

CREATIVITY: Learning and Leading in a New Renaissance

Discussion and Workshop. Block 1. Monday, July 9, 2018.
11:00 AM-12:00 noon. Room: Bennett 8.

THE PRESENTER: Brent Cirves is Chair of the Department of Drama and Speech at Woodberry Forest School in Virginia.* He is a twenty-eight-year veteran of the school. You can check out the Department's program on Facebook at "Woodberry Forest School Drama Department" or at the following website:

<https://www.woodberry.org/page/arts/performing/drama>



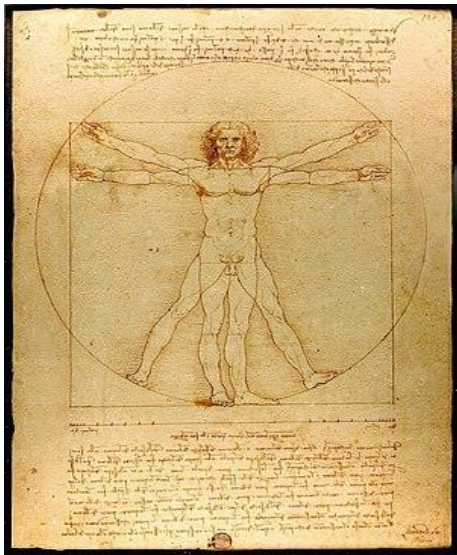
Brent Cirves, center, with students.

ABSTRACT: The 21st century is witnessing an explosion of new ideas. The depths of the human brain are being plumbed much as Leonardo da Vinci explored the human body in his search for understanding. There is new thinking on the essence of thinking itself, and creativity is at the heart of this exploration. The key to boys' futures includes learning to link disparate ideas, make connections between the arts and themselves, pose "beautiful questions," "feeling questions," ethical questions that connect different parts of their own minds, intellects, emotions. The arts are ideally positioned to use creativity as a means of helping students, although this sort of learning can and should happen across the curriculum. The lecture and workshop will focus on the teaching of drama as just one example of how to inspire and model creativity in the classroom.

THREE QUESTIONS THAT THIS WORKSHOP WILL AIM TO ANSWER:

1. What is meant by a “New Renaissance,” and how is this important to the futures of our boys?

In brief: A “renaissance” is an exciting time when knowledge expands rapidly in all directions and students are called upon to keep up and go beyond. How do our boys grow into good men, ethical men, excellent and creative thinkers and leaders in this challenging time? The answer has to do in part with nurturing students’ creative abilities. Note: this is also a very challenging, even frightening time, just as the last renaissance was. We are having to ask big questions again, in particular: With everything changing around us, how are we now to live good lives, be the best versions of ourselves? This question is of deep concern to teenagers and at the very heart of the study of ethics.



2. How is creativity a key to boys’ learning and leading in the 21st century?

In brief: Creativity may be defined as that native and nurtured ability to solve difficult problems by finding unique, often unexpected connections between seemingly disparate elements. The latest brain studies have shown that the process of creativity is not solely a right-brain function, as has been thought for a number of years. It is, in fact, a function of utilizing a number of right- and left-brain centers spread throughout several parts of the brain. In short, creativity is a function of making connections: in the brain and consequently in the outer world. (Pictured above: “Vitruvian Man” from the *Sketchbooks* of Leonardo da Vinci.)

3. What are successful, hands-on models for teaching creativity via ethics and drama?

In brief: With the right modeling, boys can become better thinkers, innovators, leaders, better men for the 21st century. The presenter will show several directing methods that have evolved over time, which, when successful, engage students by requiring them to ask and answer deep and meaningful questions. At its heart, theater is a profoundly moral art. The biggest questions characters ask are: Who am I? What am I doing here? And how can I get out of the trouble I’m currently in? Ethical or values-based directing puts these same questions to the actor/character, making



them relevant not only to the production but to the personal life of the artist. By the end of a well-played performance, students understand themselves, their strengths and weakness, and their places in the world with a little more clarity. The presenter will ask teams of volunteer participants to work on a scene using methodology that will be modeled during the workshop. (Pictured above: Joshua Staufenberg as Cyrano in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Woodberry Forest School, Spring, 2018.)



The cast of *Dracula*, Woodberry Forest, Spring, 2001

*Woodberry Forest School has a strong commitment to making drama and public speaking central to the cultural life of the school. Actors, writers, directors, technicians, designers, and public speakers make it possible to actually create culture at Woodberry Forest. Work in these areas gives students abilities that will benefit them throughout life. They learn a reverence for language and for storytelling; they learn to communicate in front of large groups; they learn to flourish as a member of a team and to complete large and highly complex artistic projects; and they learn to appreciate aesthetic experiences and to understand themselves and their world in more sophisticated ways. Ultimately, students of Drama and Speech will become more sensitive citizens of an ever-changing and challenging society, better communicators with their fellow man, more skillful arbiters of world cultures, life-long learners, and, if they so choose, leaders in the 21st century.



Joshua Staufenberg as the Monster in *Playing With Fire*, Woodberry Forest, Spring, 2018