A = Professor
B = Student 1
C = Student 2

A: Good morning, everyone. I want to start today by asking you a question: "How smart are you?" Think about how you would answer me. You might want to reply with a number, or something we could measure. For example, you might tell me your IQ—that is, your intelligence quotient. You might also give your grade point average—your GPA. But now, what if I asked you, "How are you smart?" What would you say to that question?

B: I'd say I'm good with people.

C: And I'm smart on the football field.

A: Good answers. You have two different types of intelligence: interpersonal, which is how you deal with other people; and bodily, which is how you move. This is basically the idea of a theory called Multiple Intelligences. First, though, a bit of history.

As education majors, you all know about the IQ test—the Intelligence Quotient Test—which was created by Alfred Binnet in 1905 for the purposes of prediction and placement. Binnet wanted a way to predict how well students would do in school and place them in the right classes; however, the IQ test was often used to exclude students—to keep the below-average students out of regular schools. One psychologist, Howard Gardner, had another problem with the IQ test.

How many of you have taken an IQ test? Oh . . . little less than half. Can you tell us what type of questions were asked in the test?

B: Umm . . . math, logic, words . . .

A: Good. These are exactly the subjects you learn in school, aren't they? Gardner's argument was that not everyone is "book smart," meaning good at school subjects. He suggested that there are types of intelligence that the IQ test does not test. Gardner said there were eight intelligences in total . . . language, logical, visual, musical, bodily, and natural . . . plus two emotional intelligences . . . interpersonal, how you interact with other people; and finally intrapersonal, how well you know yourself.

So, what is an intelligence? Gardner defines an intelligence . . . as the ability to solve problems by finding or creating new solutions, and the ability to create something valuable in your culture. Your example of being sports-smart fits the definition. You try to solve the problem of moving a football in order to win games, which the culture of colleges in the U.S. thinks is a good thing. The same is true of musicians, painters, scientists . . . and of course for the students who get an A in my class.

B: I have a question, professor. How does Gardner know there are eight intelligences? Why not nine, or ten, or 25?

A: That's a good question, and it's the biggest problem with his theory—it's hard to decide what is and what isn't "an intelligence." Gardner says that an intelligence must have stages of development, and a clear end state—that is, a level that makes you an expert. For example, when you're learning a foreign language, you develop your skills, and your goal is to become fluent. Then, you're an expert, correct? So language is an intelligence.

OK. Now, although there are problems with the theory, it's still useful for you as future teachers. Everyone is smart in different ways—we're all born with different levels in each intelligence . . . and we can all improve any of these intelligences, even those we're naturally weak in. So, it's a very positive theory.

C: So, how can we use the theory of Multiple Intelligences in our classes, as teachers?

A: Well, my advice is to ask your students some simple questions, so that you can find out their strong and weak intelligences. You can then use that information in your lesson preparation. Use your students' strong intelligences to help develop their weaker intelligences.

B: I'm not sure I understand . . .

A: OK. Say you're teaching a language . . . and you have certain students who have strong musical intelligence. Then, you might use songs as part of the language practice. Another use of Multiple Intelligences is just to talk with your students about their strong and weak intelligences. This teaches them to value different abilities, different intelligences. And that can create a better atmosphere in the classroom because students will have more respect for each other. Any other questions so far?