A SMALL FLOCK OF POEMS FOR TEACHERS

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And Their Children Too</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it’s Over</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brilliant Inspiration!</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure as Sunlight</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Hard to Push, How Far to Lead</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Cause to Yell</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flearning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Hero</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misguided Love</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it Really Over?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please, my teacher, open up your . . .</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Principal</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five short poems: Ambitiousness versus Ambivalence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardships and Distractions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Foundations</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator Self-Censorship: “We Won’t Say ‘They Don’t Know.’”</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I Had a Magic Formula (/I don’t, but we do.)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain the Rhythm</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TRANSFORMATION

I started kindergarten
Two or three big steps behind.
Some classmates understood things
That had never crossed my mind.

The kids who looked real different
Seemed so smart (I can recall).
Kids who looked and spoke like I did
Didn’t seem so smart at all.

Of course there were exceptions,
But on mostly any day,
It was clear those kids were doing best
And we were just okay.

Our teachers liked them better
‘Cause they always knew the answers,
So kids like me just tried to be
Good athletes and great dancers.

The years went by quite slowly
And most things just stayed the same,
Until our principal decided
It was time to change the game.

She hinted that the reason
When those other kids did best
Was that many knew already
More of what was on the tests.

They learned it from their parents
And from things they did at home.
Much that I and my companions
Never had the chance to know.

That had always been the pattern.
Yes for years it was the same.
But the standards movement came along
To finally change the game.

Now that there’s a new prescription
For the way our school is run,
Everybody’s got new goals to reach.
It’s getting to be fun!

We’re learning to get smarter
‘Cause our teachers show us how.
They’re all serious about it.
Everyone’s important now!

Time in class is so exciting
That we seldom fool around.
We might make a joke in passing,
But we quickly settle down.

After school we do our homework.
Often in our study groups.
When we need them we have tutors
And they give us all the “scoops.”

If there’s something that’s confusing,
It’s a temporary thing
‘Cause the teachers love to answer
All the questions that we bring.

All the counselors and teachers
Work with parents as team
‘Cause they share the same commitment
To connect us with our dreams.

I love the way things are now.
It all just seems so right!
We still play sports and we’re still cool,
But now we’re also “bright.”

That first day of kindergarten
Some of us were way behind.
But today I’m graduating
In a truly different time.

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And Their Children Too
The child who stands before you
Will some day be in your shoes
And a child will stand before her
Hearing things once said by you.
If your message is uplifting
And your smile is bright and true
She will pass them to her children
In the ways she learned from you.

Think
think of the deepest emotions you have –
the feelings that make you explode.
well each of the children you have in your class
carries that same mother load.

what is the role that you play in their lives?
the feelings you daily inspire?
do you nurture ambition and make their eyes wide?
do the things you teach build their desire?

yours is the power to nurture bond fires
that fuel great ambitions and goals.
so endeavor to do all you can to inspire
your students to be great and bold.

there will soon come a day when you’ll look up with pride
and know that you did all you could
when you see them on wings way up high in the sky
‘cause you taught them and they understood!!

Persist
There is no greater frustration
than to be stubbornly misunderstood
by a child who is afraid that she can’t learn.
And there is no greater elation
than when the light of understanding
burns away the fear and makes her smile return.

When it’s Over
the lesson ain’t over
‘til the skinny kid smiles
and signals that he understands.

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A Brilliant Inspiration!
(Secrets of a recalcitrant student.)

I tried hard to ignore her,
Never looked her in the eye,
But she kept on talking to me
While I tried to act real shy.

I would rather have been playing
Somewhere miles away from her,
But she kept on talking to me
‘bout the grades I had to earn.

I was getting really tired,
Wanted her to go away,
But I could not think of how to make her vanish.

It was after lots of thinking,
I can still recall the day,
That I finally had a brilliant inspiration:

There’d be nothing she could tell me
If did all the assignments
And it might be fun to show how much I knew.

So I focused on my work a while,
Completed all my papers,
Then I raised my hand to tell her I was through.

