

What are the Goals of Education?

or

Why Do I Teach?

by

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My classroom emptied as Steve finished his after school make-up test on *Romeo and Juliet*. Stacks of tests and essays that had to be packed up for weekend grading littered my desk, As I shuffled through them to sort them into classes, I glanced at the first line of a set of final essays from my Honors English 11 class before I stuffed them in my bag.

"Through the reading and studying of literature this term, I have come to realize that literature is not just for understanding and communicating with others, but with ourselves. . . There is much self-discovery and growth to be found through studying literature." **I was bowled over. Kids learning? Kids loving? End of the world? I set my bag on the floor and turned to the next paper.**

"I've learned to observe more things in life from this class. Like the other day I was listening to someone speak, and I realized that I was figuring out what kind of clauses she was using in the sentence. I didn't mean to, but it happened naturally."

Can you believe that a high school student noticed the sentence structure of words cruising by her ears???

"I have never enjoyed poetry that much until we studied poems in depth. There is so much that can be said through a poem. It doesn't have to rhyme or even have a meter; poems are thoughts put together. I never knew poems were so intense." **He discovered poems; he cracked open poems to find himself, all his friends and family nestled inside.**

"Before this English class, I would read to get it done, try to finish as fast as I could. Now I read for understanding, to get at the meaning the author stresses. 'How do I love English? Let me count the ways. . .'" **While my eyes rimmed, I noticed a heavenly choir hovering just over my filing cabinets. "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" their melodies swelled.**

"Last year when I thought of reading, I thought it was dull and boring. Now, when I see a book, I want to know more about it. . .'" **Yes, make friends with books. Spread yourself thin within the pages; bloodsuck the words.**

"Through this poetry, I have learned to open my mind to outside ideas. I have a yearning to learn more about what other people think and feel, and I want to discover for myself through the power of others, the meanings that can be found in the world." **You are on your way. Love the living and hear the dead.**

"Today my life was richer from reading one of the poems of Pablo Neruda. **"I'm beaming until the corners of my mouth touch my ears.**

"I am in awe of the ability of the English writers' ability to take everyday occurrences, transformed by technical skill and creativity, into sublime, enlightening literary pieces." **Now you can begin to write because you can read with sensitivity.**

"In English this year, I have learned that no goal is unattainable, but that you must fail many times before you succeed. The only person that can stop me from going places is myself." **So hug and help yourself.**

"Nearly every piece of literature we have studied has had some influence or relation to my life...Essay after essay, I didn't really feel like my writing was changing, but I soon noticed a dramatic change when comparing a recent paper to one at the beginning of the year. . .My writing will only illuminate others when I have come to see things for myself. I now feel with my heart, brain, and eye; I have accomplished this." **The lightning singed your heart; the thunder opened your ears; the gods have administered literary CPR.**

For an hour after I read this set of papers, I sat, swiveled to the windows. Snow-pink mountains; glowing heart. Any goal I ever had for students shimmered in the students' responses to questions I asked about their own learning and their own involvement in English as literature, writing, grammar, vocabulary, class discussion.

My goals reflect the truths that I savor. Some other educator will have to teach monetary skills, job applications, and daily life survival. I hunger to have students discover the magnitude of the world around them, the power and fulfillment of relationships with people, the glory and mystery of themselves, and the dazzling written word. To love words and people means learning to be tenderly, snarlingly human. A teacher must teach from the heart. An unemotional, uninvolved teacher cannot teach students, only subject matter. For me, all learning has to be in the blood and nerves, not just the mind. I teach students to observe, feel, discover, organize, analyze, interpret, embrace, and love. That's all I want to do: humanize students, mix literature into them, teach them to birth their hearts into written words, and let them float on the electricity of their discoveries.