

Summer Institute 2006

The fog and chill that enveloped Pebble Beach this June hardly registered with the 16 high school teachers from around the United States and Canada who participated in TCI's 11th Summer Institute. Guided by TCI's dynamic educators, the teachers spent four days engrossed in challenging Biblical texts, wrestling with the question of whether teachers are activists.

This year, TCI introduced a unifying theme to the Institute: *Educators as Activists: Transforming the Classroom Community*. Texts chosen from the Bible challenged teachers to consider the role that they play in shaping a classroom environment that honors differences and critical thinking. Biblical commentaries from diverse sources ranging from the Talmud to Cynthia Ozick and Franz Kafka spurred participants to recognize the creative tensions in Jewish tradition, and to develop their own interpretations of difficult texts.

The core practice of the Summer Institute is *hevruta*, a traditional Jewish, cooperative learning methodology that guides students through close readings of difficult texts. Related to the Hebrew words for 'friendship' and 'connection,' *hevruta* promotes open dialogue and creative dissonance in the classroom. In the words of Kim Stevens, a returning participant from the Havergal College prep school in Toronto, *hevruta* "has revolutionized the way we teach English and has revolutionized the way we teach texts.... Teachers have a deep yearning for meaning and a deep yearning to be effective. The richness of this opens one up to the love of learning... a way of capturing the learning process."

Most important, the Summer Institute gave teachers an opportunity to recharge their batteries. As adults, we rarely have opportunities to study together. The Summer Institute creates such an opportunity and fosters a surprising closeness between participants that is difficult to describe. As Amy Omaña from the Canterbury School in Connecticut lamented, “Everything after this is going to be such a letdown. When you’re teaching, you feel like an island, it’s lonely. But this was so fulfilling spiritually, intellectually, professionally; I want to get others to share it with and expand the island.”

Next June 25-28, we hope to expand the island even further when we host TCI’s 12th Summer Institute at The Governor’s Academy in historic Byfield, MA. So come vacation with us by the quaint villages and beautiful beaches of Massachusetts’s North Shore!