Teaching Mendelian genetics using flower color or pea shapes was both physically and mentally draining for both my students and me. The most trying problem was that undergraduate non-science majors were unable to draw a relationship between the observations of Mendel and their everyday life. The students felt Mendel was a bored monk whose favorite pastime was gardening. The pedagogical tension that emerged, as is the case in many science courses, centered on the continuing struggle between content-driven lecture topics and the clock-cramming topics such as Punnett squares, homozygosity, laws of independent assortment, and pedigree analysis into the 150 minutes allotted for Mendelian genetics. The tension produced from trying to present so many topics in too little time resulted in a new approach to teaching Mendelian genetics. Through active and cooperative learning, using a captivating case study, Mendelian genetics was covered in 150 minutes.

Because student learning is closely tied to motivation (McKeachie, 1999), using history to explain Mendelian genetics motivates students to understand how genetic traits are passed on in families by explaining the potential for expression of these traits. The historical example clarified several concepts and enabled the students to see the relevance of understanding the role genetics plays in populations and diversity.

**Background**

The topic of genetics begins with the introduction of a couple named Martin and Elizabeth...