

JUST MERCY  
Instruction/Assignments  
HILL  
Fall 2016

Out of class: Students read the Introduction – “Higher Ground”

In class:

Quote on board, time to write/reflect, then debrief:

Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument.”

■ Reinhold Niebuhr

After discussion, and coming up with definitions of love (best one: Love is a feeling of connection that brings a happy or sad effect.), broke into groups. Groups each had to introduce themselves to each other, get to know each other a bit. These are ALL freshman, coming into the school first time – this is their first class as it meets at 8:00 in the morning. Hoping to establish a cogent group, who feel connected to the larger college. Thus, using this book makes sense as it is a KCC Reads book.

Each group was given an index card with various questions:

Group 1: Why did the author go to law school?  
How do you assess the ease of getting into Harvard Law School, based on how the author describes his experience?  
Does he explain how or why he got in?  
What does this say about him?

Group 2: Page 6 – “It was so deeply affirming to meet someone whose work so powerfully animated his life.”  
What does this mean?  
What does it tell you about the author?

Group 3: Find references to Georgia.  
How is Georgia a ripe setting for this early introduction to a criminal justice system? Show why.

Group 4: Read over the author’s first meeting with a prisoner.  
What does the author want you, most of all, to know about Henry?  
What does this tell you about the author?

Group 5: Page 13 – “Maybe we judge some people unfairly.”  
What does he mean by this?  
The author gives you biographical data about himself.  
How will this enable him to have your sponsorship?

Group 6: Explain – “The opposite of poverty is justice.”  
And – “We all need some measure of unmerited grace.” – define it and give some examples.

Each group reported out, after working together for about 15-20 minutes. As the group responded, they were peppered with questions and much of the class wished to respond to these questions – which they did, to enable a larger group cohesion.

Out of class reading assigned.

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Out of class: Students read Chapter 1

In class:

Quote on board, time to write/reflect, then debrief:

“Hell is empty. All the devils are here.”

--William Shakespeare, “The Tempest”

After discussion, and coming up with the opposite (Heaven is empty, and all the angels are here.), we linked the quote to Chapter 1.

History of Jim Crow laws (students very sketchy on American history; general history vagueness, together with number of students from Ukraine, Greece, China, etc.). Showed internet search result of list of Jim Crow laws – discussed some of them, in particular.

Discussion of how to mark up the book – direct instruction for most of the class, covering:

- annotating
- notetaking
- quick research
- vocabulary absorption

Students were assigned Chapters 2 and 3, which we began reading in class to enable live instruction on active reading.

