

Case Study 1 -- Good Match of Article to Topic

[Model 1 -- 50-topics](#)

[Topic 20](#)

[Article](#): anonymous. "A Room of Her Own;Her college feminism professor taught her to learn through rigorous inquiry. Then Marcia Carlisle died and left her former student to answer the biggest question yet." Washington Post. November 01, 2009. -- 598 tokens.

wp-2009-h-19,Washington Post,2009-11-01T00:00:00Z,A Room of Her Own;Her college feminism professor taught her to learn through rigorous inquiry. Then Marcia Carlisle died and left her former student to answer the biggest question yet., "by Karen Houppert;Recently a professor of mine, whom I'd studied with 20 years ago at Bennington College, died. [para] Two weeks afterward, I learned that she had made me the beneficiary of her life insurance policy, leaving me \$75,000. [para] I found this out only because the school where she was then teaching, Phillips Exeter Academy, sent me a letter asking that I fill out ""the enclosed form from Prudential."" When I called the administrator who had signed the cover letter, she informed me of my windfall. [para] This is a true story. [para] For the longest time, I puzzled over it: What in the world motivated her to do it? With no note attached? No explanation? No instructions?;What do you think?"" This was Marcia Carlisle's standard response to nearly every student inquiry. She liked to puzzle her students -- she called it ""forcing them to think"" -- with a dash of philosopher John Dewey's ""learn-by-doing"" and a sprinkle of Socratic method. The mix meant she'd never give you a straight answer to anything. Ever.;I first encountered Marcia's methods in 1982, when, in the second semester of my freshman year at Bennington in Vermont, I took a history class she taught. I wasn't particularly curious about Industrialization in America, but a friend had raved about Marcia, and, hey, her class worked with my schedule.;After I turned in my first paper, Marcia sat me down in her office and explained exactly what was wrong with my poorly crafted essay and gave me a crash course in structure -- the one I should have gotten as a high school freshman. I was surprised that a teacher would make such an effort, and grateful, since the academic rigor at Bennington had left me foundering a bit. Gradually, it was dawning on me that the mostly A's I'd received in high school were a reflection of my public school's low standards rather than my superior skills. But Marcia didn't think this an insurmountable obstacle, I'd just have to work a little harder.;And Marcia made learning positively seductive. She had a stealthy approach to teaching history, luring us in with novels and diaries and memoirs that brought an emotional understanding of the period and its hardships. Once we were hooked, she reeled us into broader inquiry with facts and analysis. She insisted there was no simple line from one historical event to the next. History, she taught us, was a complex matrix of circumstances.;She was big on inference.;Look at what you do know,"" she would say. ""See what is already there in the text. Where does it point you?;For Marcia, history was about the present: How did we get here? How did this happen? It was a teaser that drove every class discussion. To answer it, definitively, we had to know more. More history. More literature. More science. More knowledge.;In 1984, I signed up for Marcia's History of Feminism course. In an unforgettable lesson, Marcia spent three two-hour classes coaxing our undergraduate pea brains

Topic 20

Top words

Word	Weight
art	
museum	
artists	
artist	
gallery	
work	
arts	
painting	
works	
exhibition	
smithsonian	
contemporary	
project	
national	
paintings	
display	
museums	
sculpture	
show	
design	

into an understanding of one slim volume. As readers may remember, Virginia Woolf's artfully constructed essay "A Room of One's Own" bemoans the historic absence of great women artists with amusing digs at pompous British men and curiously resonant hypothetical queries. "If Shakespeare had a sister," she famously speculates, then goes on to detail how the "extraordinarily gifted" Judith Shakespeare's life unfolds, how her talent goes unrecognized, how she is betrothed to a hateful wool-stapler, how, lacking a proper education and any choices, she runs away instead to be a poet in London, how she, like her brother, had "a taste for the theater" and turned up at the stage door to beg for a job -- only to be laughed at. At last Nick Greene, the actor-manager took pity on her, she found herself with child by that gentleman," Woolf writes, and so "killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some crossroads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle. In the course of this essay, published in 1929, Woolf introduces the aunt who died suddenly and left her 500 pounds a year, enough for "chicken and coffee, bed and lodging." Woolf credits the money with providing two things essential to the production of good art. First, she posits famously, women writers need a room of their own to escape from the domestic flurry that threatens to consume their time, their energy and their sense of self if they are to find the peace necessary for reflection and, thus, creation. Second, Woolf writes, money keeps anger at bay -- and anger and bitterness can cripple a writer. Woolf details the list of crummy jobs she had over the years (reporting on a donkey show here or a wedding there, addressing envelopes, reading to elderly women, making artificial flowers). Always to be doing work that one did not wish to do," Woolf says, was a poison that corrupted her worldview. Her aunt's legacy allowed her the intellectual freedom to become the writer she was meant to be. Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me," Woolf asserts. I felt similarly about Marcia's History of Feminism class. In my old copy of "A Room of One's Own" I have written a definition of ideology on the flyleaf; Ideology: a system of organizing principals, a way of seeing the world as the basis of a social or political philosophy or program. When I see the note now, I am struck not only by the obvious inadequacy of an education that let me get to Marcia's feminism class at age 19 without ever encountering the term "ideology," but also by what it must have meant at age 19 to have had someone -- or rather a whole slew of someones, since we read widely from primary texts -- move me from a dark swirl of discontent about the state of the world and my place in it to a systematic analysis of injustice. The double exclamation points penned by the young Bennington coed with a bad perm who sat on a heater in the back of this overcrowded classroom are clearly a sign of delight at this discovery. Ideology!! Feminism!! I also recall quite vividly a discussion that arose among students about whether Woolf was being elitist in "A Room of One's Own" by suggesting that only the leisure classes could produce good art. Perhaps the conversation stuck with me because of the irony of its context: Here I sat as one of the few scholarship students among the scads of trust-fund babies in what was then the nation's most expensive college. Here, already, I somehow worried that Woolf was right. Here, everybody else had a working knowledge of the word I'd laboriously looked up: ideology. I was playing a massive game of catch-up. Still, I believed I could catch up. Sort of. But Woolf had her doubts; You may object that in all this I have made too much of the importance of material things. Even allowing a generous margin for symbolism, that five hundred a year stands for the power to contemplate, that a lock on the door means the power to think for oneself, still you may say that the mind should rise above such things, and that great poets have often been poor men...but actually, a poor child in England has little more hope than had the son of an Athenian slave to be emancipated into that intellectual freedom of which great writings are born." The class discussion of this passage was wide-ranging and wandering and, ultimately, never resolved. Marcia listened from a desk in the corner, weighed in to raise a question

