

Ordinary Miracles - Lesson 1

The greatest invention...

Page 1 of 3

And then, a mere 5,000 years ago, civilization suddenly took off at a rate that's been increasing exponentially ever since. Why the long stagnation? And what changed? The answer is that roughly 5,000 years ago, the first writing systems were invented. Many options became available to smart people with good ideas. They could write down their ideas, so that they wouldn't forget them. They could develop them in greater detail. And they could leave a record of their ideas, for other smart people to elaborate on with other good ideas. This doesn't only speak to invention; political and religious organization, systematic legislation, doctrines and manifestos... they all depend on writing.

- Ordinary Miracles, by Danny Iny, page 2

Lesson Goals

To get children excited about what writing can help them accomplish.

Preparation

Select one or several historically significant documents and prepare photocopies for your students.

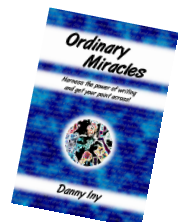
Suggested documents:

- The rules of the class (for younger children)
- The Ten Commandments (for older children)
- The American Declaration of Independence (for older children)

Also, prepare handouts of the Code of Hammurabi (full version is possible for older children, or excerpts for younger ones. The Code is available at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/hamframe.htm>).

Danny Iny is the author of *Ordinary Miracles - Harness the power of writing and get your point across!* (ISBN 1-4116-7252-6)

For more free educational resources like this one, or to learn more about Danny's work and book, please visit his website at www.dandesign.co.il



Ordinary Miracles - Lesson 1

The greatest invention...

Page 2 of 3

Activity

The class should be run in the form of a group discussion. Consider breaking the class into small groups - either the students can discuss amongst themselves and report to the class, or each group can be moderated by an educator.

Discuss with your students why writing is historically important - what if the documents that you are using as your example had not been written, and the information had only been disseminated orally? Would it still have had the same weight?

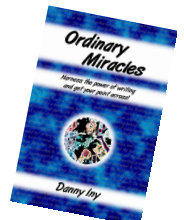
With younger children, less emphasis should be placed on the texts, as they may be intimidating. The inherent weaknesses of oral transmission can be emphasized with a game of broken telephone.

Example #1 - The Code of Hammurabi - this document has an aura of some ancient, highly intricate justice system, but in fact the contents of the document are nothing special; ideologically they don't amount to much more than an elaborated version of "an eye for an eye", and in practicality the laws are unfair and sometimes contradictory. They are special because they represent the earliest recorded legal system that we can study. *Their value is not in their content, so much in the fact that Hammurabi had them written down.*

Example #2 - The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci - these documents represent the results of decades of brilliant research into dozens of fields - advances that would, for some, take centuries to rediscover. Despite the incredible value of the contents, however, they had practically no impact on

Danny Iny is the author of *Ordinary Miracles - Harness the power of writing and get your point across!* (ISBN 1-4116-7252-6)

For more free educational resources like this one, or to learn more about Danny's work and book, please visit his website at www.dandesign.co.il



Ordinary Miracles - Lesson 1

The greatest invention...

Page 3 of 3

the surrounding world. This is because they were written in Leonardo's mirror-script (backwards), and were never systematically published - *so for practical purposes to the general populace, it's the equivalent of them not having ever been written down.*

Questions for discussion - Is writing important? Is it important to learn how to write well? Does it matter if writing is complex and archaic versus direct and accessible? Is it important that everyone be able to read a document, or is it enough for an elite, educated class to have that ability?

Notes

Either as preparation for the lesson, or as a follow-up, older children can be given the Code to read at home, with the assigned work being to look for inconsistencies, and to evaluate whether or not the Code represents a 'good' legal system.

Danny Iny is the author of *Ordinary Miracles - Harness the power of writing and get your point across!* (ISBN 1-4116-7252-6)

For more free educational resources like this one, or to learn more about Danny's work and book, please visit his website at www.dandesign.co.il

