

Fenway High School
Boston, MA
Boston Public Schools



Engaging Questions at Boston's First Pilot School

Peggy Kemp, Principal: Fenway began as a program within English High School, really focusing on students who were either bored, or just disengaged with school, and might in fact drop out.

Eileen Shakespear, Founding Humanities Teacher: School is really boring for a lot of kids, and something just piques your interest and gives an edge to things. What's the edge? Why would anybody want to answer the question of "Who is the main character of *Hamlet*?" What about, "Is Hamlet a good son?" Just a question that compels interest from humanity, that's what Humanities is.

At the Heart of the Fenway curriculum is a four-year cycle of Humanities Seminars.

Keith Hammitte, Humanities Teacher: Number one is, How to do the right thing in the face of injustice.

How to do right in the face of injustice.

It varies, but often it includes the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, sometimes the Civil Rights movement.

How do we govern ourselves?

The next year is, how do we govern ourselves, which is what we're doing now.

What does it mean to be human?

What it means to be human, which is where we look at sociology and psychology. and religion and philosophy. Who built America, which is the Great Depression, and sometimes, globalization.

Junior Year Student: One of the topics I enjoyed was the Columbus one, and deciding whether or not he was a hero. Because I know in most of our middle schools, we got a book and it said what he did, and just idolized him, basically. This year, when we came here, we got to know the story behind it, and create our own opinion on whether or not he was a hero.

Jessie Lortie, Humanities Teacher: It's not just addressing the big questions, it's also the way we have them address those questions. One of the most powerful units we teach is how do you do right in the face of injustice unit, where we look at how do we make outcasts. How do we as high school students make outcasts? Why do we try to find an us and pit that against a them? So we do a lot of internal identity issues, first. And then we start looking at the Holocaust. And then they bring what they learned about the Holocaust and they say, "It really opened my eyes. I never thought it was really a big deal to make fun of somebody. And now I see how it connects to these other things."

Freshman Year Student: It shapes us as individuals, learning to take on our own ideas, and our own opinions about it, instead of a teacher just telling us.

Demonstrating Mastery

Students conduct a Junior Review for family and faculty.

Seniors complete a 9-part portfolio.

Kelly Gilfranco, Former Student, Current Teaching Intern: Fenway requires their students to do portfolios as a graduation requirement. The portfolio is an opportunity to choose one topic of your interest, write a research paper, a position paper, about ten annotated bibliographies. It's just a great opportunity to do independent study research and to work with other faculty members

Freshman Year Student: I came from the suburbs and it was like American history only. And I came here and we learned about the Rwandan genocide, and the Cambodian genocide, and it opened my eyes to a whole other world that I wasn't exposed to in my middle school and my old town, and I realized how much more there is in this world, and kind of have to find the other story. You really have to open up and look for more sides of it.