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## Opening Day - As Ernie Bank Said, "Let's Play Two!"

John Bird

Winthrop University, [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu)

Teaching and Learning Center

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# The Weekly Reader

*Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC*

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Dr. John Bird  
Professor,  
Department of  
English  
Bancroft Hall 260  
(803) 323-3679

Director, Teaching &  
Learning Center  
Dinkins Hall 233  
(803) 323-2447

EMAIL:  
[birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu)

Winthrop University

## Opening Day—As Ernie Banks Said, “Let’s Play Two!”

Opening day.

For me, those words first connect with baseball. On opening day, every team has hope. Every team can be a winner. Every team can still go to the World Series. Even the Cubs. Spring has come, the grass is greener, the sun shines, and the beer and the hot dogs taste great.

For me, those words first connect with baseball. On opening day, every team has hope. Every team can be a winner. Every team can still go to the World Series. Even the Cubs. Spring has come, the grass is greener, the sun shines, and the beer and the hot dogs taste great.

A bit over a decade ago, I took up fly fishing, or more properly, fly fishing took me up, which the afflicted will understand. Now opening day also means the opening day of trout season, the first Saturday in April. In Ashe County, NC, where our mountain cabin sits, the whole county is up before dawn to hit the creeks for rainbow trout, brown trout,

and brook trout. Nearly every church hosts a “fishermen’s breakfast” as a fundraiser. And then the streams are clogged, and the dream of catching a trophy fish comes true for many.

One thing about both opening days, however: for many people, the excitement and enthusiasm wears off quickly. Nearly every major league baseball team will have a sell-out for opening day, but attendance starts to taper off for most teams soon after. By this point in the season, attendance for many teams is sparse, even for contenders. The Kansas City Royals are leading their division at the end of August, something that has not occurred in many, many years. Their attendance the other night was a bit over 13,000 fans.

In Ashe County, the enthusiasm wears off even more quickly. I have gone to Big Horse Creek on the day after opening day and have spotted only

two or three other fishermen. Many of the locals who would not miss opening day never fish again for the whole year—and trout season runs until the end of the next February.

In school, we have opening day too, with similar enthusiasm. On opening day, we as teachers see every class as a winner. The students think they can all make A’s. The books are fresh, the classrooms are sparkling, and all of us are ready to go.

How long does that feeling last? Certainly a good bit longer than the Ashe County “fishermen,” but maybe not much longer than it does for many baseball fans.

How can we sustain that opening day excitement over the course of a long semester? It’s probably not possible—there will be tests and papers and long assignments and big projects, and the spirits of both teacher and student will flag. It takes effort on the part of both teacher

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## Continued from page 1

and student to keep that feeling going as long as it can (and we know where the burden falls).

One key is to think of the semester as segments rather than an endless stretch of classes. Just as a novel has a beginning, middle, and end, so does a college course. If not more segments.

Approaching the class in pieces, in chunks, may help. Each new juncture brings another opening day. Make these breaks clear to the students.

Bring your enthusiasm level back up as you reach a new segment. Even if you are faking it a bit. (I find on the occasions that I fake my enthusiasm, my fake excitement soon turns real. I suspect that is how we are made. And we all know how infectious enthusiasm can be.)

Another thing to keep in mind is the need to switch things up. I had a political science class in college that was very innovative for the time. Mondays, the professor would lecture.

Wednesdays, the students were in groups making mini-presentations to each other, in a competition. Fridays, we had the weekly quiz. Dr. Moy's approach really was radical for the time—and it was also really, really old after the third week. Even

a great plan becomes stale if repeated constantly.

Finally, since the burden really is on the teacher to keep things as fresh, interesting, and exciting as opening day, we need to keep our attitudes in constant check. In the past, I have compared a semester course to a trip, like one of those crazy “if it's Tuesday, this must be Belgium” guided tours. I have been on a number of tours, and the attitude of the tour director always makes a big difference in the success or failure of the trip.

I have had tour directors who basically sleep-walked through the whole trip. Maybe he or she just got back last week from this same trip, and it showed. But I have also had excellent tour directors, ones who seemed to be on the trip for the first time, even though it was the 50<sup>th</sup> time, directors who seemed as exciting about the trip as us tourists.

I try to be that excited kind of tour director. And even though I have taken this trip through American literature or critical thinking or literary theory many times before, I have never taken it with this particular tour group.

So, bon voyage, and off we go on another magical mystery tour. Roll up! Opening day, and then the next day, and then the next...

## And A Few Words About Recruitment and Retention

A major focus for us at Winthrop this year is recruitment and retention, for a number of reasons, financial reasons being foremost, but there are others.

Debra Boyd emphasized this theme at last week's Academic Leadership Retreat, and Eduardo Prieto and his team made excellent presentations.

As we know, recruitment is not just the job of the recruitment folks—it's a job for all of us, all faculty and staff.

But retention is our job, too, and it is probably easier for most faculty and staff to retain a student that it is to recruit one.

Think about your teaching and your interaction with students as part of the vital effort of retention. Gone are the days when freshmen were told on the opening day that “half of you will be gone by Thanksgiving.” We want to keep them all if we can!

## Thanks For Helping Make the Teaching and Learning Center Work!

Winthrop's Teaching and Learning Center offers a wide variety of sessions each year for faculty and staff, on teaching, technology, professional development, and personal development. From leading class discussion to mastering the Smart podium to tenure and promotion to cooking soufflés, the TLC tries to make sure that all faculty and staff receive

the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging,

timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

We also thank those of you who have attended TLC sessions. Your time is valuable, and we appreciate you taking some of it to enrich yourself through professional and personal development.

## A Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The TLC for several years has been offering a service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me (803) 323-3679 or [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu).

## Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

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## Thought For the Week

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."  
--Mark Twain