Ordinary Resurrections: Identifying Community Strengths
Possible points: 75 Due Date: Tuesday, March 10th

This report should be a fun one. Ordinary Resurrections is an easy and uplifting read. Jonathan Kozol is an educator and activist who most recently spent several years with young children in the poorest neighborhood in the country—South Bronx. In his previous books, he used his experience (participant observation) to highlight major social problems, especially in the educational system. In Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope, Kozol turns his attention to “the children’s games and stories, and their silliness and sorrows, and the many intricate and sometimes elegant theologies they manage to create in order to invite into their lives the little mysteries that make them brave.” He also looks at how the adults in their lives—parents, other family members, teachers, ministers, after-school teachers and mentors—support and care for the children. In other words, Kozol is looking at how people living in often dire circumstances cope and manage and, now and then, triumph over adversity.

For this assignment, I want you to select one vignette or story that Kozol tells that you feel illustrates community strengths and the concrete ways in which the children and/or the adults make the most of what they have and get around what they don’t have. Briefly describe the story or situation, and then reflect on what impressed you about the main players and what they did in the story. Next, consider a comparable vignette or story from your own experience (in service learning this term or otherwise), and describe it in a similar way. [It obviously helps the flow of your paper if your examples illustrate similar experiences, or some common thread.]

Following your discussion of the individual stories, try to generalize about what you see as the main assets or strengths that the South Bronx and the community you have drawn from your own experience have going for them. Reflect on what kind of “little things” (resources) would make it easier on children and their families, and on the people you have described from your own experience.

Finally, since we all live in and experience “social systems” that are bigger than us and our immediate interactions, think about what is wrong with the social systems that affect children’s lives in the South Bronx (and the lives of the people in your experience) that individual efforts and local, private programs are trying to address. You might get some ideas for this by looking at the footnotes in the back of the book. In that section, Kozol usually refers to problems in social systems, including, e.g., unequal funding in the schools. One way to identify system problems is to think: “This child wouldn’t be facing this problem, if “X” were different.”

Depending on how detailed you make your descriptions, your assignment should be about 3-4 pages long.