

Book Review: The Red Bandanna: A Life. A Choice. A Legacy.

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The story of Welles Crowther comes to life through Tom Rinaldi's *The Red Bandanna: A Life. A Choice. A Legacy*. As a historical non-fiction novel, *The Red Bandanna* showcases the life of Crowther leading up to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, where he would later be recognized by his red bandanna. Although 18 years have passed, the story of Crowther resonates with individuals and students experiencing their own journey towards adulthood, navigating life decisions, and developing their own core values. For anyone who may or may not remember the terrorist attacks of 9/11, *The Red Bandanna* highlights an individual's story that shines a light of inspiration during any difficult time.

Rinaldi takes the reader through a chronological story of Crowther as a youth in Nyack, New York, his experiences as an athlete, his passion to serve as a volunteer firefighter, navigating his time in college, and ultimately as a hero. Crowther carried a red bandanna throughout each of his pivotal life experiences. After the events of 9/11, Crowther would later be recognized by this red bandanna and his heroic efforts. Rinaldi emphasizes the decisions Crowther made to shape his life story and impact others by including commentary from Crowther's friends, families, and references to the news and media stories occurring during various points of Crowther's life events. Rinaldi uses the life events in order to intertwine broad themes that may be relatable for many readers, although not everyone will relate to Crowther as an individual. With that in mind, this book allows for ample discussion, opportunities for reflection on experiences, and defining one's own values. Beyond opportunities for discussions, faculty or facilitators could implement

activities surrounding this text that relate to identifying values, decision-making activities, and creating story maps of students' own lives.

Seven-year old Crowther received his original red bandanna from his dad to compliment his church attire. From that day forward, the red bandanna became a staple to his everyday attire and activities. In his youth, Crowther was a smaller boy compared to his peers, but he had a strong sense of right and wrong beyond his age. There are multiple childhood stories included in the text that highlight Crowther's values and his experiences as he emerged into adulthood. In one instance Crowther responds to a class bully, and on a separate occasion he must react to an animal in pain. These examples of Crowther's development of decision-making skills and his own values could lead to great, meaningful discussions within a small group setting for college students. By allowing students to reflect on their own coming-of-age experiences they can define their own moments of development and emerging adulthood.

As an athlete, many of Crowther's teammates recount their memories of Crowther on various sports teams such as hockey and lacrosse. The themes of teamwork and leadership are emphasized throughout the book with the stories of Crowther serving as a volunteer firefighter and participating in team sports. On one occasion Crowther discusses with his hockey coach what was preventing him from becoming one of the team's captains. That defining conversation encouraged Crowther to lead by example; he later did so by making it his own goal to help his teammates score their first goals during games. Crowther quickly discovered the importance of making actions speak louder than words. His life events can easily lead to book discussions regarding the impact and importance of teamwork, learning from others, and creating opportunities for success amongst peers. It is also beneficial to note the text's connection to higher education and the references to a multitude of colleges and universities intertwined within the text. These references can make the stories within *The Red Bandanna* more tangible for students and add a layer of meaning for those who may not remember the events of 2001.

Crowther's value of serving others becomes the climax of the story in his heroic efforts during the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks. As the man with the red bandanna, Crowther took his experiences as a volunteer firefighter and commitment to serving others to heart. He led many individuals to safety

during that tragic event and would later be recognized by his red bandanna. Rinaldi recounts the factual historical events that lend themselves to an emotional reflection on a different perspective of the events that unfolded. Crowther's legacy is now widely shared and continues to influence others. Discussions of The Red Bandanna can be supported and complemented with videos highlighting Crowther's story, speeches by his friends and family, and articles related to the events. Many themes that emerged in the book have been outlined in this review and offer a myriad of topics to explore. This book could be used within a new student reading program, an introductory university 101 course, or a learning community. At the end of this text, readers can expect to have feelings of appreciation and motivation to make each day count. These feelings could serve as an excellent foundation for any student as they manage their transition to and through college.