

For New Teachers: by Sharon Draper

Why should I be a teacher?

Who would ever want to be a teacher? A teacher makes no money, gets no respect, and makes no difference to anyone! Now wait a minute. Is this true? Or are we listening to exaggerations and remembering stereotypical images of the bespectacled, mean old Miss Crabtree from old movies? Think back to all of the teachers that you have encountered in your eleven or twelve years of schooling. Which one stands out in your memory? What grade?

The kindergarten teacher who was not afraid to give a hug when needed?

The third grade teacher who taught you the magic of cursive writing?

That fifth grade teacher who made you retake that spelling test fifteen times until you triumphantly got them all right?

The history teacher who showed you the world of humanity?

The math teacher who taught you not only the intricacies of numbers, but also the practicalities of balancing a checkbook and figuring the discount at a sale?

The science teacher who showed you how the physical and the natural world worked together to give us life on earth?

The gym teacher who showed you how good it felt to run fast and to push yourself to the limit?

The music teacher who showed you that a complete individual needed a full complement of expression?

Somewhere in your educational career, one or more of these outstanding individuals opened your mind and showed you the way. That teacher made a difference in your life.

And when you become the parents of the twenty-first century, and you will, with young ones to care for and educate, who will teach those children? Who will make a difference in the lives of the next generation? If none of you choose to go into education, to make a positive difference on the lives of children who are not even born yet, who will be there to guide them, or direct their minds through the beauty and complexity of the vast wealth of knowledge that we now control?

I once asked a class of fourth graders to give me their definition of a good teacher. These are their responses:

A good teacher is soft enough to hug, but too hard to punch.

A good teacher knows lots of dirty jokes but only tells the clean ones that make you laugh.

A good teacher is not scared of thunder and lightning and knows what to do when the lights go out.

A good teacher never makes fun of you when you do dumb stuff like throw up or forget the answer.

A good teacher would be fun to have at your house for dinner, but you'd never want him to come for real.

A good teacher knows a little bit about a lot of stuff, and a whole lot about things you need to know.

A good teacher makes you have so much fun you don't you're learning, and then when you've learned it, you realize it wasn't hard at all. A good teacher knows a little bit about a lot of stuff, and a whole lot about things you need to know.

A good teacher never has bad breath.

A good teacher loves you and you know it.

If we could all live up to this simple list, we'd be successful teachers. The children are waiting. Every year, the school year begins a cycle--of freshness and possibility. New shoes, notebooks, and hopes all shone with the beginning of a new school year. As students you accomplished this cycle many times. Each new school year is filled with new hopes and possibilities--new book-bags and textbooks, fresh clean paper, and more often than not, a new teacher to encounter. A teacher who has the potential, just like a new textbook, to open your mind to ideas as yet unimagined. Why not be that teacher? The one who sings the song that you'll always remember. The one who lights the candle that you'll always carry. Are you a potential teacher?

Young teachers are waiting, unidentified and unknown, in third grade and seventh grade and eleventh grade classrooms. We must look to students long before they graduate from high school and steer them to a career in teaching. Those students who would be natural teachers are sometimes never identified because no one takes the time to nurture the idea in their minds.

Think of your parents and what school was like for them. (Very few of them actually walked to school barefoot ten miles every day in deep snow, as they like to exaggerate.) They had no computers, no cell phones, no pagers--none of the modern conveniences that we take for granted. Just as your parents had less to learn that you do, your children will learn more than you can imagine. We will need well-trained, dedicated teachers who can make this transfer of vast amounts of knowledge a reality. Children are waiting for a teacher to make a difference in their lives. That teacher can be you.

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