

Success Story

Envision this. You are an 11 year old girl who is at least 20 pounds overweight. You live with your dad and two brothers in a single wide trailer in the woods. You come to school with slivers on your feet from walking around in your house. You wear a brown leather coat, two sizes too big for you, which you found in the old broken down bus that sits in your front yard.

You get excited when your neighbor brings you used clothes because you have been wearing the same clothes for a couple of years now and they are getting too small. Even though getting these clothes feels like Christmas to you and you want to keep all these new treasure for yourself you are still thinking of your teacher. On Monday you bring your teacher a pair of earrings from this magical pile that you think she might like.

At school you know none of the kids are excited when their desk gets put next to yours. Maybe it is because you scatter your things in a big cloud around your desk, or maybe it's because you smell of bad breath or bad body odor. Nonetheless, you are still friendly to your classmates but you just don't seem to fit in. It seems like you always say the wrong thing at the wrong time and you do silly things that you think will make your classmates laugh, and it does but more often than not they are laughing at you not with you.

You rarely pay attention in class because you are too enraptured in the newest project you're working on in your lap under your desk. You might be making a blue paper bracelet, which you later give to your teacher to wear with her blue outfit. You might be wrapping thin strips of pink and brown paper around your pencil to make it more decorative. This makes it impossible to sharpen in the pencil sharpener but you don't mind. Maybe you are making a drawing of some swans or beautiful scenery. All this art is

keeping you from finishing your workbook pages, textbook assignments, and worksheets.

You usually get Ds and Fs on your progress reports from having so many missing assignments. The assignments you do get turned in are the poems, drawings, and your journal. In your journal you write in similes and metaphors and are able to describe vividly how you feel. When it comes to a drawing your classmates are stupefied that the best drawing in the class belongs to you. From the outside you appear to be a mess. "How could something so amazing come from her?" the other students are pondering. You become shy over all the positive attention because this is a rare feeling for you. Your face lights up anytime you get to do an assignment that involves acting or creating.

Now, you are only one of many students in your class that would rather stay in from recess the entire year then do yet another workbook page. You get the feeling that the teachers think your class is the worst class ever. You feel like the teachers think you are stupid and lazy for not doing your homework. Homework translates to workbook pages. You want to tell the teachers that maybe if they weren't so dull and they tried to be more fun (singing, dancing, drawing, storytelling etc.) then maybe your class wouldn't be the horrible class they have come to earn the reputation as being.

This is a true story of my fifth grade class this year told through the eyes of one of my students. I picked her because she was the most obvious, dramatic case where all I needed to do was integrate the arts into my curriculum and her grades skyrocketed. She appeared happier, she was grasping concepts, and her attitude turned from failure to success.