One Teacher's Timeless Resolutions

by
Carol Jago

Editor's Note: Five months after we first decided to run Carol Jago's New Year's resolutions in our premiere issue of The Voice, we finally go to print. Though the new year is no longer new, we thought our readers would still appreciate the humor and honesty of Carol's words.

I, Carol Jago, a veteran teacher, resolve in the new year (1996):
• To return every parent phone call, even if it takes a dozen attempts. Any parent who braved the bureaucracy of a school's message center, deserves my best effort.
• Not to lose my temper when I find the solitaire program reinstalled on the computer after having discarded it for the umpteenth time.
• To avoid sarcasm when responding to students, even when provoked.
• To remain unshakable in my belief that there is that one perfect book that can hook the most reluctant student on reading. With every resource I can muster I will fill my classroom with those books and never count the cost when my fifth copy of Luis Rodriguez's "Always Running: La Vida Loco, Gang Days in L.A." is missing. I will continue to trust that the books which are not returned have simply gone on to other readers.
• To defend students' right to read controversial and provocative books.
• To raise my voice in support of stories that challenge students' beliefs and have the courage to enter the fray against censorship, even when worn down by organized opposition.
• To read in class when my students are reading, to write when they are writing. No matter how many pieces of "administrivia" call out from my desk to be handled, I will model the behavior I teach.
• To encourage students to take risks in their writing and remember not to punish them when they fail.
• To forgive myself for lessons that fall flat and assignments that don't trigger the kind of student writing I expected.
• To continue to look for reasons why on some days a whole class is disengaged, disgruntled and disrespectful.
• To know that some days it's my fault and some days it isn't.
• To eat more. An anorexic-looking teacher is a poor role model for young women.
• To let students have more choice in what we study.
• To put my criteria for choosing texts on the table and be willing to negotiate even if it means I don't get to teach Frankenstein.
• To reinforce through word and deed that good grades are not the goal of a year in school. An education is.
• To think harder about what that means in a society that doesn't particularly value intellectual pursuits and glorifies those who "make it" by dint of personality.
• To maintain a sense of humor when students are loud and messy and the classroom is bursting with their energy.
• To be able to say, "Yes, this annoys me a lot. But these children are not doing anything that a younger teacher couldn't take in her stride."
• To take up yoga.

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