I think that I surprised her
‘Caused she stood there stunned and speechless
And that’s just what I’d been wanting her to do.

Success!

Sure as Sunlight

there’s a child here in your caring
who may someday cure all cancer
but you’ve got to lay the groundwork
so that it can come to pass.

she’s a child who hasn’t blossomed
so you cannot see her brilliance
but as sure as there is sunlight
she is here now in your class.

I can’t tell you what her name is
nor her height, nor weight, nor color,
only that she is potentially
a history-making lass.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How Hard to Push, How Far to Lead</strong></th>
<th><strong>No Cause to Yell</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who can say how hard to push The children to excel? You ask, “How hard is hard enough?” But don’t know how to tell.</td>
<td>If you teach the joy of learning You may be surprised to find That the need push and fuss and shout Will soon be left behind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood years should overflow With games and lots of fun. But time is short and pressure high For learning to get done.</td>
<td>When you make that evolution Deep inside of your own mind, That will be the day you know The joy of teaching not the grind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The state’s new test is coming And our principal is clear That our students must be ready There is a lot to fear.</td>
<td>On that day you will no longer Have to force them to excel, For they’ll know the joy of learning And you’ll never have to yell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the scores don’t reach the threshold Then the piper we must pay. So I guess I’ll put the pressure On my little ones today.</td>
<td><strong>Flearning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But no! That can’t be the answer! Pressure crushes and distorts! There has got to be another way -- One of a kinder sort.</td>
<td>We need a magic formula To make a flearning blend. So kids will keep on learning Even when the fun begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will take them on a journey On a road that dips and winds. When we tire we’ll continue -- Learning things of every kind.</td>
<td>With flearning it’s amazing How they run to class and then Start to grab at books with eagerness And read with funny grins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will help them deeply value What that journey has to teach. They’ll excel because I love them And because of goals they’ll reach.</td>
<td>You’ll find this magic formula Inside of your own heart Just think of why you’re teaching And right then the magic starts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the end of our endeavor When they take the State’s new test They will know most of the answers And with smiles they’ll do their best.</td>
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</table>

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My Hero

My teacher is my hero.
She’s the captain of our team.
My classmates all adore her.
She taught us all to dream.

It’s a dream of overcoming
All the challenges we’ll face.
She helps us build our confidence—
Prepares us for the race.

It’s a race into the future
To a place we don’t yet know.
We’ve got to be quite versatile —
Prepared for any foe.

My teacher looks for excellence.
She says she’ll take no less.
Now when a challenge faces us
We’ve learned to do our best.

I really love my teacher
And I’m sure that she loves me.
When I get to be a grownup
She’s the kind I want to be.

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Misguided Love

I care about my students
More than I can ever say.
When they hug me in the morning
They’re so loving.

Some are very disadvantaged
And their lives are really hard
I’m especially sympathetic
When they’re crying.

I allow them just to watch
Until they’re ready to join in
Then I praise them to the hilt
For simply trying.

Perhaps if I were stricter
They would learn a little more,
But I’m not sure that they can.
So I just love them.

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Is it Really Over?

It’s the end of the semester.
I don’t know quite how to feel.
I have finally come to know you,
Now you’re leaving.

This is our last day together
And my sense of loss is real,
But somehow it isn’t right now
To be grieving.

I have given my best effort
To prepare you to move on,
So I guess I should be happy
That you’re going.

I will just have to accept it
That next week you will be gone.
Here’s a wish that your success
Is overflowing.

So long.

Please, my teacher, open up your . . .

heart to care ever more deeply for us;

mind to think ever more creatively about ways of helping us learn;

mouth to seek fresh ideas and feedback (including from us!); and

classroom to join colleagues and parents in a thriving community
where as teachers, parents and children together
we strive to reach our potential.

okay?
My Principal

My principal is my hero.  
She’s the captain of our team.  
My colleagues all adore her.  
She taught us all to dream.

It’s a dream of overcoming  
All the challenges we face.  
She helps us build our confidence---  
Prepares us for the race.

