

Okay, all you retiring and retired people. Quiet down, please. Quiet down! Quiet down?

ahem

Thank you! Thank you. Thank you...

Mary Jo,

This little attention-getting technique is one of dozens (if not hundreds) of Mary Jo-isms that help me in the classroom each school year. But that's not where all this starts, does it? You also helped me when I was at the most embarrassing point in my life - middle school.

I've tried a little experiment since I started teaching middle school - ask adults what they remember from their time in middle school - academically or socially, good or bad. It turns out that most people can't even summon one memory of middle school, or are too embarrassed to share those memories, if they can remember them. Well, I remember a few things from middle school, and they are embarrassing, and they both involve you, so I thought I'd share them here.

First - I was a voracious reader when I was younger. At least a book a week, if not more. I was particularly in love with fantasy books, including all the books written by a Mr. Piers Anthony. I'd discovered his "Xanth" series sometime around the fifth grade, and fallen in love. Mr. Anthony named the world "Xanth" after his own name (say his name quickly), and the world of Xanth is drawn on a map of the state of Florida, his home state.

In 1992, the *fifteenth* book in the series came out, titled The Color of Her Panties. I was a little embarrassed by the title, but I desperately wanted to continue the series that had me so enchanted.

Unfortunately, about halfway through the book, I forgot the book in your classroom. You were so kind about it, and all you were trying to do was return the book to the person who had lost it, but you asked our class whose book it was. I felt like the student in Sandra Cisneros' "Eleven", and found myself frozen, unable to speak up. I can't remember if later in the week I grabbed it without comment, or a friend of mine grabbed it for me, but I was eventually able to finish that book, and a few more in the series.

Second - my love of the fantasy genre extended beyond books into video games as well. So in your class, you'd asked us to do some kind of writing assignment, and I decided to type up the story of a video game I had been playing, "Final Fantasy 2" line by line, in the most middle school way you can think of. No punctuation, no capitalization, no sense of actual storycraft, and definitely no attention to dialogue. I just typed and typed until I hit whatever length requirement you had asked. I don't remember much more than that - just getting a bad grade, or possibly no grade at all - until I actually listened to what the assignment was, or bothered to pay attention to what the purpose of the writing was.

So, my first thank you is handling all of my embarrassing moments (these and probably so many more) with kindness and anonymity and gentle grace. That certainly won't be the last of the thank yous.

In college, I can't remember what my course selection list said, but something about "Bode, Mary" reminded me of someone, but I couldn't remember who until I walked into your

classroom. I don't have any artifacts from middle school anymore (sadly), but I looked through my files from your methods class, and found some writings from that era. I wrote a parody of a song called "Puck You", telling the story of "A Midsummer's Night Dream", and also wrote some piece of creative writing for some unknown purpose, called "Captain Squishyfruit."

As you can see, my writing maturity hadn't progressed much from middle school, and it turns out neither had my personal maturity. In this class, you worked with all of us pre-service teachers on classroom management, protocols for varying up reading, writing, and speaking activities, and texts that could be used at middle and high school level. Notably, I remember a yellow piece of paper ("Remember, if you hand out papers of different colors, it helps students find them...") that addressed how to avoid being the second party in power struggles that students attempt to engage in. Without my own classroom, and with my current maturity level, I had no idea how difficult implementing the words of advice on this piece of paper would be. I still have this yellow piece of paper, and refer to it at least once each year, to help me with "that student", who needs special handling.

So, my second thank you is for finding and choosing the most valuable resources that a pre-service teacher could possibly want or need, and helping shape me, and hundreds of others, to be the teachers I/we are today.

I was lucky enough to be hired in BVSD as a first-year teacher, and entered the PIE program to begin my master's, and you were my induction coach. Here, I was lucky enough to have you visit me weekly in my classroom during my first year of teaching. This is where your expertise of dozens of topics really came into play - including my social/emotional well-being, academics, grading, classroom management, lesson planning, and ... power struggles. This time, the power struggles you helped me with were not only with kids, but also adults. I think the only reason I was able to keep working in BVSD is because of the coaching, advice, and mentorship you provided during that first year.

So, my third thank you is for helping me during my most formative year, going above and beyond with your wisdom and advice.

Since then, almost every since, there's some situation that comes up that seems unsolvable, and I place a call to Mary Jo. You listen, ask questions, and finally give advice which unfailingly gets me out of or past the situation that previously seemed to have no visible or viable options.

I write this during Spring Break of 2019, and here I am, teaching 7th graders, like you taught me, and taught me, and taught me. I am only who I am professionally (and personally) because of who you are as a person, a teacher, a listener, and a mentor.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Daniel Laman