have influenced you negatively. At least three of them should be literary characters.

Following each character or person in your list, identify the main values each stands for in your mind. How do you think this person or character sees life? *What does she or he stand for?* (To help you get started, respond to your choice of the questions below.)

Does the person see life as a place where might makes right, where only the best fighters or the cleverest operators survive? Or does this person see the world as a place in which we each must stand for something beyond ourselves? Does he or she see life as a struggle to "get yours" before someone else gets it, or as a place where you get what you need in life by serving others? Does this person believe "life is hell and then you die"? Or does she or he see this life as a first taste of an endless life in a universe permeated by the love of a caring God? These are only some of the possibilities.

Which characters or people do you know have gone through *a change in values*? Compare the *causes* of these changes, if you know them. *What conditions and forces do you think cause a person's vision of life and, thereby, values to change?*

II - Most and Least Admirable--

Look over your list from Step I above. Which of these characters or real people do you *most admire* for her or his vision or values? Why? Give specific examples. What other characters from your list do you admire?

What person or character do you *least admire*? Explain, giving specific examples. What other characters or people from your list do you *not* admire much? Why?

What do you suppose your choices of most and least admirable person say about your own values?

III - Preliminary Creed Statement--

Write a preliminary statement of your personal creed--the vision/values you hold at this point in highest regard. Incorporate values you have learned from your family, religion (if you profess one), peers, personal experience, books, music, films, or any other source including literature you have read.

Re-read your last paragraph in Step I. Which of your own values do you feel are probably constant (unchanging)? Which do you predict may change in time? Explain, using examples.

How would you describe your current vision of reality? Do you see yourself as having a purpose here on earth? If so, how would you express it? Are you here to get what you can grab before you die? Or are you here to learn about yourself and learn to be tolerant of others? Are you here to accumulate wealth and security? Or are you here to learn what it means to serve others? Are you here to survive as comfortably as possible? Or are you here to leave the world a better place for your having lived here? (*Again, answer your choice of the questions above. Feel free to explore your own questions too!*)

Create or find a saying that reflects your personal creed. (For one good example, see the saying at the top of page 1 of these instructions. Tip: try your Quote Log.)

IV -Your Arch Critic Speaks--

Imagine someone whose values are *opposite*, nearly opposite, or at least very different from your own. Imagine this person as clearly as possible, down to clothes, facial expression, how his or her voice sounds. Write a detailed physical description of how you imagine him or her. What criticisms and objections do you suppose this person would make about the values you expressed in your preliminary creed statement (Step III)? Express these objections in a newspaper editorial, a television political advertisement, a speech, a poem, or any other creative way that comes to you. *Create a critique, that is, of your own vision or values.*

Student Comments on Personal Creed Project

(and other components of an approach to teaching for expanded insight)

June 1998

I would say to keep the Creed Project & Portfolio. I really liked them because I got to explore myself and my belief. I never really thought of my beliefs or needed to for school, so these projects you should keep.

The only thing I think you should change is the presentation of our creed projects. I get way too nervous around a lot of people, making presentations, so I wouldn't want others to almost embarrass themselves like me.

(Harvin Toledo, chief class disrupter)

During this course I like doing the creed project. The only time I can get to my inner self is during church and church camps.

I also like it because we got to film it.

(David Leslie, son of Episcopalian priest, assistant class disrupter)

One project I enjoyed was the Creed Project. I had a great time working in my group. One thing I would change is if I had a chance to do the creed project next year I would probably do the presentation by myself, just so I can express some of my own thoughts and be recognized for them.

(Corina Haralson, a shy student)

The Creed Project was the best because it lets out all your feelings so you can just cry it all out.

(Haseeb Halimi)

I feel you should keep the Creed Project, the Portfolio Project, and the quote logs.... The creed makes you search yourself and also tells everyone what you believe in. The portfolio because you get to pick out all your favorite writings, and share them with other people.

And the quote log because the class discussions are good, it brings the class close together and you discuss what you feel about each quote.

(Amy Gibson)

My Personal Creed and Mission

Written at the request of a class

J. Creger, 6 June 1998

1. The universe is like a mountain; each of us is finding a path to the top.

2. Your path and my path are like our inner natures, unique--
unlike any other. There are as many paths as people to walk them.

3. Life is about finding and walking our paths.

4. Many things can help us: religious traditions, philosophies, life experience,
friendships, knowledge, an openness to finding our way.
But these things are not our path.

Religion, for me, is like my roots. Spirituality is like my flower.
The religions of the world can help nourish me, but a tradition is not
my goal. My goal is to grow spiritually, to find my path and walk on it.
As I see it, the goal for each of us--in our own unique way--is to bloom,
and, in blooming, more and more to come to love others and ourselves.

5. Two great adventures help us find and walk our paths. One of these
is the adventure of coming into our gifts. Each of us has a unique combination of
gifts from the universe, or God. Our lives are a process
of discovering and developing these gifts that often lie hidden inside us.

6. Another great adventure along our paths is friendships--relationships.
Relationships with others--family, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, teachers of
all kinds--is one of the main ways we become ourselves. Learning about others
and their paths helps us stretch ourselves
into new shapes. To do this takes a lot of love.

7. My creed is to discover and develop my own gifts, and help friends I meet along
the path find and cultivate theirs. My mission is to do these things with a calm
and thankful heart.
And a lot of love.

A Testimonial

Note: A year ago Nicole Verser began spring semester chronically late, sleeping in class, and did failing work most of the way through. In the end she managed to earn a passing grade. Largely, I think, she slowly began to see value for herself in the Creed Project, Quote Log, and other elements of the course described earlier.

I share her course evaluation here not only to boast shamelessly, something teachers need to do more of, but to offer what I feel is an especially credible student voice in support of the approach I am attempting to develop and describe, and other approaches like it. Thank you, Nicole.

"I found this course interesting and certainly an exciting experience. Many people thought your work was too abundant but I find you a fantastic teacher and your intentions for your students full of your soul. I can't remember a teacher I have enjoyed as much as I did you. Your organization and comfort made me want to learn. I enjoyed your course and your next year's student are truly lucky. Thank you and have a good summer!"

References

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Rumi. *The Essential Rumi*. Trans. Coleman Barks. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995.

Sprunger, Meredith J. "The Challenge of the 21st Century." *The Fellowship Herald*, Spring 1999.

Steiner, Rudolf. *Balance in Teaching: Meditatively Acquired Knowledge of the Human Being*. Spring Valley, N.Y.: Mercury, 1990. Four lectures delivered in Stuttgart, 1920.

The Urantia Book. Chicago: Urantia Foundation, 1955.

Closing Journal

What have you learned in this workshop that you feel is of value?