

More than a Teacher

by Angela MacArthur A great teacher teaches you more than just the basics in math or English or history. A great teacher inspires you to reach beyond your grasp and aspire to be a better person. A great teacher will go out of their way to make sure that you feel able and valued, no matter how many students they have in their class or how many years they've been teaching. You can tell a great teacher by the number of students gathered around their desk throughout the day; they're the ones still there an hour after school has let out, simply because so many students are waiting. My great teacher was my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Kasha. Mrs. Kasha was definitely the popular lady at school, and although there were only two sixth grade teachers to choose from, all the fifth graders spent the summer with their fingers crossed, hoping that she would be theirs the next year. It's hard to explain what it was about Mrs. Kasha that made her the best teacher in a school of dozens. She certainly wasn't the easiest - she challenged each and every student to attempt what they thought was impossible, and she never let the 'smart' kids coast by on their good reputations. Maybe it was her kind voice, or her easy way with every kid, regardless of who they were or where they came from. Maybe it was the way she made everything seem a little more interesting than it probably was. I think it was the whole package: she was the type of teacher who made you care about her and what you were learning. Mrs. Kasha made a difference in my life because she went out of her way to understand someone who was different. My school wasn't exceptionally large, but there were certainly enough students to get lost in the crowd. My problem was, it was impossible for me to get lost in that crowd because, early in my life, my teachers found out that I was one of those 'smart' kids. Things naturally came easy to me, and I was often called upon to help my classmates when they were having trouble. I was visibly different from all the other kids, and it made a real impact on the way I felt about myself, all the way through school. Mrs. Kasha acknowledged the fact that I caught onto things easily and she knew that I could get bored with what was going on. However, she also knew that I didn't want any more attention drawn to me. She was the first teacher I had who looked past my intelligence to think about me as a person. Her solution was to quietly give me extra work to keep me occupied, or when I needed to be away from my classmates, she would let me go to the fourth grade class and help the teacher there. It was easier for me to help the students who were younger because they naturally expected me to know more than they did and they didn't question the fact that I would be able to help them. Sixth grade wasn't an easy year for me. The move to middle school loomed large in front of me, and I also experienced a lot of medical problems that year. I was in and out of the hospital a couple of times, and my life was drastically changed by a number of these trips. Mrs. Kasha helped me through this time by making sure that I was still included in the class. Our final assignment of the year - one that everyone looked forward to from fifth grade on - was the publishing of a class newspaper. I was way too sick at the time to help with the creation of the paper, but Mrs. Kasha had all the kids write letters to me as if I was the writer of the advice column. She knew how important it was for me to be able to interact with the other kids despite my differences and because of her I left that school with a ton of new friends. I know that Mrs. Kasha touched the lives of hundreds of students. There will, of course, be some who remember her a little more than others because of the special things she did for those who needed it. I know that, for me, my time in Mrs. Kasha's class changed my life and she's a big part of the reason why I'm now working on my PhD. She taught me to embrace the way my mind works, and showed me that being different isn't really a bad thing.

About the Author

Have you ever had to read a book on a topic that you didn't care about? We all have. (Think back to those dry history books filled with a series of dates, or overly technical science tomes.) And sometimes that is part of life - at times we have to read, even if we aren't inspired by the topic.

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