

What Would Wood Think?

By Jax Mckinnon



If you've ever found yourself in the English hallway and heard a voice yelling in some sort of accent about something that seems completely irrelevant to an English class, you probably heard Samuel Wood, Golden's longest-standing English teacher.

Wood is a self-proclaimed "navy brat," born in Beaufort, South Carolina, who has lived in a plethora of places throughout his life, including Maine, Virginia, Scotland, and England. He graduated from Elon University in North Carolina, majoring in Philosophy, Theater, and English Lit. Wood didn't decide to become a teacher until much later in his career.

"I went and got a string of terrible jobs that had nothing to do with Philosophy, Theater, or English Lit. Like for years I was an accounts receivable manager, and I had never taken an accounting class

in my life."

In 2008, Wood was laid off along with millions of others during the recession while he was living with his now-wife. He was collecting unemployment for a while and "looking for a new crappy corporate gig, and she [Wood's wife] went 'Why are you looking for another terrible job that you hate? You should do something you might like doing.'" Suggesting he'd be good at teaching, Wood took her advice and went back to school to get his master's in education at Regis University.

Wood says his background in corporate jobs gives him a different perspective on aspects of teaching that many other teachers hate.

"Teachers hate parent-teacher conferences because we're used to dealing with kids, but if you have to deal with angry customer service, parent-teacher conferences are nothing," he said.

His varied background allows him to take English classes from a different approach. He says he loves teaching freshmen that Shakespeare "is not pretentious love stories" and that it's "dirty jokes and terrible decisions and usually pretty funny." Wood teaches both freshman grade level English and AP English Literature to juniors and seniors.

The choice between Lit and Lang can be difficult. A lot of the time it comes down to choosing between a surplus of homework from Paul Evans, another one of Golden's english teachers,

or harsh critiques from Wood. Wood's comments on the side of his student's writing often start with "No," which is a jarring experience, especially if you're one of the many students coming from Evan's class. Wood noted that he grades harsher than the people who grade the AP tests, "so if you do well in my class you're going to kick butt on the exam, and even if you don't do super red hot in my class you're still probably going to kick butt on the exam."

Wood believes that if kids are told, "eh, it's okay, it's good enough, then you don't get better. [But] if I point out every place that you made a mistake, then you figure out how to fix the mistakes and you stop making it."

Regardless of his harsh criticism, Wood cares deeply about his student's success and about them as individuals. He has told his classes before that his grading isn't personal and is merely a tool to help them become better writers for this particular exam. He doesn't hold many hard and fast philosophies as he explains, "I got a degree in Western philosophy and basically what that taught me is that I am not a huge fan of Western philosophy." He chooses to simply try and make life a more enjoyable place for everyone, encouraging people to reflect on themselves as individuals regarding how they interact with the world.



"In the long run and down the road, I think you're going to have a richer existence if you have the tools to critically self-examine the world around you rather than just kind of float."

His beliefs are evident in his boisterous and loud teaching style. Wood can talk about something inherently boring, yet be endlessly entertaining, and more importantly engaging, with his impressions and accents, making everything relevant to the modern teenager. He mentioned he loves reading *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck with his freshman. "Every character's got their own voice. That thing's like a frickin' radio play at this point."

Although Wood's criticism and essays seem serious, he takes life pretty lightly. When asked for any closing thoughts, Wood said, "my philosophical truth for the world [is] there is no situation that can't be made worse by covering it in spiders." Whether you've had Wood as a teacher, or just heard him in passing, it's evident that he loves what he does and will continue to keep Golden's AP English students captivated.