or two, but otherwise sat tight, a sphinx having posed her riddle.;In 1986, a year after I graduated, three of us Bennington grads went to Marcia's apartment for dinner. Her three-year stint filling in for a Bennington professor on an extended sabbatical had ended, despite students' protests, the college declined to offer her a permanent position. She had taken a pay-the-bills job doing grant-writing for the Maine Humanities Council in Portland.;I, too, had wound up in Portland in the post-college miasma of joblessness, with the boyfriend whose family once summered there and who thought it might be fun and the girlfriend who also liked New England. We were all temping. I had arrived at Marcia's apartment from a day spent as a receptionist at a factory that made typewriter cartridges. The clatter of machinery was so loud that I could not hear the people on the other end of the line whose messages I was supposed to be writing down on a pink message pad, on which I mostly doodled elaborate portraits and tried to conjure up the perfect ""family emergency"" that would get me out of coming to work the next morning.;I had push-pinned my pink, message-pad art around my bedroom wall like a Roman frieze, and the future similarly stretched out bleakly in front of me. After several years, I would have to begin layering the small rectangles on top of each other, I imagined aloud to Marcia. I would live in a giant, pink padded cell.;Marcia laughed at my scenario, and as we sat on the front steps of her townhouse in the gathering dusk, I pulled out my camera to cement the moment.;I knew by then how hard it was to make Marcia really laugh, though I didn't know much else about her. Even after we had begun to occasionally socialize after graduation, Marcia remained something of a mystery. I knew only the most basic facts: that she was from North Dakota, that she had been married once while very young, that she lived alone, that she had a cat, that she'd written her dissertation on prostitution, that she'd never had children. What I knew for a fact about her personally wouldn't have filled a single page.;Marcia would smile slyly, chuckle. But a real belly laugh was rare. I started snapping pictures, continuing with the saga of my tedious day, wondering aloud whether I would ever find meaningful work.;I wanna do something that matters, that will make a difference in the world,"" I confided in a half-whisper, because I knew it sounded corny.;She could have looked at me with a softly condescending smile that said, This, too, shall pass. But she didn't.;You can,"" she said.;More than a decade later, Marcia took a year's sabbatical from Phillips Exeter and began to craft an essay about how her sky was slowly being veiled by the debilitating illness that was eating away at her muscle mass -- and sense of self. She asked if I would edit the piece.;It was a role reversal for us.;This time, it was Marcia on the phone asking for my thoughts on this article she described as ""an exploration about the meaning of 'disabled.' "" At that point, I hadn't seen her in more than two years -- since the time she had told me of her illness, by way of warning me before a visit that she was ""much changed.;When the manuscript arrived one evening about a week later, I opened the brown envelope, rifled through the pages to judge its length and then set it aside on the heater just inside the door. Even though I knew she would be as anxiously neurotic about a swift response to her work as any writer -- as I myself was -- I had to be hard-core. The few peaceful, focused hours of work I squeezed in each day were meanly measured out for my own work.;I was the single mother of a toddler then, and it was a grimy winter dusk in Brooklyn. The passing headlights of rush-hour cars were honking their way along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and into our living room, joined by my son's stream of ""mines's"" and ""no's."" Dusk was the time of day when I had to accept my limitations, to see that all I had hoped to accomplish would not be completed. The work left undone was the money unearned. The money unearned now had to be carefully set aside for me to fret about later, in the middle of the night when I awoke anxious and short of breath.;Right then I had to pick up my toddler for the evening routine of bath and story. After that, I wouldn't be able to stay awake long enough to embark on a treatise about ""disability.;Two weeks after she sent it, Marcia left a message on

