

William Charles McMillan III Lecture Series

**Queen Bees & Wannabes:
What the Rules of
'Girl World' and 'Boy World'
Mean to a Teen**

by Rosalind Wiseman

The Grosse Pointe Academy
Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan

October 9, 2007

William Charles McMillan III Lecture Series

In 1994, Mr. and Mrs. James T. McMillan II established an endowed annual lectureship in memory of their late son, William Charles McMillan III. The purpose of their gift is twofold: to honor William's tremendous intellectual curiosity and energetic pursuit of all subjects; and to emphasize and promote the importance of elementary education by inviting a nationally known speaker to The Grosse Pointe Academy each year.

William was a student at The Grosse Pointe Academy from 1973 until 1981 where, receiving love and encouragement, he learned to reach beyond his limitations.

Although weak physically, William was intellectually gifted and his passion for life, his love and concern for all living things, and his enthusiastic use of verbal skills changed the lives of those who were closest to him and left a lasting impression on all with whom he came in contact.

Never at a loss for words, he was bursting with impressions, questions and insights which came pouring out in a dazzling, dizzying torrent. It was rare to have a brief, superficial conversation with William. A friend commented, "I sometimes felt like I needed a seat belt when William was talking to me, because William would take us into outer space, back into primeval history, and then into a universe of his own imagining."

William believed that anyone could make a significant and lasting impact on the world no matter what one's age, size or circumstance.

These lectures on elementary education are dedicated to the proposition that every child can reach beyond his or her own limitations, that each child makes the world a better place. It is the goal of these lectures to take your mind where it has never been. So, fasten your seat belt and get ready to enter the universe of imagining - a gift to you from William.

Speakers

April 26, 1995 - Dr. Ernest L. Boyer
President, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

April 23, 1996 - Dr. David Elkind
Professor of Child Study, Tufts University

April 22, 1997 - Dr. Thomas Lickona
Professor of Education, State University of New York, Cortland

January 21, 1998 - Dr. Jane M. Healy
Learning Specialist, Educational Consultant and Author

March 10, 1999 - Dr. Thomas J. Sergiovanni
Lillian Radford Professor of Education and Administration,
Trinity University

April 12, 2000 - Dr. William S. Pollack
Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychology,
Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School

March 7, 2001 - Dr. Mary Pipher
Clinical Psychologist, Author, Lecturer,
Adjunct Professor, University of Nebraska

March 6, 2002 - Dr. Anne Chapman
Author and Consultant

March 4, 2003 - Dr. Michael G. Thompson
Psychologist, Consultant, Author

March 4, 2004 - Dr. Susan B. Neuman
Author, Professor at University of Michigan,
Former Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education

October 11, 2005 - Eric Jensen
Author and co-founder of the first international
brain-based learning program

October 10, 2006 - Dr. Wendy Mogel
Clinical Psychologist, Parent Educator, Author

October 9, 2007 - Rosalind Wiseman
Author of New York Times bestseller *Queen Bees and Wannabes*

Rosalind Wiseman



Rosalind Wiseman is the author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence*, which was the basis for the 2004 hit movie, *Mean Girls*. Twice a New York Times bestseller, *Queen Bees & Wannabes* is in its 30th printing. Her latest book, *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads*, was released in March of 2006, and she has recently become a monthly columnist for Family Circle Magazine.

Ms. Wiseman founded the Empower Program, a national violence prevention program, in 1992. Since then, she has gone on to work with tens of thousands of students, educators, parents, counselors, coaches and administrators to create communities based on the belief that each person has a responsibility to treat themselves and others with dignity.

Ms. Wiseman has been profiled in the New York Times, People, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, USA Today, Oprah, Nightline, The Today Show, CNN, Good Morning America, and National Public Radio affiliates throughout the country.

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McMillan Lecture Series*

Queen Bees & Wannabes:

**What the Rules of ‘Girl World’ and ‘Boy World’
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Thank you all for coming tonight. Before I begin I want to establish some ground rules for the evening because we have two groups of people here who see things in very different ways: parents and their children. So parents, if I say something that you think is applicable or relevant to the child that you brought here, you are not allowed to touch that person or attempt to telepathically communicate to that child; you are here for you.

