

## ***Plato's Cave***

In *The Republic*, Plato describes a group of people who have lived in a cave all their lives. They are prisoners, chained in such a way that they can only look straight ahead, facing a blank wall at the back of the cave. Behind them is a half-wall as high as a person. Behind that is a bright fire. People pass back and forth in front of the fire, carrying all sorts of figures of people and animals and various objects held high. These objects cast dancing shadows across the cave and onto the wall here the prisoners see them. Sometimes the carriers speak as they go by, sometimes not. For the prisoners, reality is nothing but these shadows of the objects and the voices that accompany them.

Plato meant this as a parable for his time. And, although it could be, it doesn't have to be a parable for our time. It doesn't have to be about the way we watch media. Not if the ability to distinguish between shadow and substance becomes part of our lives and the lives of those we teach. This is why, in 2005, in conjunction with Face to Face Media, the JCP began work on *Inside Plato's Cave*, an online credit course for teachers who will be teaching media literacy at the Grade 8 to 12 level in Canada. Although media education is a mandated component of the curriculum in Canada there is little opportunity for pre-service or in-service training. The Newfoundland-based Virtual Teacher Centre in St. John's provided technical and instructional design support.

In the summer of 2007 – incidentally the year the iPhone was launched – the modules were field tested by teachers in Vancouver, London, Toronto, and St. John's, with enthusiastic response. In July 2010, the online course was offered for credit through Alberta's Athabasca University as "Understanding Media Literacy: Inside Plato's Cave, Education 315." (LINK: <http://www.athabascau.ca/syllabi/educ/educ315.htm> )