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NMH SUMMER SESSION

2010
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
Advanced Level

This course provided opportunities for the students to refine their English language skills and experience the culture. Classes were structured to help them speak English clearly and comfortably, read critically, write freely, revise carefully, and build vocabulary deliberately. Regular class discussions and small-group tasks encouraged them to share their ideas and experiences with each other.

The class quickly developed a shared interest in communicating with each other. The students were involved in activities such as discussions, small-group problem-solving, and projects such as being a museum tour guide and a TV news anchor. They also communicated through their writing, sharing drafts with each other during the ongoing revision process. They wrote many journal entries and crafted their writing more carefully in two compositions: an expository piece entitled “My Name” and a composition of their choice to submit to the online publication “TeenInk” (<http://www.teenink.com/>).

There was one required text for reading practice this summer, *Shades of Simon Gray* by Joyce McDonald. The novel is about a teenage boy named Simon who falls into a coma after a traumatic car accident. At the same time, he and a group of friends come under scrutiny in connection to a computer hacking incident in the local high school. The story also includes a surreal thread about a man who, 200 years earlier, was unjustly murdered in the same town. Simon, while in his coma, and his friend, Liz, who is writing a research paper on the historical incident, help the man prove his innocence and revise the story of his life and death. Class discussions focused on a variety of topics, including the dynamics of friendships, grief, peer pressure, and ethics. The students concluded their work with the novel by holding a mock trial to creatively explore the perspectives of the characters and the shades of truth found in the story.

The students built their vocabulary in several ways. The first was by choosing words and phrases that they encountered in their lives outside the classroom. They also gleaned vocabulary from the novel. Finally, they were introduced to word roots, prefixes, and suffixes so that they could have a rudimentary understanding of a wide range of words they may not have seen before.

The students’ cultural learning grew from their experiences both inside and outside the classroom. The class took several field trips during the summer, which gave the students an opportunity to expand their world-view and interact with the culture. The trips included a 4th of July parade and fireworks display in nearby town; a hike accompanied by a sizeable, yet lovable, dog named Hank; a visit to the museum at Smith College; a trip to a unique farm that serves as a shelter for exotic animals; and a day-long sojourn to Boston with the other ESL classes.

Student learning was assessed through daily written work, the compositions, projects, comprehensive tests, and class involvement. The teachers met with the students individually several times during the summer to discuss their progress and learning goals.

This course met for three hours, six days a week, for the five-week session.

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Teaching Intern: Jonah Kaplan-Woolner
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