In addition, I want you to know that I come to you as a teacher and as a parent, and while I have worked in communities like this one for over 15 years, I do not make the assumption that I know your community. What I am going to do is present you with the way that I look at the world and ask you to engage with me in the process. In order to get there, I am also going to ask you that if I say something that makes you uncomfortable, whether you disagree or agree with me, that you sit with it, and ask yourself why and to talk about it with your child on

William Charles McMillan III Lecture Series

the way home. I'm also going to ask you to laugh and breathe, and that the adults in the room really challenge themselves to understand the world of your child. I do not believe I have the truth, except for the fact that dignity is not negotiable. Your child has the right to be treated with dignity by their parents, teachers, administrators, coaches, and peers. You have the responsibility to teach your children to treat their parents, teachers, administrators, coaches and peers with dignity as well. But what does dignity mean? Dignity means that everyone has an equal voice, and equal right to speak and be heard. Unfortunately, our culture teaches us that some people should be listened to over others. Sometimes when a person speaks it is believed no matter what, and when others speak they are ridiculed or dismissed.

What else does our culture teach us? First let me give you my definition of it-everything you we know but no one has ever sat down and told us. So why is it that girls won't tell a person when they are angry? Why do boys say it's fine, it doesn't matter, don't worry about it, both when they really don't care and when they're really upset? The culture teaches what they need to have to be counted-the right body, the right gear, you're in control, never complain, don't want to be seen as uptight. Boys have to have the right gear, right body. More and more, boys are coming under the same rigid pressure as girls to conform to impossible body standards. Although it might look different, boys taking supplements and bulking up, and girls starving themselves to be skinny is actually the same thing. Boys can't complain, or else they're called fags or "You're so gay." The culture also teaches girls and boys how they are allowed to express their anger. They can sit on it and turn it inward, they can sit on it and then ask for it to stop and people blow them off with "I'm just joking, you're so uptight,"

People have the right to complain to speak out when their dignity or the dignity of others is being violated. But how do you teach your child to speak out effectively?

The big question is: when and how do you intervene in a problem that your child has? Say your child comes to you and tells you that

The Grosse Pointe Academy

a child that has grown up with yours in the same neighborhood has now turned against your child and is encouraging other children to come after them. First, you have to stop your natural inclination to hate that other child. You have to ask yourself, is anyone going to die in the next thirty seconds? If the answer is yes, then get moving and stop the danger. If the answer is no, sit still and think about how you are going to teach your child to treat themselves and others with dignity through this experience. In whatever manner your child can, she needs to take the bad feelings in her stomach and put them to words. She can draw it, write in a journal, act it out - whatever is the most natural way for her to communicate and put to words those feelings is what she should do. Next, help her think through when and where she should speak to the other child. Then she has to confront the bully. Less important than how the bully reacts, because after all, the bully may not agree with your child, is the process your child is going through. It might not be pretty, nor the way you would do it, but it is the way your child will develop social competency. And from there, your child will develop self-esteem. If you don't allow your child to go through the messiness of this problem, if you fight your child's fights for them, you will raise socially incompetent children, and you are not sending your child to this school to have an incompetent child as a result. You need to reframe the definition/goal of confronting someone. It is not to become best friends in the end, nor is it to destroy the person as a result. The goal is to speak your truth in a difficult situation with someone who could be very intimidating. It is also your job to teach your child to apologize. If your child is on the receiving end, so that she is the one being confronted about her bad behavior, her responsibility is to apologize regardless of what she thinks about her behavior. No one gets to say to anybody else, "You just took it the wrong way," or "You're just being overly sensitive." And no one gets to say that to your child either. For an apology to be meaningful, the tone of voice has to be sincere, you have to recognize your wrongdoing without blaming someone else, and sometimes it is necessary to

William Charles McMillan III Lecture Series

make concrete amends beyond just saying "I'm sorry," to write the wrong. I am strongly asking you to consider as parents that if you are ever in the situation where the school is asking you to help them hold your child accountable that you don't fight the school, you don't get the child out of the punishment, and that you stand with the school. If you fight the school and get the child out of the punishment, your child will grow up believing that he or she is above the law.

