

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2002

Testimonial Comments

- I loved being introduced to new pieces of literature.
- Being with teachers was wonderful. We were always thinking about how to take these ideas back to the classroom.
- Everybody has the chance to voice ideas about the text. It challenges each participant to develop critical thinking skills.
- The small group seminary enabled us to cover background information on writers and have good, heartfelt discussion among professionals.
- Our group had diverse opinions, but everyone listened to each other.
- This seminar has been an excellent format for the exchange of good ideas.
- The enthusiasm of my professor and classroom colleagues was contagious!
- Common Ground is an indispensable venue for teachers to express their ideas and impressions in an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual interest.
- The small group gave everyone a chance to contribute. It allowed us to really explore our diverse ideas.
- The small size of the seminar compels each participant to contribute substantially to the freewheeling exploration of ideas.
- The small groups facilitate discussion and allow us to get to know each other better and feel more comfortable about bringing forth our views.
- We exchanged ideas and lesson plans in a “round table” discussion atmosphere. Everyone’s ideas were judged equally and fairly.
- We were exposed to good literature, knowledgeable minds, and strong opinions. Everyone gave lots of text support for their ideas.
- Everyone gets to speak in the seminar. There is lots of peer support.
- I was given the chance to discuss literature with people who have different ideas and values, and whom I might not have met otherwise.
- I enjoyed the distinct personalities and varying insights of each of my colleagues.
- Common Ground gave me the opportunity to hear the opinions of others and to gather and exchange ideas as to how to teach the books.
- Dr. Estess was warm, open to ideas, and prepared. She engendered good discussion.
- Dr. Estess conducts a lively and stimulating seminar.
- I loved Dr. Muoneke!
- Romanus Muoneke is a great mind. He really knows his subject. He’s also a facilitator and knows how to keep the discussion focused.
- Professor Muoneke was very open and accepting of ideas. He allowed us to take the discussion where we wanted it to go.
- Dr. Thomas is an outstanding teacher who has a panoramic grasp of literature and history.
- Lorenzo Thomas is a great discussion leader. The books he assigned were very rich, and the participants were very enthusiastic!

- Dr. Gregory is generous, knowledgeable, and organized.
- Thank you, Dr. Gregory! You inspire us!
- I look forward to participating again with another seminar leader. It was fun!
- Lunch was a nice touch!
- The lunchtime presentations were enriching and insightful, helping us to become better teachers.
- The presentation by Arte Publico Press is always valuable.
- Ted Estess's reading was wonderful!
- Common Ground was very worthwhile—I will definitely reenroll.
- Thank you for the opportunity to participate!

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2003

Testimonial Comments

- This is a great opportunity to exchange viewpoints with others who love literature and love to discuss ideas.
- I love being introduced to books that I would probably not pick up on my own.
- I am going back to school better prepared to teach literature and with a ton of ideas, stories, and authors to bring into my classes!
- The small group seminar brings out the best of everyone.
- I loved the rapport our group built up over the 2-week session.
- Our seminar was an open exchange of ideas about literature, teaching, and life.
- We had the opportunity to stretch and go in new directions with a supportive cast.
- The size of the group and its diversity stimulated new ways of looking at the literature.
- The intimacy of this small group supports learning and experience that is unmatched by any other format.
- We had an excellent facilitator. She was warm, positive, and extremely well prepared.
- Dr. Gregory is so eloquent and learned. She is very delicate and graceful in her leading of the group.
- Dr. Thomas was an excellent facilitator and very open-minded. He was great when he played “devil’s advocate” and challenged the popular opinion on certain topics.
- Dr. Monroe was fantastic!
- Dr. Monroe created an atmosphere where we could all feel at ease in expressing our views.
- When our group was “stuck” on particular issues, our facilitator could guide us to our own answers.
- Dr. Monroe is the consummate educator!
- Our seminar leader was stimulating. He forced us to leave our comfort zones.
- Dr. Thomas is so intelligent and funny. He is organized and knows something about everything.

