



HILLSDALE HIGH SCHOOL FOUNDATION

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Susan Bedford and the Creation of Hillsdale's Famous William Golding Trial



Susan at Hillsdale in 1977

Susan began her thirty-year stint as an English teacher at Hillsdale High School in 1970, after earning degrees in English and German from Stanford University. Sometime during the 1988-1989 school year, Greg Jouriles, who taught Social Studies at Hillsdale, started getting complaints from his students: they were frustrated because he and Susan were assigning projects that came due at the same time.

Susan's class was in the middle of studying William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, which tells the story of a group of boys stranded on an island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean after an airplane crash. Greg's class was learning about the rise of fascism during World War Two. Because Greg had a background in anthropology, he approached Susan with an idea: why not work together to create an engaging project for their students that examined the parallels between the two topics?



Susan celebrating her 80th birthday this year

"Susan loved her subject, knew her subject, and was able to convey her passion and knowledge to her students," says Greg. "She was also open-minded, willing to take risks, and creative."

And so an incredible partnership was born. Susan and Greg collaborated to create the William Golding Trial, the first of many projects they would spend thousands of hours fashioning out of a desire to build powerful experiences for students that were as exciting and memorable as any sporting event or high school rite of passage, like prom. The Trial starts with William Golding accused of libeling human nature in *Lord of the Flies*. Students are tasked with portraying all of the characters you see in a courtroom drama; expert witnesses like Mark Twain and Ghandi might make an appearance. Sometimes, Golding is acquitted and freed; sometimes, he's convicted. For more than thirty years, his fate has been in the hands of Hillsdale students.

"The William Golding Trial is the single best thing we get to do," says Sarah Press, an English teacher at Hillsdale who happens to teach in Greg's old classroom. "The book asks a totally provocative question about all of humanity, and it's a way to get kids to engage with ideas in a way that's motivating and exciting."

The Trial has proven to be such an extraordinary experience for students that it is now taught in schools across the country.

Look for more of Susan's story later this month in the HHSF e-newsletter!