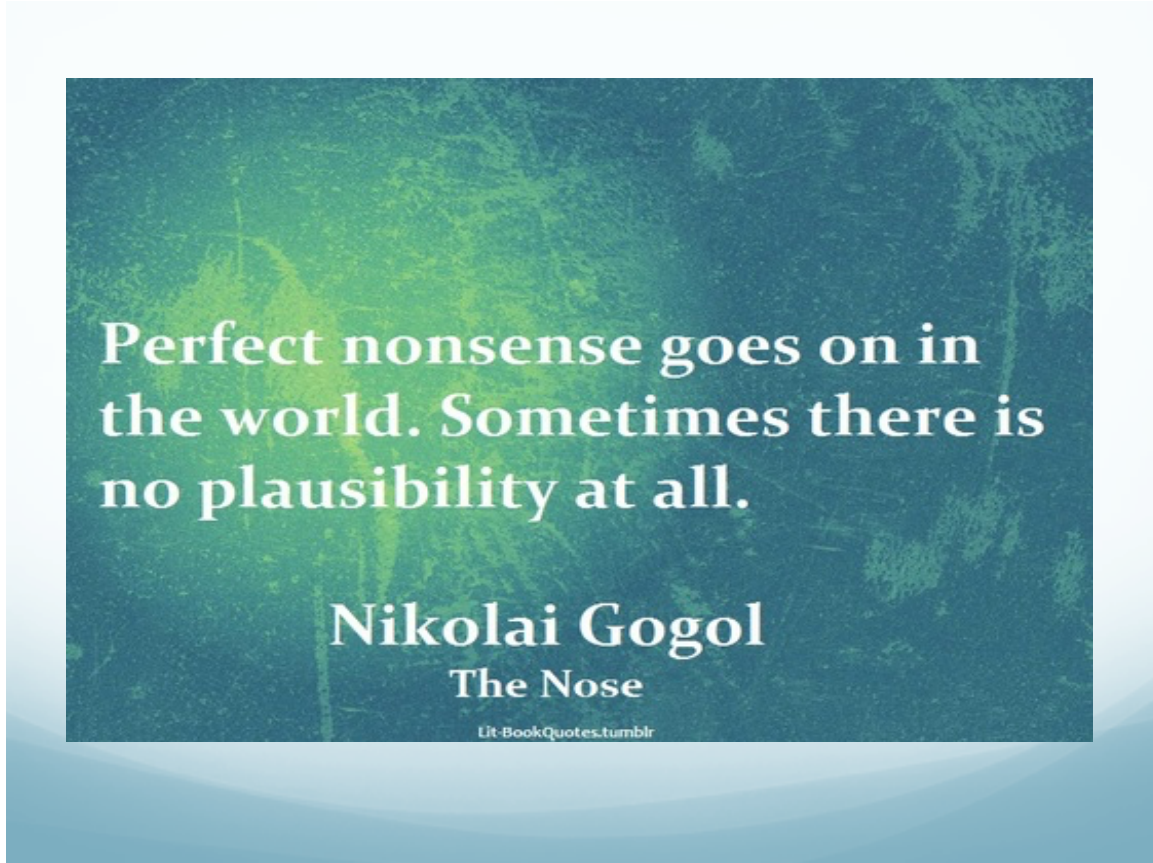
Out of class reading assigned. Each student had to make up three questions from these chapters, to be handed in (typed, etc.).

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Out of class reading: Chapters 2 and 3.

In class:

Overhead quote on powerpoint slide:



Time to write, reflect, link to chapters. Followed by quick PP on words –

# LUDICROUS

- Ridiculous
- Laughable
- Absurd
- Deserving Derision

# ANGUISH

- Excruciating or acute distress
- Pain
- Suffering
- Grief

# TRIBULATIONS

- Severe trial or suffering
- Grievous trouble
- Affliction

Copies of lyrics to "STAND" by Sly and the Family Stone handed out. Set the scene about Bryan Stevenson in his car, listening to the music, just before he gets harassed by the police.

Played the song from a youtube video while students read the words, thought about why Bryan stayed in his car to listen to the end of this song, opened up discussion of the influence of that song on Bryan's whole life. (Amazing sympathy/empathy from students about how the song represents Bryan's REASONS for being – students absolutely became friends with Bryan during this part of the class.)

Asked students what Higher Ground means, then pointed them back to the Introduction, then handed out lyrics to Stevie Wonder's song, played it for them on youtube, .

Pointed out the pattern of the book – Introduction sets stage, Brian gives his story, asks for your complicity.

Chapter 1 tells us about Walter McMillan.

Chapter 2 is about Bryan's journey.

Chapter 3 is about Walter McMillan.

Broke into groups, with questions from class being used for discussion. Some of the questions are wonderful, some elementary. Each group interested in answering as they were from their classmates.

Assigned Chapter 4 to read out of class.

Assignment for homework given, after we discussed answers from groups.

# LET WALTER MCMILLAN SPEAK

- Write a dialogue between McMillan and ANYONE IN THE WORLD, living or dead
- Two pages, double spaced, 12 pt. font
- Here's an example:



# DIALOGUE

- Conversation between two or more people.
  - For our purposes, make it two people.
  - One of them is Walter McMillan.
  - He can speak with anyone in the world.
  - Who would he speak with?
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