- Dr. Thomas was incredible! He poses excellent questions for discussion. I loved every day!
- I enjoyed hearing different writers during the lunchtime sessions. It was so worthwhile to hear from people with different lives and backgrounds, in order to expand one's own narrow view.
- The seminar opens up avenues of interest—in both literature and food!
- This is like a breath of fresh air to be able to listen to others and glean valuable teaching aids from one's colleagues.
- The plenary sessions created a community atmosphere and a genuine sense of companionship among the fellows.
- The plenary sessions were relaxing, refreshing, and broadening after our intense seminar discussions.
- Our book selections were great; we all really enjoyed them.
- The laid back, informal book circle discussion allows members to get to know each other well and feel comfortable bringing up personal stories or difficult issues.
- I loved being around so many good, bright people and hearing a variety of views.
- I loved the exposure to so many new ideas, concepts, and people.
- Everyone had good observations that made the authors more accessible.
- We read challenging, interesting, varied books I wouldn't have read on my own. I would love to come again next year.
- Our facilitator made us all feel involved and able to concentrate. She pulled all the loose ends together.
- There was a genuine feeling of trust and respect in our group.
- We all learned from each other's experiences and fields of expertise. I got some valuable ideas for the classroom.
- This experience made me think about writing again.

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2004

Testimonial Comments

- The small-group format is a necessary ingredient that allows The Common Ground Institute to be meaningful and effective. It provides an avenue for teachers to discuss good literature. This is not usually done through the course of a regular school year.
- Our leader is packed with knowledge and expertise, but he encourages us to share our thoughts and feelings. He makes certain we connect the literature to a common ground. The environment is warm and receiving and is not intimidating.
- More teachers need this kind of summer experience; our students would be the ultimate beneficiaries.
- I can use the other works of literature that I learned about in my classroom to make connections with classical literature.
- I enjoy the camaraderie and open nature of my fellows.

- The easy interaction among colleagues allows for emergence of new ideas and aspects to address issues otherwise not realizable.
- The group is presented with thought-provoking and conversation-starting questions in an environment where people could argue and debate while still respecting others.
- The most beneficial aspect of the small group seminar is that it provides every participant the opportunity to share and be heard. We get to receive a variety of ideas and strategies to use with our students.
- My mind was opened as a reader and a human being by being presented with diverse opinions about singular works.
- The very non-threatening atmosphere encourages me to read, think, dream, and unashamedly share my thoughts. Thanks!
- These meetings are always revealing, exciting, and substantive, and I enjoy the access to the discourse as a contributor and a listener. It is always a rare experience, filled with thought, meaning, and treasure.
- Great exposure to “real, live” authors! The small group sessions were the best. I will spread the word!
- Having works with similar themes is beneficial because new approaches to themes open new vistas in the discussion of those themes.
- The seminar was informative and very enjoyable. I like the relaxed atmosphere and intimate feel of the group. It is nice to have adult conversations about literature.
- I particularly enjoy being able to get together and discuss the novels with others who read and think about what they read.
- It is a very interesting and enlightening opportunity to share, learn, and get new ideas.
- Dr. Muoneke is an outstanding and knowledgeable teacher and leader. He guided and promoted much discussion.
- Dr. Thomas is superb at what he does academically, personally, and professionally.
- When I grow up, I want to be like Dr. Monroe! I would like to be around him more often, to absorb all that he knows.
- The small group allows for more interaction and more sharing of ideas both in and out of the classroom.
- This is my favorite out of seven years of Common Ground! My seminar leader is supportive, relaxed, funny, and so informed.
- What a wonderful experience. It gets the mind working again after a summer of gathering cobwebs.

