

Thank You, Teacher: Grateful Students Tell the Stories of the Teachers Who Changed Their Lives

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Teachers will love these letters for the way that they vividly validate the hard work they do in the classroom.

Thank You, Teacher is a collection of delightful letters expressing gratitude to educators, compiled and edited by Holly and Bruce Holbert. This book is not a page-turner, but one to work through slowly, meditating on the abundance of human wisdom and kindness exemplified by the many teachers addressed, all of whom inspired their students.

The pleasure of the letters is their intimate tone, as if the writers have gathered around a kitchen table to remember the teachers who changed their lives. The authors range from the well-known people like Maya Angelou, Alan Dershowitz, and John Glenn to people like Joan Baker, a voice-over actress. Many of the most prominent people reveal an unknown character flaw that may have been their downfall if not for a compassionate teacher. Dershowitz, for example, believed, despite test scores to the contrary, that he was a dunce, until an influential teacher said he was wise (and didn't append the word "aleck").

These letters cover the universe of education, from remote rural prairies to urban schools, in religious and public schools, and from the earliest grades to college classrooms. The majority of the letters are written by published authors, so their literary quality is remarkable. While the phrase "I remember" is used repeatedly and the authors relate the common thread of an excellent teacher, each letter has an engaging personal quality, poignant without being too sentimental. The vast majority express love and affection for their subjects, though a few also address hated teachers and dysfunctional schools that also imparted valuable lessons. Mariana Klaveno sums up the common theme of kindness when she notes that "it's remarkable how hard you'll work for someone who believes in you."

Besides acknowledging teachers, the book also contains commentary on the state of contemporary education. While visiting the library with his children in his childhood town, Chris Offutt notes that he was "stunned to realize that no one was there on a Saturday afternoon."

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THOMAS H. BRENNAN (Summer 2016)

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