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Education

To Teach: The Journey, in Comics
William Ayers
Ryan Alexander-Tanner, illustrator
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To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher, the now-classic memoir that has been motivating teachers for nearly two decades, has a new companion with this graphic novel adaptation. Following a foreword by Jonathan Kozol, author of numerous books about public education, this book highlights the same need for self-reflection and reform among educators. William Ayers begins by debunking popular myths about teaching, such as “kids today are worse than ever before,” or “good teachers are good performers,” and challenges both novice and veteran educators alike to think of teaching as an adventure to be embarked upon along with students.

Drawing on his own early experiences as a primary classroom teacher, his experiences with his kids’ teachers, and the amazing work of other visionary teachers, the author presents mini case studies of how educators can turn teaching into an interactive practice, see students individually, create engaging learning environments, and discover (or rediscover) the magic of teaching. For example, readers will meet Aaron, an occasionally erratic student who was dismissively diagnosed with ADD until a caring teacher took time see beyond the label to notice a third-grader who visited an older brother in jail awaiting trial for murder.

Although No Child Left Behind is never specifically mentioned, the intermittent appearance of central office administrators, armed with clipboards, a rigid list of state standards, and standardized tests, help illustrate Ayers’ plea for liberating the curriculum and authentic assessment. He offers interesting suggestions for developing opportunities that integrate discovery, productivity, primary sources, hands-on activities, the community, and student interests, as well as more meaningful ways to assess these kinds of work.

The author, once co-founder of the Weather Underground, has written a plethora of highly acclaimed education titles, including *Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom*

and *On the Side of the Child: Summerhill Revisited*. This school reform activist also serves as a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the vice-president of the Curriculum Division of the American Educational Association. Illustrator Ryan Alexander-Tanner works as a comic journalist, freelance illustrator, and teacher of the art of comics.

Just as in Ayers' original *To Teach*, this equally moving adaptation calls on individuals to undertake "the vocation of vocations" that is "never far from mystery." The expressive cartoon illustrations draw out even more of the author's sensitivity, wit, and compassion. This new version of *To Teach* will continue to inspire teachers for generations to come.

Angela Leeper