

# THOUGHTS ON TEACHING

By Suzan Lake  
23 December 2017

"You know I have never really asked to make any of your choices for you," said my mother, "but I would like you to consider this one idea. Please, please get your teaching certificate. You know your sister has her master's degree, but she can't teach in the public schools. Do this, if you have to, only because I ask you. That's your gift to me." (I think she was worried I would be unemployed.)

My mother won. I graduated with a degree in English in one hand and a teaching certificate in the other. But the process of becoming certified, more specifically my time as a student teacher, brought a revelation to me: **TEACHING CAME AS NATURALLY TO ME AS BREATHING.**

The first day I student taught Miss Neal's reading class at Ben Lomond High School in Ogden, I could hardly believe this was work. My questions. Their answers. The batting of an idea back and forth. The rephrasing of a thought. Slam. Another word caught on the back of my tongue. I smiled and savored it. From that moment in class I began to live and love teaching.

However, loving isn't enough. My skill as a guide and observer must allow the students to grow beyond their fears into learning they never considered possible. That can only happen when I am well-prepared and constantly searching for the next meaningful assignment, for a new way to get them to see, feel, and digest, and as a teacher, I search for ways to help them dig deeper, swim further, absorb more.

## WRITING

Writing reveals the person. When a person chooses to become a writer—even an emerging, primitive, or embryonic writer, he commits to being involved in discovery and communication. How he thinks, analyzes, feels, observes, organizes, and senses the world seeps into his words.

A lab technician must take blood and scrutinize it under the microscope to discover the person's physical makeup. A reader may take the words alone and dissect them for the life-blood flowing through the writer's veins. Words

reveal life. That's what I want students to discover. Words don't just fulfill assignments; they echo the concepts and insights of the author.

Nothing is more difficult than writing. Nothing demands more. A person who writes hurts, pains, joys, and blanches at what he discovers about life. Doing assignments often turns out to be handwriting exercise. Writing requires a change of priorities. Words, meaningful words first; appearance second. Teach kids to write and live at the same time. Risk in both to succeed.

## **GRAMMAR**

I know most people grimace when they hear the word, "Grammar!" Not me. I relish showing kids how to understand how sentences are built and then helping them to strengthen their own. In one assignment, I had the students analyze fifteen of the sentences in one of their own essays. The interesting parallel that surfaced was the correlation between the complexity of the idea and the complexity of the sentence structure. I know this doesn't sound like formal grammar, but it is. Learning structure aids students to write more effectively.

Discovering succinct yet simple grammar explanations feeds my soul. How much more fun can I have than teaching dependent clauses, participial phrases, or gerunds?? I feel sorry for those who only get to teach algebra and accounting.

For me the purpose in teaching grammar is two-fold: to strengthen writing and to take away the inherent fear the word carries. I am very clear about both of my objectives to my students. It's satisfying when students can follow grammar study and end up relaxed and more capable. That's my idea of a good life. Someone who can be barefoot and grammatically correct at the same time.

### **The Personal Teaching Goals of Suzan Lake**

<p>TO MAKE THE DIFFICULT DOABLE TO TURN INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCES INTO PERSONAL ONES</p>
---