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2005

Testimonial Comments

- This is an amazing opportunity to work with other educated professionals. I can't wait until next year.
- It's a place to discuss with intellectual equals—something a teacher doesn't often get to do!
- Dr. Gregory is just wonderful. She's a great leader.
- I found that other teachers provided ideas for the classroom that I can definitely use.
- The ability to exchange ideas—in a large group setting where you are limited to one point of view. Small groups allows for so many different view points.
- Dr. Gregory was wonderful! (Nonjudgmental, patient, knowledgeable).
- Romanus Muoneke's point of view and background were invaluable in our discussions; his wisdom, restraint, and patience were admirable; his skill in interjecting trenchant questions was masterful. He is a delight and an honor to have as a leader.
- Dr. Gregory is very diplomatic and is an awesome leader, keeps us focused.
- FABULOUS! I really enjoyed Dr. Gregory's style of being a facilitator to our discussions instead of being a leader of discussion.
- Fair, engaging, moderating, skillful.
- The small group format makes the discussions very comfortable. Over the two-week time period, the group members became close enough to express opinions without fear, and we can even argue/disagree some and not be offended.
- I like the frankness of our discussions. I enjoyed the depth of immersion.
- I find Dr. Monroe supportive and interesting.
- I enjoyed being able to express my views on a variety of topics and I was never judged or told that my view was wrong.
- The seminars were of good size to foster a conversation with the text and each other. Excellent selection of texts to mesh with the theme.
- We had a good mix of people in our group. Various ages. People were willing to share personal stories that enriched discussion.
- The most beneficial factor is being able to hear from such a variety of backgrounds and experiences and relating all these variations to the literature.
- The wide range of backgrounds of the participants.
- We were able to bring classroom topics into the small group along with the novels. I also enjoyed having “adult conversation” about a novel.
- Dr. Monroe is wonderful! He keeps the conversations moving and brings so much outside knowledge to the books that make the novels more beneficial.
- Romanus has a great love for books and very conscientious about making Common Ground beneficial for all of us. Romanus is charming and patient—and very knowledgeable. He sets a tone for discussions that encourages participation.

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2006

Testimonial Comments

- This is like a form of detox. After all the TAKS testing and finals and grades, you spend the summer reading amazing literature and remembering why you started teaching English in the first place. Then at lunch and after the seminar, you are able to commiserate and celebrate with articulate, caring colleagues. The readings rejuvenate you and show you the result of teaching English. New authors, building the new canon. You leave ready for school and excited to be in the classroom again. I can wait to share with my students what I've learned (as a student myself this summer).
- This is definitely the best way to learn! Our whole group benefitted from shared ideas, insights, and research. Never boring!
- My seminar group challenged, supported, and fed each other in ways we all wish our students could experience.
- I thought it was a wonderful opportunity to discuss great literature. Stimulating and challenging.
- I love the size because everyone is able to contribute and no one is shut out.
- The variety of backgrounds and the depth of commitment to the goals of the institute contributed to a very satisfying experience.
- Dr. Monroe brings insights to the selections and challenges his fellows to “see” literature in new and vibrant ways.
- Dr. Monroe was just great. A real joy to work with.
- Bill ran our seminar in a very relaxed manner that allowed freedom of discussion—and he brought us back around to our topic when necessary.
- I found it quite beneficial. Dr. Brown-Guillory leads the group cohesively and creatively. She is an honest egalitarian discussion leader.
- Elizabeth helped me see the world as others see it. She was open, honest, and inspiring. She sets a selfless, sharing tone. She kept in touch with us every day—that was affirming.
- I cannot say enough about Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. She is fantastic. The topics could have been intimidating, but she encouraged every voice to be heard.

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2007

Testimonial Comments

- I have thoroughly enjoyed my Common Ground experience. It has broadened my perspective with regard to race and culture issues.
- It introduced me to works I never would have read as well as “forcing” me to read things that were on my “to be read” list.
- One of the most beneficial things about the small group seminar was seeing other viewpoints regarding the novels – good teaching strategies learned at lunch.

