

## Why Teach

Nothing is more valuable than the impact a teacher can have on a student. One sentence could tear down every wall a student has built. One encouraging statement could impact a student's grades for years to come. One word could change the trajectory of a student's life. The impact my teachers have made on me has changed my life. I was an unassuming sophomore when I walked into the first day of English class in 2019. I just wanted to complete whatever busy-work I was assigned, get a good grade, and move on. Things are easier that way. I would soon learn that nothing worthwhile is easy. As I sat on my English teacher's alternative seating bosu ball, I was able to take this approach for a while, just doing what was requested of me: nothing more, nothing less. Then, my English teacher, Mrs. Black, assigned the first essay of the year and I was completely dumbfounded because she didn't tell us how to do it. It shocked me to my core. This was the first teacher I had who didn't tell me how to accomplish something step-by-step in excruciating detail. I walked up to her desk and stumbled over my words, "But... how do I do this?" I don't remember her exact words but I do remember her all-knowing smile and calm demeanor as she told me to write the paper how I think it should be written. She gave me one of the greatest gifts of all: freedom.

This was kind of the jumping-off point for me and where I was headed was a pool of knowledge and awareness. Already an avid reader, Mrs. Black encouraged me to read even more and to go beyond my typical genre. This led me to classical works by Shakespeare, analytically psychological books by Malcolm Gladwell, and informative works by Bryan Stevenson. Besides encouraging my delve into self-education, she also used the curriculum to encompass much more than was required. During College English I, Mrs. Black used the already formative course load and took it even further. This course was focused on reading academic essays and, in turn, writing essays to them in response. Some of the topics were about the bias against blue collar workers and inherent bias within the educational system leading students to a college education instead of the workforce. This topic really caught my attention and only further captivated me when Mrs. Black mediated days of classroom discussion, asking us eye-opening questions, just vague enough to not provide the answers because she understood the importance of letting us find the answers on our own. Mrs. Black is the reason that I question the status quo and try to do my part to change things for the better, whether that be in my home, school, community, or the world. She made me realize that I could actually be an asset to one of the top private universities in the country and is one of the main reasons I will be attending Tulane University next fall. Her teaching went way beyond the classroom and into my life. But why does there have to be a distinction between the two? What if teachers taught like Mrs. Black, bridging the gap between life and the classroom?

Top-down changes, like increasing teacher's pay and reshaping society's view of the teaching profession as a highly sought after job like it is in Finland (which has an acclaimed educational system in its own right), are needed in order to end the current teacher shortage. But changes like this will take a long time and require both political and social change. In my opinion, the best way to incentivize students to become teachers is to remind them of the impact they can have on other students. It's the way teachers connect with students now that will make them want to affect future students in the same way. Teachers taking the time to link the curriculum and life--that is what makes students *want* to be there and *interested* in learning, that is what will inspire students to become teachers. This type of change can occur right now, this very moment. What are we waiting for?