

Eddie, The Sophomore Year

A Social Studies Confrontation

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The word has gotten around school that certain members of the track team also excel at other sports, specifically football. This knowledge has made its way to Mr. O'Brien, who has been frantically searching for a reason to use this information against Eddie, Mark, Braden, and perhaps a few others. Today, Mr. O'Brien thinks he has found the opportunity that he has been looking for. While taking attendance, it is clear to the class that Mr. O'Brien is in an unusually good mood today.

Opening the class, Mr. O'Brien begins his lesson for the day, explaining, "in every facet of society, there is a clear intent of certain individuals or groups to intentionally injure another party. We see this here at the school in the classroom, on the street, in business, and even on the sports field." Seeing Mr. O'Brien look over at the tribe, Mark whispers to Braden, "here it comes, bro. Duck when the shit comes this way." Braden whispers back, "if he sends any shit my way, I'm gonna sling it back at his ass at twice the speed."

Mr. O'Brien continues, "just reading the newspaper, article after article portrays one person or group pitted against another." Flipping through today's newspaper, Mr. O'Brien tells his class, "let me provide you with a few examples of what I am talking about. In each of these cases, there seems to be oppression of one group against another." Citing a few examples, Mr. O'Brien announces, "employees versus management. The citizens versus the

police. City employees versus the city. A patient versus the hospital.”

Finally getting to his real agenda for today, flipping to the sports page, Mr. O’Brien exclaims, “oh! And, what do we have here? One professional football player appears to have gotten intentionally injured by another during last weekend’s game.” Holding up a picture found in the newspaper of the injured player laying on the football field, Mr. O’Brien tells the class, “they say the injured player here, number 42 on the Riddell football team, may never play football again!” Many students in the class laugh hysterically at Mr. O’Brien’s comment as Mark exclaims, “Riddell is the helmet manufacturer! It’s not a football team!” After Mark provided the rest of the class with an education, everyone else joins in laughing as Mr. O’Brien catches on that he just made a fool of himself.

Once the laughter calms down, Mr. O’Brien lays down the hammer, exclaiming, “I think we’ve even seen one student in this school intentionally try to injure another player recently during football tryouts! As I said, there always seems to be oppression of one group against another.” Mr. O’Brien, who has an axe to grind, is still very bitter that his son, Jimmy, was cut from the track team last year.

While Mr. O’Brien continues to orate his poorly thought out nonsense, Mark whispers to Braden, “I think he’s talking about you, bro.” Braden replies, “I see that.” Seeing the opening he has been looking for, Mr. O’Brien interrupts his presentation, looks over at Mark and Braden, and announces, “does someone over there have something more important to say than I do?” Stepping up, Braden boldly replies, “I think I do! What are you talking about, anyway? Ain’t nobody intentionally tries to injure their teammates!”

Suddenly flustered, Mr. O’Brien paces the floor for a moment, and tells Braden, “I think there was a clear attempt by a certain individual in this school to intentionally injure another player during football tryouts. I’m sure you’re very aware of what and whom I am talking

about.” Messing with Mr. O’Brien, Braden replies, “no. I don’t know what you’re talking about. Why don’t you go ahead and tell us? I really wanna hear this!” A lot of chatter arises, with many in the class telling Mr. O’Brien, “yeah! Tell us.”

Perceiving the energy behind Braden and the rest of the class, Mr. O’Brien quickly realizes that he stepped into a pile of muck that he wishes he hadn’t. Trying to get out of the situation, Mr. O’Brien tells Braden, “I’m not here to discuss the matter in detail. So, please let me get on with my lesson for today.”

Not letting Mr. O’Brien off the hook so easily, Mark pipes up, announcing to the class, “Mr. O’Brien is talking about when Braden tackled Ambrosini, and Ambrosini had to be taken to the hospital. And, it wasn’t intentional. I was there.” Echoing Mark’s sentiment, Eddie replies, “I agree. It wasn’t intentional.” Chatter again rises up, giving Mr. O’Brien a slight hint that he has totally lost control of his class.

