

Essential Questions: What are the perceived advantages of intelligence—namely, why is intelligence considered to be such a valuable attribute? What are the ways in which intelligence is measured? To what extent does intelligence factor into decision making? What are the consequences of intelligence, and in particular of supreme intelligence? (Does increased intelligence lead to greater self-awareness? In turn, does increased self-awareness lead to personal fulfillment and greater self-sufficiency or social isolation and strained relationships?) And lastly, what kind of responsibility accompanies intelligence—personal or communal—if any?

Texts/Films: Excerpts from *The Genius Factory*, David Plotz
Bringing Down the House, David Mezrich
Boiler Room (2000)
the curious incident of the dog in the night-time, Mark Haddon
Grizzly Man (2005)
Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck
Good Will Hunting (1998)

(previous years have included: *Flowers for Algernon*, Daniel Keyes; *A Simple Plan* (1999); *The Life of David Gale* (2003))

Overview: In his research about the “Repository for Germinal Choice,” David Plotz documents the unprecedented advancement that modern science has made in the field of genetics, and twenty-first century technology will certainly facilitate even further development. The experiment conceived by Daniel Keyes in *Flowers for Algernon*—once limited to the realm of fiction and imagination—is becoming increasingly realistic. Likewise, as the science of intelligence enhancement becomes more plausible, the ramifications become increasingly relevant (both individually and communally).

Seniors on the cusp of graduation—thus completing one stage of their education, while contemplating the next—are in a unique position to reflect upon the “value” of their education. In pursuing aspirations of college, seniors are also in the unique position of having their intelligence quantified (standardized testing, transcripts, letters of recommendation) and being judged accordingly (acceptance or rejection!). While examining the different ways in which intelligence is assessed, and identifying the opportunities that have emerged in turn, I am hopeful that students will contemplate their responsibility to use their education productively, which includes weighing the balance between private endeavor, personal relationships, and a larger social conscientiousness. By exploring notions of multiple intelligence and alternative perspectives, I am equally hopeful that students will successfully recognize and appreciate their own potential to learn and to contribute.

These four quotations help to frame this course and its progression:

No great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness. – Aristotle

I don't want to be a genius - I have enough problems just trying to be a man. – Camus

Three great forces rule the world: stupidity, fear and greed. – Einstein

It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents us from living freely and nobly. – Thoreau

Methods: Advances in digital media have led to an inundation of images and visual stimulation. As this trend continues, students (with ready familiarity youtube, streaming online, digital pictures, etc...) need to be able to process and analyze visual information critically. While most Cushing students have the ability to absorb and recall visual information with admirable proficiency, my goal is to teach basic aspects of film and cinematography alongside a more traditional literary approach, in the hope that students will develop the critical thinking skills necessary to extract meaning from a variety of sources. Additionally, by working towards strengthening their preexisting disposition towards the visual, I expect my students to apply the same skills in other ways that will foster enhanced reading comprehension. Given the limited amount of material that can be covered during one term, the pairing of three films with three novels allows for an exposure to additional models of the various ideas that will be presented.

Term Breakdown:

1. Week 1: Course Overview – *The Genius Factory*
 - a. perceived attributes of intelligence
 - b. motivation/desire for intelligence enhancement
 - c. slippery slope

2. Weeks 2-4: Standards and Applications – *Bringing Down the House & Boiler Room*
 - a. accepted measurements of intelligence
 - b. career choices and applications of intelligence
 - c. greed and the “American dream”
 - d. personal/social impact

3. Weeks 5-7: Alternative Perspectives -- *the curious incident of the dog in the night-time & Grizzly Man*
 - a. self-discovery and the emergence of acute self-awareness
 - b. the divide between reason and emotion
 - c. Monty Hall problem – odds/probability vs. intuition
 - c. threats of social isolation
 - d. acceptance of difference

4. Weeks 8&9: Relationships and Sacrifice
 - a. social impulses, camaraderie, and loyalty
 - b. fears of realizing potential
 - c. social responsibility
 - d. self-sacrifice for the betterment of others