It’s a race to do the best we can  
To help our students grow.  
They’ve got to be quite versatile --  
Prepared for any foe.

My principal seeks excellence.  
She says she’ll take no less.  
Her firm insistence pushes us  
To do our very best.

I really like our principal  
‘Cause she inspires me.  
As I strive to be a leader  
She’s the kind I’m trying to be.

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Task 3

Ambitiousness versus Ambivalence:
Five short poems about setting goals and planning to do well, or not.

(The Random House dictionary defines “ambivalence” as: 1. uncertainty or fluctuation, especially when caused by inability to make a choice or by a simultaneous desire to say or do two opposite things. 2. the coexistence of positive and negative feelings toward the same person, object or action.)

Reasons for Ambivalence

1. Not Smart Enough
Sarah thinks that she’s a dummy
So she has no real ambition.
She just hopes that she gets lucky
When the teacher grades exams.

2. No Expected Assistance
Johnny thinks he’d be successful
If he only had a tutor,
But he thinks that’s not an option
So he doesn’t make big plans.

3. No Encouragement
Heather knows that she is smart enough
And yes, she knows as well,
That all the help she needs is right nearby.
But she doesn’t feel encouraged
So she doesn’t feel ambitious.
She just drifts along and doesn’t really try.

4. Boring and Irrelevant
Shantu feels encouraged
And he understands the lessons,
But they’re boring and irrelevant to him.
He says, “To learn them would be useless.”
So, his daily aspiration
Is to make it through until it’s time for gym.

Reasons for Ambitiousness

Gregory used to be like Sarah, Johnny, Heather
and Shantu,
But this year his teachers told him to believe
That his brain is like a muscle
So that if he puts the work in
His high goals will be real possibilities.

Gregory also knows that help
Will always be there if he needs it,
So that even if the work gets really hard,
His ambitions will be justified
And not just idle dreaming
So he plans to try his best to go real far.

Encouragement surrounds him
Since his parents and his teachers
Try in many different ways to let him know
That he’s a very special person
Whose ambitiousness and progress
Make them happier than they could ever show.

Gregory knows that what he’ll learn
Will be important.
And he’s expecting that the process will be fun!
So he’s feeling quite ambitious
Looking forward to his lessons
And to all the great success that is to come.

Let’s do our best to help all children to: (1) feel smart enough to justify setting goals;
(2) anticipate that help will be available if needed; (3) expect continuing positive reinforcement from adults; (4) understand that their studies are relevant to their lives; and (5) expect that time on task will be enjoyable. If we do, more will become ambitious goal setters (and, ultimately, industrious learners) like Gregory in the second column above.

HARDSHIPS AND DISTRACTIONS

I'm going to have my dinner  
At my grandma's house today.  
My mom is stayin' late for work  
To make some extra pay.

I've got a lot' a homework  
But I'm worried 'bout my mom.  
So that makes it hard to concentrate.  
My mind feels like a bomb!

I've also got to make sure  
That I wash some clothes to wear  
And I've got to get the stuff I need  
To tame my crazy hair.

And while I'm doin’ that,  
I'll use the phone to make some calls  
To tell my friends the time and place  
For Friday at the mall.

And sometime between now and then  
I've got to get some dough($).  
'Cause I ain't going to the mall  
All destitute and po'.

I know that I should focus  
On that test I've got in math,  
But my English paper's due soon too.  
I need some help real bad!

Some teachers think I just don't care  
And some think I'm not tryin'.  
I think I'm caught in a trap –  
Sometimes I just start cryin'.

But no one ever sees my tears.  
'Cause I just show the tough side.  
I like to seem real in control –  
If not book-smart, then street-wise.

I wish my teachers understood  
What it's like to be me.  
To see my life the way I do —  
The whole complexity.

They'd see how hard it is to keep  
So many things in focus.  
They'd see how blurry things can get —  
How stuff can seem so hopeless.

My teacher said I best be ready  
When I take that test in math.  
But I ain't got no help at home.  
I never knew my dad.

I want to go to college.  
But for that I need good grades,  
Based on what my grades are now,  
There may not be a way.

