

Darrell Rasco

Welcome to the Life of a Writing Student: A Conversation With My Teacher



“I’m a teacher that’s big on writing, so y’all will be doing a lot of it this year. If you hate it, get over it!”

This year is gonna be awful, I thought. She seemed like such a cool teacher—then she said we would have to write a lot. So much for enjoying an English class for once. I already can’t wait for this year to be over. This year is gonna SUCK!

“Writing is very important and can take you far.”

Seriously? I’m not going to be a professional writer; I have no interest in any form of writing. This is STUPID! I just want a calm school year and to be able to hang out with my friends without a lot of stress from stupid assignments. I want to be able to walk these halls and enjoy life as a student. Wait. Did I use the word *enjoy* and *student* in the same sentence? I don’t think that’s even possible.

Darrell Rasco is a full-time student at Waxahachie Global High (STEM/ECHS). When he’s not working on school work he loves to work on robotics, he is currently the COO of the school’s FIRST Robotics Team. As seen in his article, his ambition is to become a mechanical engineer; however, he has recently discovered his writing ability and has been “convinced” by his teacher to pursue writing alongside his engineering career.

“Go for the jugular”—that’s advice from Goldberg (1986, p. 8). Hmm, that sounds pretty cool. And I like that that’s just what Pitts does—he doesn’t hold anything back when he writes.

“Today we’re going to be looking at ‘distant teachers.’ Leonard Pitts, Jr., is a Pulitzer Prize winner, which means he’s a really good writer. We will also be looking at Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*.”

“Go for the jugular” that’s advice from Goldberg (1986, p. 8). Hmm, that sounds pretty cool. I like that that’s just what Pitts does he doesn’t hold anything back when he writes. Pitts, in his newspaper column, just tells it how it is, straight up, no sugar coating, like when he says, “Consider the recent study indicating that the state of Maryland has been choosing whom to execute based on the color of their skin and place of residence” (2003, para. 10). It’s also really cool how he can say a lot with a line as short as, “Holy wow!” (2012, para. 6).

“Here’s your first writing assignment: I need you to write a personal essay about your hometown. Remember to use the tools we’ve discussed when you are writing. Also think

about incorporating some of the styles we've looked at from other authors."

Write about my hometown? Seriously? What can I say about my hometown? It's full of hick kids who think they can rap. I'm supposed to write an essay about a bunch of rednecks and inside-out Oreos? I mean, I love those guys, but I left to get a brighter future. Wait. Did I actually come up with a good idea for this story? This may actually work. I'll just write about how nobody who grows up here does anything with their life.

"Class, I was impressed with most of your hometown essays, so your next assignment is to write about a significant event in your life."

A significant event. Is she expecting us to get really deep with this one or something? 'Cause that's not happening. I am not about to spill my guts to some teacher just 'cause she's making us write about real stuff. What kind of "significant" events have I experienced anyway? Hmm. There's the time I unintentionally rode a jet ski alone when I was four, or when I got my first dirt bike when I was three and put it in a tree the same day. No, I don't remember those well enough; I was too young. How about the first time I went cliff diving? I could make an interesting story about that. I can just exaggerate the thoughts running through my head while trying to decide if I should jump or not. She doesn't have to know I made stuff up.

"You did a really good job on this. Would you mind reading it in class?"

Whoa! Is she serious? I wrote this in a rush last night. She's gotta be joking. "Umm, can I think about it?" I mutter.

"Yeah, that's fine. We are having author's chair time next class, and I would like you to volunteer ... if you feel comfortable."

"So, you want me to go in front of the class and read my story? Seriously? I don't want to put myself out there like that. What if they don't like it?"

"Writing forces you to become vulnerable. I do it EVERY time I put something I have written in kids' hands."

"All right, I'll do it."

You know what? They liked it. They actually liked it.

"Ok, now we're going to take a break from writing and read a book by Tim O'Brien (1990) called *The Things They Carried*. This—as well as many of his other books—is about the Vietnam war."

So, you see, if you have the power to add pen and paper to produce a result that will blow minds and move hearts and souls, don't be like me and attempt to resist. Do what she says. Just do it. Just write.

I'm not a fan of books unless it's *Harry Potter* or something written by James Patterson, but I guess I could go for a book about a war....

Seriously! I get so deep into this book and I figure out some of it's made up. That's just wrong—you can't do that and make me feel that it's so real.

Wait. I've done that—I'm good at that. I guess I'm not the only one who figured out that adding a bit of fiction to real events makes a better story. If Tim O'Brien is a professional author who uses the same technique I do, I guess I've got something figured out here.

"You've had a break from writing for a while, so now I need you to write a response to your *The Things They Carried* project. Be sure to incorporate the writing styles we worked on earlier in the year and think about how you can represent the tangible and intangible effects of war in your writing."

Oh, man. How am I going to do this? Apparently I'm good at writing personal essays, but how can I make that work with the Vietnam War? I wasn't in the war. Grandpa was in the Vietnam War, so I could talk to him—if he were still alive. What if I talk to Mom and Grandma? I bet they could tell me some stuff about what he did in the war. I can probably use a lot of the ideas from *The Things They Carried* too. It was an excellent book. It really made me think about how much deeper the effects of being in a war are. There's more to it than just getting hurt; there are a lot of emotional effects too. I think I can make this work. I made up a lot of stuff in my other stories, so I'll just make up the whole thing. I'll pretend I was in the war and talk about my "experiences." She said we could pick any genre, right?

"That's one of the best pieces of student writing I have read in years, maybe ever. It was excellence on paper. You have a gift."

Is she on drugs? My paper—one of the "best" she's ever read? I can't believe it. That's awesome, and a great compliment because of how great of a writer she is—but WOW! I mean, I guess I did a good job. The weird part is that I actually enjoy writing these papers. Writing lets me express myself in a new way. I would never expect that people would actually like and be inspired by what I have to say.

“I want you to try writing an article for this journal that I’ve been published in a couple of times. You should really think about publishing your work in the future.”

“Miss Adams, I don’t want to be a writer. I’m going to be an engineer.”

“You don’t have to be a famous author to publish your writing. You have a real gift here; I don’t want to see you waste it. You can just write because you enjoy it, you know.”

Fine! I’ll write the stupid paper. I wish she didn’t have such high expectations of me.

I did it. She told me that I made her cry. She said, “The student has become the teacher.”

So, you see, if you have the power to add pen and paper to produce a result that will blow minds and move hearts and souls, don’t be like me and attempt to resist. Do what she says. Just do it. Just write.

I actually do enjoy writing. Just don’t tell her.

References

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