my answering machine. She just wanted to make sure, since she hadn't heard from me and given the unreliability of the U.S. Postal service, that I had in fact received the essay. Rather than call her back immediately, I determined to read the piece that night so I could deliver concrete comments the next day. After my son went to sleep, I sat down in the rocker with a beer, Marcia's manuscript and my red pen. I assumed this would be an academic exposition, the kind of essay professors hope will make it to the popular press, requiring me to untangle sentences contorted by heroic efforts to avoid first person singular. I set my pen down. This essay was personal, indeed so far inside the "I" of Marcia's thoughts that I was startled to be invited there. In 10,000 words, she had written of her disease, her finances, her thoughts of suicide. Degenerative is the word the medical texts use, but wasting -- the old word, the nineteenth century word -- is better, more apt," Marcia wrote, referring to the neuromuscular disease polymyositis, with which she had been diagnosed two years before at the age of 48. "It is wasting. It is muscle mass melting, disappearing slowly. My fate, or so the guesswork goes, turns on a mildly toxic dose of a chemical my own body produces," she wrote, explaining that the chemical eats away at her muscles, rendering them useless. For a long time she tried to ignore the signs, the difficulty she sometimes had swallowing, her inability to lift her knees high when she ran, the trouble she had sitting on the ground with her history class one spring afternoon. "But one day as I walked from one room to another both knees buckled, and I dropped to the carpeted floor and wept," she wrote. She dropped down to less than 100 pounds. Lacking muscle, her back first tipped into a slight curve and then, in the rapid course of a year, folded completely at the waist so that she suddenly needed a walker to steady herself. She was exhausted after a trip from the kitchen to the living room of her apartment, a spacious two-bedroom that was fortunately located on the Phillips Exeter campus, where she continued to teach. Movement lost its unconscious nature, and Marcia had to map out every task, every movement. On some profound level, the disease challenged her understanding of the world. To Marcia's mind, history was the study of active choices, activists. And social movements, like movement itself, were merely a matter of choice. We choose to act. We choose to move. We choose to go forward. Or back. For Marcia, the notion of fate had always been relegated to the margins. We have, or believe we have, control over what we become. (It is an active verb)... Become a wife, a colleague, a friend, an historian, a teacher, an advocate, an ex-wife," she wrote. "Now the question of becoming presents itself again but in a passive voice. What will become of me? One of Marcia's biggest worries was money. Her income was modest. Having joined the workforce later than some, after years of graduate work, and having no spouse to help support her, her retirement funds were limited. She didn't want to be dependent on anyone, but she could little afford, and did not truly desire, outside help. Her choices for action were limited. For a while, despair consumed her. Then, she did what feminists have done all along. She took a hard look at her circumstances and considered her personal story in the larger political context. I am reminded of a passage in "A Room of One's Own," in which Woolf observes that, "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size." Marcia saw a similar desire to inflate oneself among the able-bodied -- at the expense of the disabled. She began to move from internalizing her anger to placing it a historical context of oppression -- insisting that Phillips Exeter add ramps to buildings not only to accommodate her but to make it an inclusive campus, to alter its "wheelchair access" buttons outside doors to read "universal access," and to end its practice of holding faculty meetings in inaccessible second-floor conference rooms. She was determined to teach her students to reframe their understanding of disabled. In the same way that the driving force in any piece of writing can occasionally elude the author herself, Marcia denied the anger that drove her stiff, stubborn, uncooperative fingers across the keyboard. "Why aren't

I angry I got sick at all?" she asked toward the end of her essay, which never was published. "At some deep down level do I believe I am being punished for errors of judgment in my past?" She then answered her own question: "No. What keeps me calm is my increasing sense of myself as part of history.;The small measure of peace she found came from anger, but anger that moved from indignation at a personal injustice to fury at a social injustice: the plight of the disabled in an able-bodied world.;When I received the news about the money Marcia had left me, I was living in a small rented house on my meager freelance salary and my husband's slender earnings as a newspaper reporter. I was hoping my recently released nonfiction book would sell -- and had qualified for state health insurance and food stamps for the family. The money was not insignificant.;Reading the letter from Phillips Exeter on the short walk from the mailbox to my house, I sank down on the front steps, stunned.;Who leaves an ex-student \$75,000?;Casting about for clues, my thoughts kept returning to that Bennington feminism class so many years ago. Perhaps Marcia was playing the role of Woolf's aunt, bequeathing me a small measure of artistic freedom.;Or perhaps not.;In truth, I'll never know, and maybe that was Marcia's point;How did we get here? she might ask. How did this happen?;Karen Houppert is an author and freelance writer in Baltimore who covers social and political issues. She can be reached at me@karenhouppert.com.",anonymous,<http://libproxy.clemson.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.clemson.edu/docview/410360681?accountid=6167,3091>