- Love the format – group is small enough to get to know everyone and have real discussion.
- It was great to meet people from other campuses/districts; how fabulous to have a forum to read and discuss literature with other professionals.
- What was most beneficial about the small group seminars was hearing about common issues, courses and programs from all the different school districts -- hearing about various cultures in all our schools.
- Dr. Brown-Guillory is very personable. She was very informed and shared ideas and opinions, at time, she redirected the focus of conversation to address the topic of love. She quickly learned the names and invited individuals to share opinions and ideas.
- As usual, Dr. Muoneke was articulate and erudite.
- I have not found another literary study to approach the quality of this.
- I like the idea that people from very different backgrounds, schools, academic levels, cultures come together to offer ideas on the same texts.
- I liked the non-traditional texts (non-American) mixed with the “classical” ones.
- Our group was diverse – in academic backgrounds and in the schools we represent; therefore our perspectives as well as our needs were different. This made for great dialogues.
- Dr. Muoneke was a facilitator. He did not impose his opinions or interpretations upon us, nor did he dominate our discussions. He asked intriguing questions, challenged us, and participated along with us.
- I spend the school year trying to get adolescents to read and talk about literature. Talking to adults who love literature as much as I do, who challenge me about great texts is a great way to spend 2 weeks.
- Overall the small group seminar is enlightening and liberating for the participants to express views “outside the box” of accepted intellectual thought.
- This year’s class has been so focused, so well balanced, so articulate and intellectually matched.
- Our number seems to be ideal, not too many to be forgotten, not too few to become lost.
- Dr. Monroe is a careful and compassionate listener, a skilled referee and facilitator and a friendly, academic, collegial peer.
- Most beneficial about the small group seminar is the interaction, the exchange of ideas, the friendships formed.
- Very worthwhile and invigorating.
- Dr. Monroe has a gift for communicating lofty and difficult content with humor, style and grace.
- I truly enjoyed the discussions between and among the teachers and then Dr. Monroe’s direction as to how to ask, or which question to ask about the works.
- There’s nothing like a community of eager and willing learners!
- Dr. Monroe created an open and warm atmosphere, even when his views challenged our views.
- It’s a blessing for us teachers.

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2008

Testimonial Comments

- Dr. Muoneke was an excellent seminar leader. He made me secure in giving my opinions, ideas and suggestions.
- I like the intimacy of discussion-the “freedom” of exchange, the willingness to agree and to disagree, the diversity of experiences to augment an interpretation or event in a work.
- Please, continue this program which treats teachers as somebody important. The scholarly, graduate level approach to the examination of the works-free of fees! - is a godsend.
- Excellent! I enjoy the fellowship and conferring with other teachers about literature, and how to teach it to our students.
- The small group seminar is an excellent venue for mature readers who can express themselves without rancor.
- Elizabeth was a passionate seminar leader who made me feel energized and recharged.
- The pursuit of memoirs was one of the most gratifying experiences of my life.
- She (Dr. Brown-Guillory) was fabulous. She pushed us to think in depth and embrace new ideas.
- Inspiring. It made me feel as though I were back in college and sitting at a poetry reading.
- I promise I will spread the word for next year ☺ .
- The seminar was a great opportunity to dialogue with informal intelligent people who share their perceptions on reading and writing.
- Elizabeth is a wonderful, warm, intelligent seminar leader full of wisdom and love.
- The exchange of ideas between teachers and other professionals within a safe and welcoming environment using timely pieces of literature (political memoirs and literacy memoirs).
- Professor Elizabeth Brown-Guillory is an amazing teacher and human being who is fearless when it comes to encouraging discussion on race, class and gender.
- The wide-ranging readings throughout the work exposed me to poets, and writers that I will continue to follow!
- Nothing is truly more powerful than the “testimonials” of teachers who have attended Common Ground. I, myself, plan to shout it from the rafters next spring.
- Our frank and open discussions of the texts together with life connections gave this seminar true transformative power.
- She (Professor Elizabeth Brown-Guillory) is strength and power in the kindest, most loving personality.
- The presentations are a real treat. I like the setting! Such opportunities for creative reflection in such welcoming and comfortable surrounding are extremely scarce.
- Listening to other people’s ideas and approaches to teaching is beneficial. The cohesive nature of new groups made the seminar enlightening and fun.