I don’t know what I’m gonna do.  
I need someone who’s wise  
To help me figure out which way to turn –  
To empathize.

But let me stop daydreamin’,  
'Cause I got a lot to do.  
If I don’t start my homework soon,  
I never will get through.

If I try and still can’t do it  
Then I just won't hand it in.  
But if I don’t try, I’ll never know.  
So here goes, I’ll begin.

Everyday I pray  
To find someone to guide me and to care.  
Is there any chance that you could be  
An answer to my prayer?

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**Preschool Foundations**

The children seem so tiny  
As they move about the room.  
Still, they’re complicated people  
So much more than we assume.

Each is different from the others.  
None the same as all the rest.  
So, I strive to understand them  
And it puts me to the test.

Kiesha likes to count things backward.  
Pedro likes to pull my hair.  
Franco marches like a soldier.  
Herman stands up in the chairs.

But each in his or her own way  
Is curious and growing;  
Learning more about the world each day  
With new things that they’re knowing.

And my job is to be sure they know  
That love is all around  
And that I am here to help them learn  
New words and smells and sounds.

No one’s job is more important  
Than what I do here each day.  
Things I teach will shape the future  
For these children now at play.

As among the first to teach them  
I must build a firm foundation.  
‘Cause for all I know, young Kiesha Jones  
Will someday lead the nation!

And even if she doesn’t  
There’s a lot that is at stake.  
God made me her preschool teacher.  
That I’m here is no mistake.

**Educator Self-Censorship: “We Won’t Say ‘They Don’t Know.’”**

(Response to a group of university-level math educators who refused to talk about what inner-city children tend not to know when they arrive at school.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There are words we dare not whisper.</th>
<th>We’ll declare that some arrive with more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, those words we dare not say</td>
<td>But none arrive with less.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For our enemies they listen –</td>
<td>We’ll deny the contradiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poised to pounce from where they lay.</td>
<td>Our semantics at their best!</td>
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</table>

| Therefore we must be quite careful | But that cannot be the answer.         |
| Speaking only foolproof words,    | No, there is a better way:              |
| So bigots cannot misinterpret    | We must not allow the bigots            |
| What they think they heard.       | To restrict what we can say.            |

| If we hint at any weaknesses       | For we know that there are differences |
| Or injuries or hurts,              | In how students arrive.                |
| Then the critics and the bigots    | There are differences                  |
| Will then use them to assert      | In what they’ve had to do to just survive. |
| That the people we are serving     | Our opponents seek to blame the victim |
| Are an undeserving lot             | Giving them the rap                    |
| Whose frailties and transgressions | Nonetheless we must admit the truth:    |
| Make them all a hopeless blot.     | There really are some gaps!            |

| So, we mustn’t utter any sound     | There are many subtle differences      |
| That might be overheard            | In what kids understand                |
| By those lurking here among us     | And the ways we strive to teach them   |
| Waiting to distort our words.      | Must respond with careful hands.       |

| No, instead we will self censor    | Every child for sure has assets --     |
| So that nothing that we say        | Most have loving home relations.       |
| Can be used against our values     | But some nonetheless arrive            |
| In a wrong or hurtful way.         | With larger holes in their foundations.|

| Never mind that this prevents us   | If we face this fact directly          |
| From addressing like we could      | And do what we need to do              |
| All the deficits our work could fill -- | We can fill those gaps with knowledge |
| The ways we could do good.         | To help every child get through.       |

| And, instead of striking out to prove | Then the critics and the bigots         |
| That injuries can heal,              | That we now seem so to fear             |
| We’ll assert that they do not exist – | Will have long since fallen silent --    |
| We’ll say that they aren’t real.     | May have simply disappeared.            |

| We will say that every child        | So the next time you self-censor       |
| Arrives with knowledge equal value  | Give yourself a big dope-slap.          |
| And that differences are absent –   | Know that destiny is on our side –      |
| Or at least that’s what we’ll tell you. | We’ll someday close these gaps!        |

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If I Had a Magic Formula  
(I Don’t, but We Do)

If I had a magic formula  
To clear up your confusion  
I would use it in a heartbeat  
But no magic do I have.