Use technology as an example of your family values in action. If your child has a cell phone, a television, a computer—all of those things are given to your children with the understanding that they are privileges and not rights and that they will be taken away if your child uses them in ways that are against your family's values. Tape to the cell phone, computer your family values, what technology can be used for (helping with homework, getting the weather) and what it cannot be used for (stealing passwords, spreading gossip, sending humiliating photographs) and then outline what the consequences will be for violating your family values. Better yet, sit down with your child and come up with these rules and these consequences together.

Undoubtedly your relationship with your child is incredibly important. Also vitally important is working with your child to find an ally. Someone that you think shares your values and that your child thinks is cool enough that they can talk to. The rule is that the relationship and the conversations between your child and the ally are private unless your child is in physical danger.

The goals of the presentation:

- ♦ Not to waste your time.
- ♦ Leave with concrete skills you can use.
- ♦ Let you breathe.
- ♦ Give you information but not increase your anxiety.
- ♦ Leave feeling affirmed and inspired.

The Grosse Pointe Academy

- ♦ Teach your children social competence.
- ♦ Teach your children that their dignity and the dignity of others is not negotiable.

Individuals will buy into this culture to varying degrees but everyone has to learn how to navigate their way through it understanding how it influences their behavior and the behavior of the people around them.

In this world, it is inevitable that your child will have conflicts with a peer or an adult in his life -- a teacher, coach, principal, etc. The big question for you is if and how you get involved.

It's hard for parents because the parent culture tells parents two seemingly logical rules. 1. A good parent is an involved parent 2. If you mess with my kid you mess with me-then I get to do whatever necessary to right the wrong.

But these two rules have convinced parents that they have to be involved in every problem and they have to fight their kids' fights for them. Involvement now looks to parents like everything is a life or death issue. A schedule change, an unacceptable grade, not getting a part in the play or making a team-all have become life or death issues. Ask yourself if someone will die in the next 5 minutes. If yes, go. If no, sit down. And remember involvement is never all-meaning fighting your kids fight for them-or nothing-letting the kids work it out without any adult guidance. One of the best examples of this is how to respond when your child tells you they are being bullied.

Child comes to you being bullied. You say, "I'm sorry, thank you for telling me, and together we will work on this."

If child demands a promise that they will only tell if you won't do anything. Don't make that promise. Tell them you can't but you will talk through a strategy with them and while they may not agree they will be informed.

If physically safe, parent helps them put bad feelings into words by using SEAL strategy.

William Charles McMillan III Lecture Series

If it is an issue of content, (grade, class change, play, position on a team, being cut from a team, etc.) your child handles it without your visible help. You help them prepare.

If your child is ridiculed, dismissed by an adult (teacher, coach, etc) than you can be more obviously involved. First: Walk the child through the SEAL strategy.

If the child meets with the teacher and is again dismissed the parents call the teacher. Step one: Arrange a good time to talk by phone or in person (not email).

Step Two: Ask if they think your child's retelling of the situation is accurate.

Step Three: Use SEAL to frame your position.

*Going above the teacher's head should always be a last resort (meaning you and your child have completed the first two attempts).

Let me conclude by reaffirming the following:

- ♦ Dignity is not negotiable.
- ♦ Living according to your values isn't hard when you like people. The true measure of your character is based on living your values when you really don't want to.
- ♦ Your goal is to teach your child social competence.
- ♦ Let your kids get through the messiness of all of these conflicts because that's the way they will learn that dignity is not negotiable for anyone.

Remember the one truth is that dignity is not negotiable and your job as a parent or person who works with youth is to teach them that they have a responsibility to treat themselves and others with dignity.



The Grosse Pointe Academy is an independent, coeducational day school serving children in early school through grade eight. A Grosse Pointe Academy education emphasizes the value of each child and the growth of that child. We provide an education of the highest quality in the pursuit of academic excellence, the arts and athletics. We impart to our students an education which is sound in moral and ethical formation. Our outlook is Christian and our heritage is Catholic. The Academy respects all cultures and religious beliefs. Incorporated as a non-profit institution, the Academy is directed by a Board of Trustees working together to serve the Southeastern Michigan community.

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