- She (Professor Elizabeth Brown-Guillory) is a remarkable woman-sensitive and intelligent. She cares about Common Ground and its participants. Her warmth and enthusiasm is contagious!
- My whole department changed so when I sent out the initial information to my team I realized how many people had not heard of C.G. I will make sure to cover my whole department next year. Awesome program!
- Each participant in my group presented their assignment in the most professional way. The discussion and assignments will be a great help to me when I go back to school.
- The atmosphere was pleasant and welcoming. Our seminar leader (Dr. Monroe) is a brilliant and kind person. The literature we covered was interesting, new and worthwhile. My small group was comprised of inspirational educators. These fellows, I now call friends. Thank you!
- I leave this program as a better educator, a more rounded person, and very motivated for the new academic year!
- Dr. Monroe is a model educator. He is real. He is brilliant.
- This was truly an eye opening experience. This seminar has truly opened my eyes (and refreshed) for analyzing literature again.

The Common Ground Teachers Institute 2009

Testimonial Comments

- I enjoyed this very much. I will definitely participate again. I learned so much from this session!
- It is great to be in small groups to discuss the wonderful literature. It is relaxing and gives opportunity for many opinions and different viewpoints and be able to relate these to life experiences.
- It is an exceptional and beneficial way to learn. I enjoy the interaction and “safe environment” small groups afford.
- I love it! The group sizes are large enough to allow for varied points of view but small enough for everyone to be heard.
- I would love to conduct my own classes in this manner.
- I thought it was very enriching.
- Superior leader. Insightful comments. A free flow of ideas was encouraged.
- This is one of the best ways for readers to interact.
- Excellent! Loved it!
- As always, surprising and enlightening, building from enigma through astonishment toward any number of possible resolutions.
- Excellent—a safe environment for exploring vulnerabilities and perhaps, cock-eyed responses.
- The willingness to bear others’ views and be (mostly) open to them. I learned to be more open-minded with my own class discussions.

- I always enjoy the challenges of repeated attempts to verbally articulate meaning from art.
- We were all “forced” to read and to be open to our own ideas.
- The entire experience was beneficial—the readings, the research, the discussions, the life applications did what literature does best which is to open our eyes with greater insight into the world.
- The leader/facilitator did a great job encouraging real reflection and dialogue—no one monopolized the discussion; all shared duties happily.
- Dr. Muoneke is a deep, thoughtful facilitator who brings so much to the discussions engaged in during the seminar. Hope he comes back every year.
- Romanus has been a wonderful, knowledgeable and inspiring seminar leader. He challenged us and made us look at things in different perspectives.
- A masterful job of gentle, humane leadership—[Dr. Muoneke] certainly has a mastery of leading dialogue and cooperative learning.
- [Dr. Muoneke] is wonderful—it is a privilege to hear him and learn from him.
- [Dr. Muoneke] is very knowledgeable about literature and the human condition, He was present and unguarded which put us at ease.
- Dr. Monroe is exemplary. He is organized and has a plan, yet has flexibility to shift those plans. He is gracious in discussion and makes everyone feel to be an asset to the group.
- I wish I could lead a discussion as [Dr. Monroe] does. Nothing is forced; yet when there are gaps, he quietly, efficiently filled in.
- Elizabeth Gregory was tremendous! Her depth of knowledge was inspiring and she encouraged a variety of perspectives.
- Dr. Gregory let everyone’s voice contribute while sharing her own stunning insights—she made this thoroughly enjoyable.
- Elizabeth [Brown-Guillory] is an incredible leader, mentor and example. I will be back next year—and Elizabeth is 95% of the reason why.
- I thoroughly enjoyed Elizabeth [Brown-Guillory]. She is knowledgeable and personable—a true gem.
- Common Ground is wonderful, stimulation and a renewal of the soul. It is a definite part of my summer each year. The small groups, the wonderful literature, the great food, and the readers during lunch all contribute to a wonderful experience. The best and the brightest are drawn to Common Ground each summer and so we are sharing ideas among the best. The seminar leaders are so knowledgeable, inspiring, and wonderful facilitators. The idea that we are all fellows enables much sharing without the feeling it is a class. Long live Common Ground!