Realizing he is in a no-win situation, Mr. O’Brien raises his voice, announcing to the class, “we’re not here to discuss what happened out on the football field. So, let’s move on to today’s lesson plan! We’re not here to discuss the minor details of each and every situation, but rather the spirit of injustice behind these reports.” Mark yells out, “hey! You’re the one who brought it up!” Boos and jeers directed at Mr. O’Brien are heard from the class, giving the communist social studies teacher the impression that he’s crossed some invisible line that he perhaps shouldn’t have.

Having a question, Eddie raises his hand, which does not give Mr. O’Brien a warm fuzzy feeling. Hoping to move on and avoid the current subject and heckling, Mr. O’Brien reluctantly asks Eddie, “yes, Edward. Your question?” Eddie replies, “you mentioned all those articles in the newspaper. How do you know what you’ve read is even true?” Mr. O’Brien firmly replies, “if it’s in the newspaper, you can be certain that it’s true. News reporters and journalists do not make stuff up. They are impartial!” A low level of booing and hissing can be heard from the

class, now causing Mr. O'Brien to wish that he called in sick today.

Eddie responds, telling Mr. O'Brien, "last year, in social studies, Mr. Whitehead told us every class period, 'believe nothing of what you read and half of what you see.'" Eddie repeats the phrase that Mr. Whitehead is famous for, with the class joining in this time since Mr. Whitehead always repeated the phrase twice. Turning a deep shade of red, Mr. O'Brien asks Eddie, "now, you really don't believe that, do you?" Eddie and the class respond in unison, "believe nothing of what you read and half of what you see." Apparently, last year, Mr. Whitehead has gotten his point across to his class quite well, unlike Mr. O'Brien.

Realizing he will get nowhere with Eddie, Mr. O'Brien informs the class, "please let me move on to today's lesson plan." Mark replies, "why? You're the one who brought this crap up. Geesh! Everyone knows that half the crap in the newspaper isn't true." Eddie interjects, "yeah. But, which half? That's the real question." Mark exclaims, "that's a good point! If you don't know which half is not true, then how can you believe anything you read in the newspaper?"

Wanting to back Mark into a corner, Mr. O'Brien asks him, "so, you think you know everything? Please give me an example of something in the newspaper that is inaccurate." Mark confidently replies, "in our town newspaper, they always get our events and times wrong when they report the track meets. And, it's the same when they report the football games. They can't even get the players' names right. And, last year, when Ronald Rex set someone's locker on fire, the town newspaper reported that Rex's locker was the one that was set on fire! I'm sure you remember that. We all stood out in the cold for an hour waiting for the smoke in the hallways to clear after the fire department put out the fire. So, whenever I know the real story, I can always find mistakes in the newspaper story. What about all the other stories in the newspaper? If I wasn't there, I can't find the mistakes in the article. So, why should I believe any of it? Mr. Whitehead has a point." The class again educates Mr. O'Brien, orating together,

“believe nothing of what you read and half of what you see.”

Realizing that he is getting absolutely nowhere with his agenda, Mr. O’Brien announces, “we’re now moving on to the lesson plan. If there is anymore discussion of this matter, someone will be going to detention.” Mark asks, “who?” Mr. O’Brien exclaims, “all of you!” Braden comments, “so what? It ain’t track season, so I don’t care.” Mr. O’Brien authoritatively announces, “that’s enough! If there is any more discussion on this topic, someone will be taking a trip to the principal’s office.”

Braden looks at Mark and shakes his head. While Braden, Mark, and Eddie have clearly won this confrontation, it is not worth it for them to continue the discussion. They’d rather spend their time after school with their girlfriends. A trip to Mr. Crum’s office and potential detention is simply not worth it. But, the class is very well aware that Mr. O’Brien just got his head handed to him.