

Voices of Modern Cultures
2009-2010
Dropping Knowledge for the Last Time

Dear Students,

It is with great pleasure and admiration that I write you this letter. It is important for me to recognize your contribution to this classroom and I want to thank you for being my students. I have been privileged to be your teacher this year and I am proud to be a small part of each of your lives.

It seems so far away from us now, but if you remember, at the beginning of the year, we listened to a song called "It's Your World" by Common. We talked about what Common was trying to say and I asked you write a poem that emulated his. I asked you to reflect on where you have been and where you want to go. Those poems were my introduction to you; I was and still am humbled by what so many of you have accomplished and the ambitious dreams you have for yourselves. It is my hope that you will take some time to look over that poem again and remind yourself of what you wrote. It is important to always reflect on where you have been and congratulate yourself on what you have accomplished. But while those poems may have been my introduction to you, my intention was to encourage you to begin developing what you want to "be" beyond that. To me, the word "be" is such a powerful word because it is not a request, it is a demand. If you are to "be" something, it is not an option to refuse. My goal as an educator is to constantly challenge you to achieve what you demand of yourself and to inspire you to always demand more.

Pushing you to your limits is never an easy task for me and it is made particularly difficult because of why I do this job. You must understand, when I made the decision to be a teacher, I did not do so because I love kids, or because I love English or fiction, or even because I love teaching either. I teach, because I want to change the world. The world we have now is not the one I want. There are too many people who lie, cheat and steal to selfishly pursue their own interest at the expense of others. I, for one, am finished ignoring the tremendous amount of injustice they create. All around us is suffering, hate, discrimination, fighting, poverty, separation, anger and so on. I do not see any good reason why a single person anywhere on this earth should suffer more than you or I and I do not see why any one person on this planet is more important than the collective whole. To me, causing the suffering of others or failing to prevent it, is unacceptable and inexcusable; where this exists, there must be a change.

I always feel strange calling for people to change; to care more about each other. I do not, and never will, understand why our mutual ability to care is not the foundation from which we build our society – why it is so hard for the people of the world to care about each other – why we idolize selfishness – why I have to *convince* people to care. It is as if the world has forgotten how small and insignificant we are in relation to the entire universe – how lucky we are to have each other, on this planet, together. I believe that it is far more beneficial to us all to recognize that no matter what grand scheme we find ourselves a part of, we must remain united in what we share; life on earth. We are not united by colors, countries, orientations, beliefs, locations, desires, religions, or classes; we are united by our very humanity. Every single human being on this planet is your brother and your sister. They deserve to be cared about and treated as such – even the ones you do not like. Quite frankly, the ability to care about other people is what keeps us alive and consequently is what binds us together as *one*. No matter our differences - you and I are one - and together we must dream of a better world. We must stand united to say that this world is unacceptable to us; that this world needs a revolution.

But if we are to bring a revolution, we must work to break the cycle of what is and what has always been. We cannot accept that the past and the present will lead to what will always be. I believe this process begins with young people like you. I think that when you are educated – you *are* inspired – and you *will* do something to break the cycle. Somewhere within you there exists an *inability* to accept what is and a desire to constantly seek what can be *beyond* what always has been; from the world and from yourself. I know it is there, because it

is what makes you human. And so it is the job of a teacher to awaken this spirit – to always push you to go beyond all possible limits. I may only teach high school English, but within that is the responsibility to help you develop as a person. In fact, it means so much to me that I believe that if I ever become complacent in accepting the status quo and stopped challenging you to seek more out of life; I would be unfit to be your teacher. To me, the purpose of education is growth – learning how to *always* find ways that you can be more than what you are and the world can be more than what it is. Ultimately, this passion is what I have sought to develop within you because it leads to an impenetrable desire to care. I can only hope that for all my labors and efforts, there have been some successes along the way.

As you leave this place, it is imperative that you continue to grow and never become complacent. Complacency is what makes you just another average person. This world has too many average people and it does not need any more. People who are content with being average and who accept the status quo are the reason why nothing ever gets done – why the world never changes. Positive change begins with intelligent young people who have heart, passion and drive - who are unafraid to use their potent voices to fight for what is right under all circumstances – who care enough to seek out what can be and demand that it be so. This world needs you at your best. You have a tremendous voice, and as you continue to develop it, consider that children look up to you, adults are ever watchful of you and many people, including myself, have devoted our lives to you. We all know how powerful you are; we would not pay so much attention to you if we did not think so. It is time that you also recognize just how much you are capable of – it is essential if we are ever going to achieve a revolution in the way we treat each other.

So, despite my constant grumbling to the contrary, I remain inspired, because I know that you *do* care. I simply will not agree that apathy, cynicism and ignorance are true representations of young people – of you. I think there is an innate ability to care that exists at the core of your being and it is the single reason why I show up every day and why I work so mind-numbingly hard. It is the reason you are on my mind the second I wake up and the hours before I go to bed. It is the reason that I talk about you all the time, with everyone I know. It is the reason why you drive me crazy. It is the reason that I wonder about what happens to you and why I will continue to wonder as you go off into the world. It is the reason that *I* care. There is no doubt in my mind that I would not be here, teaching as I do, if I did not believe that *you will* be tomorrow's heroes and succeed where humanity has historically failed. Each generation brings a new hope – and you are mine.

As I leave you with one final thought, I would like to first steal a line from one of my favorite historians and philosophers, Howard Zinn. He said, “We are all in [this] together. History has come to that point. We have run out of time and space and boundary lines. We are all crowded together on a planet which must find universal brotherhood and sisterhood, across lines of class, of race, of religion, of nationality – or we will all go down, whether in nuclear holocaust or endless civil war. What we do now, therefore, we do for us all. If enough people begin to recognize that, I believe, your extinguished torch of freedom will be again, as will be a thousand more in other parts of the world.”

To me, actively seeking to live life in harmony, where we genuinely care about each other – regardless of the circumstances - is a revolutionary idea that has not been achieved yet. This is true freedom. I believe it is not only attainable, but necessary. Our survival depends on it. It *is* time for a revolution. But it is *your* world and it is *your* revolution. You are the ones that must stand and lead us to a better future. When you do, I will be proud to stand with you. So I teach - in the hopes that someday - as *one* - we all will change the world.

Thank you for allowing me to contribute to your journey and for being a memorable part of mine. I have learned so much. I would be honored to shake your hand before you leave this classroom one last time.

Always “Be” Revolutionary.

Mr. P