

With Rigor for All

Helping Students Read Challenging Text

36th Day of Reading Conference
November 3, 2012

Keynote

The goal of a rigorous curriculum is to help students “develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging.”

Teaching What Matters Most. Strong, Silver, & Perini. ASCD

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Resource materials

Kehinde Wiley, "Dee and Ricky"

YouTube video: Kehinde Wiley on MUSE (5 min.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jNKBOMOTPA&feature=youtu.be>

Claude McKay, "If We Must Die"

Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Boy Died in My Alley"

"Anti-violence program fails to save young Markham man. Victim of Chicago shooting had a mentor in high school

Chicago Tribune, June 13, 2012, by Barbara Brotman and William Lee

If We Must Die

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

by Claude McKay

The Boy Died in My Alley
to Running Boy

The Boy died in my alley
without my Having Known.
Policeman said, next morning,
"Apparently died Alone."

"You heard a shot?" Policeman said.
Shots I hear and Shots I hear.
I never see the Dead.

The Shot that killed him yes I heard
as I heard the Thousand shots before;
careening tinnily down the nights
across my years and arteries.

Policeman pounded on my door.
"Who is it?" "POLICE!" Policeman yelled.
"A Boy was dying in your alley.
A Boy is dead, and in your alley.
And have you known this Boy before?"

I have known this Boy before.
I have known this boy before, who ornaments
my alley.
I never saw his face at all.
I never saw his futurefall.
But I have known this Boy.

I have always heard him deal with death.
I have always heard the shout, the volley.
I have closed my heart-ears late and early.
And I have killed him ever.

I joined the Wild and killed him
with knowledgeable unknowing.
I saw where he was going.
I saw him Crossed. And seeing,
I did not take him down.

He cried not only "Father!"
but "Mother!
Sister!
Brother."
The cry climbed up the alley.
It went up to the wind.
It hung upon the heaven
for a long
stretch-strain of Moment.

The red floor of my alley
is a special speech to me.

- Gwendolyn Brooks

Anti-violence program fails to save young Markham man Victim of Chicago shooting had a mentor in high school

Chicago Tribune, June 13, 2012, by Barbara Brotman and William Lee

Four years ago, as a 16-year-old student at Gage Park High School, Davonte Flennoy was pegged as 20 times more likely than the average Chicago Public Schools student to get shot or shoot someone else.

That "ultrahigh" risk rating, from a consulting firm that used statistics to identify students at risk of violence, put Flennoy into an intensive program initiated by former schools chief Ron Huberman. Flennoy was provided with a mentor, Stevie Powell, to see if he could defy the statistics.

Powell became Flennoy's cheerleader, mentor and surrogate parent. With Powell's help, Flennoy managed to graduate from high school. When he expressed interest in attending college, Powell mounted a herculean effort to make it happen, raising \$3,500 to help Flennoy get settled into an apartment in Atlanta.

But after just a couple of weeks last August, Flennoy moved back to the Chicago area. And late Monday, the odds came calling.

Flennoy, 20, was shot to death in an alley in the Marquette Park neighborhood. Underneath Flennoy's body, police said they found a handgun. Authorities said they believe the shooting was gang-related.

The consulting firm had gotten it right, and Flennoy had become another statistic for this year's growing homicide tally in Chicago. Despite the best efforts of those who lined up to help him, Flennoy fell to the violence of the streets where he had spent much of his youth.

Powell, a minister, will officiate at Flennoy's funeral. He said that when he learned of the shooting through a text message from Flennoy's mother, he wept. "He was so talented and really had a lot to offer," Powell said. "If he could have only been able to see it himself."

Powell and Flennoy were subjects of a Tribune story last year on Youth Advocate Programs. For that story, I spent several weeks riding around in Powell's minivan with Flennoy and Powell's three other charges. I saw some of the same things that Powell did about Flennoy's possibilities.

Flennoy could be moody. One day he would bound cheerily into the minivan; on another, he would turn aside Powell's good-natured joking with a curt, "Not in the mood." But he was smart. He had a "laser focus," according to the head of his alternative high school, where Flennoy got top grades and won academic awards.

He could be charming — a handsome, compact guy making silly noises to his baby son as Powell drove them home late at night. Riding around with Powell, a married father of four, and his guys, I thought Flennoy had a fair chance.

His life had been anything but charmed. His father spent five years in a penitentiary. The year before he was enrolled in the advocate program, Flennoy missed 97 days of school. A friend died in his arms of gunshot wounds. By the time he went to Atlanta, where he had a grandmother, he had lost three friends to violence.

He didn't volunteer many details to an outsider. But in a powerful rush one night in a church, where Powell had taken the teens he was working with to discuss the Christian perspective on manhood, he told a story.

I was riding with one of my men, and as I was getting out of a car, a black van pulled up. I see a gun pulled out the window. I try to tell my friend to watch out. But he shot my man four times.

I'm under the car. I'm scared-like. ... I try to keep him with me. He looking at me, saying, 'I'm good, I'm good.'

But he gone.

That night, he told the older men that he had a child of his own and was leaving his previous life behind. Powell thought he could do it. "I was willing to put all that I had on the line because I believed in him," he said.

Ira Davis, assistant director of Powell's advocate program team, said he believed in him. "I do think Davonte had a good chance," he said. "I had a couple of teachers speak about his writing ability. They thought with a little hard work, he would do very well being a writer."

The president of Atlanta Metropolitan State College believed in Flennoy, too, and made sure the school admitted him. "There's no question there was promise," said Gary McGaha, who interviewed Flennoy at the request of an admissions counselor who had been impressed with the young man. "He had tremendous ideas, and he simply needed assistance in bringing those ideas to fruition. ... I was very impressed."

Lealer Harris, whose two sons were close with Flennoy and also had Powell as a mentor, thought he had a chance. "I thought he was going to school in Atlanta," she said. "I'm like, what is here (to bring him back to) Chicago? He could have made it somewhere." But Flennoy wanted to be with his son in Chicago, said his mother, Danielle Weatherall, who lives in Markham.

"He missed his child," she said. And he was devastated when a friend's pregnant girlfriend was shot and killed in Chicago the day after he had arrived in Atlanta to start college.