I am but a single person  
Who has tried his best to teach you  
But with limited capacity  
To help you understand.

You come to me not knowing  
Many things you should have mastered  
Long before you ever got here --  
Long before this class began.

Thus I’m feeling rather powerless  
But will not give up on you --  
No, not even if you doubt yourself  
Just let me take your hand.

If all of us who care for you  
Commit to work together  
I have faith that we can pull away  
From doubts that hold us back.

If we focus on your progress  
And commit to learn together  
That might be the magic formula  
We never knew we had.

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Maintain the Rhythm

There are folks who pass among us
   Moving steady as the tide
   Who we daily take for granted
   While upon them we rely.

Then there comes a time when slowly
   Like the sun that daily sets
   That their presence starts to fades away
   Though we aren’t ready yet.

That’s the time when we ourselves become
   The steady force at hand
   That allows those younger than ourselves
   To strengthen and to stand.

There’s a rhythm to the universe
   That echoes in your school
   From the sounds your feet are making
   As you too live out the rule.

If you fail to keep the rhythm
   There’s no one to take your place.
   So be diligent
   The time has come for you to set the pace.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Where Fools and Experts Hovered</strong></th>
<th><strong>Your Courage and Commitment</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every year you come the first day back</td>
<td>I love the way you’ve introduced</td>
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<tr>
<td>With things that you’ve discovered</td>
<td>The new approach we’re taking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When you went to all your conferences</td>
<td>I’m really looking forward now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where fools and experts hovered.</td>
<td>To what we’re going to do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There together they concocted</td>
<td>I also like the fact that we</td>
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<tr>
<td>All this brand new stuff to do</td>
<td>Will all do this together</td>
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<tr>
<td>Then they handed you the package</td>
<td>And that no one has the right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wherein you became the fool.</td>
<td>To stand aside or be excused.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You’re a fool to think I’m waiting</td>
<td>The training you describe</td>
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<tr>
<td>For your latest great idea</td>
<td>Appears to be so comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve developed what I need myself</td>
<td>That I really can’t imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s perfect. Don’t you fear!</td>
<td>We won’t all know what to do.</td>
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<td>When you see my next year’s test results</td>
<td>And the fact that you’ve relieved us</td>
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<tr>
<td>You’ll see just what I mean</td>
<td>Of some old and stale commitments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Then you’ll know that you’re superfluous</td>
<td>Means we’ll have the time and energy</td>
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<td>And vanish from the scene!</td>
<td>To really see this through.</td>
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<td>WAIT! I was only kidding.</td>
<td>So, thank you fearless leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blowing off some excess steam’</td>
<td>For your courage and commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please come tell me of this year’s idea</td>
<td>We have finally got a way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m sure it’s quite a scheme!</td>
<td>To bring real greatness to this school.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Johnny’s Thirst to Learn

Johnny had a thirst to learn.  
It followed him to school.  
It sought a way to quench itself  
So Johnny’d be no fool.

It followed John from class to class  
Where sometimes it did find  
Great lessons quite superbly taught  
That strengthened Johnny’s mind.

But sometimes behind other doors  
Were classes poorly taught.  
The time spent there a total waste  
Where effort was for naught.

The world cannot afford to leave  
A mind like Johnny’s thirsty  
Please join me in a quest to make  
More classrooms great and worthy.
Concentration

Dear class I want you all today
   To come with me to find
The great untapped potential
Hidden deep inside your minds.

   As grownups we have failed
   To push you hard enough to build
   Your capacity to concentrate
   To reap your fullest yield.

There’s a place deep in your consciousness
   You’ve probably never been
Where your brain keeps all the records
Of old thoughts and deeds and friends.

   When you find the path to get there
   You will be amazed to find
That there’s treasure beyond measure
Stored right there in your own minds.

   But you’ll never find the pathway
   If you fail to join the search
And the first step is to concentrate
To give your brilliance birth.