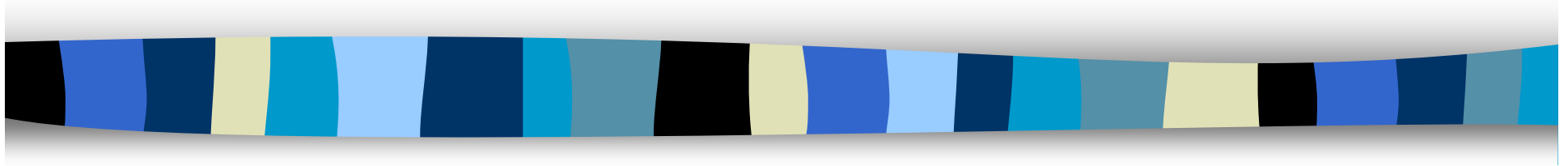


Small Victories



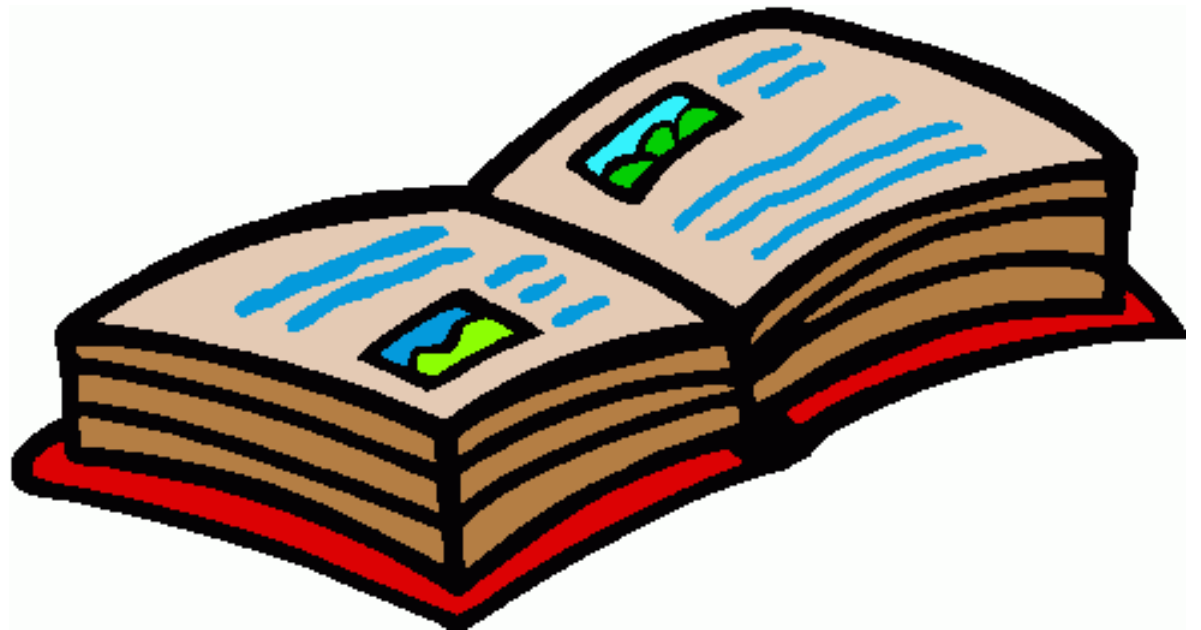
A book review...

By: Alexander Antropov
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Foundations in Curriculum
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Overview

Jessica is an inspiring English teacher who shows her extreme dedication to her students in numerous ways. Whether it is driving them to college interviews, spending numerous hours organizing the school newspaper, or handing out bobby pins at graduation, Jessica goes the extra mile when it could have been very easy to give up. In the end, Jessica does decide to leave teaching, but not without first accomplishing many small victories with her students at Seward Park High, a challenging school in New York, NY.





Approach to Our Presentation

The following slides will present quotations from the book along with...

a statement which provides the context of the quotation and

a question or activity which you may use to guide your reflection in applying this example to the material we have been discussing in our course.

“The two most important things to people are their kids and their taxes. Public school is the place they both meet.” page 1

- Freedman's editor told him this on his first day as a reporter.
- What do you think about funding at your school, and how funding affects your teaching, students' learning, and your relations with the parents of your students?



“Don’t smile till Christmas” because “kids treat kind teachers the way sharks treat wounded swimmers.”

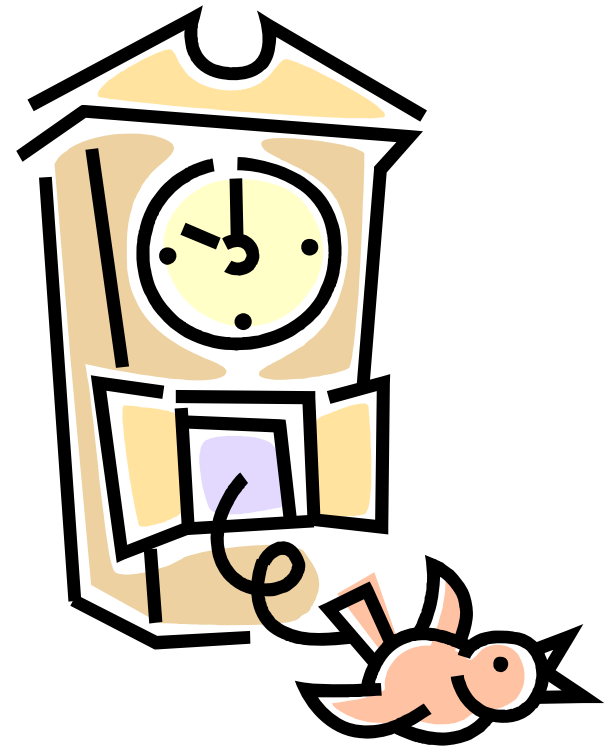
- Rumour says this is what New York City teachers say.
- Is this how you manage your class or relate to your students?

page 30



“It is now past eleven, and two unread papers remain.” page 60

- Jessica is already two weeks late in returning the graded papers.
- Do you give your students a lot of homework? Do you collect and grade all of it?



“Her role in life is to do for others, to serve.”

- Jessica's mother has this to say about her daughter.
- What is your role as a teacher?

page 56



“Taking a chance and venturing an opinion felt safe in her room. There was never a sense of Right and Wrong.”

page 57

- Jessica said this about her favorite English teacher.
- Do your students feel safe to risk an opinion in your classroom?



“She had a personality and she had a belief system. She had the confidence to be herself at a time when being yourself is the hardest thing.”

page 54

- This is how one of Jessica's best friends describes her.
- With all external pressures, can you afford the luxury to be yourself in your classroom?



“I am overwhelmed and underconfident... I need to know so many things. I want to learn from you.”

page 183

- Jessica asked an experienced colleague for help and received it.
- Were you lucky enough to receive help from a more experienced colleague?

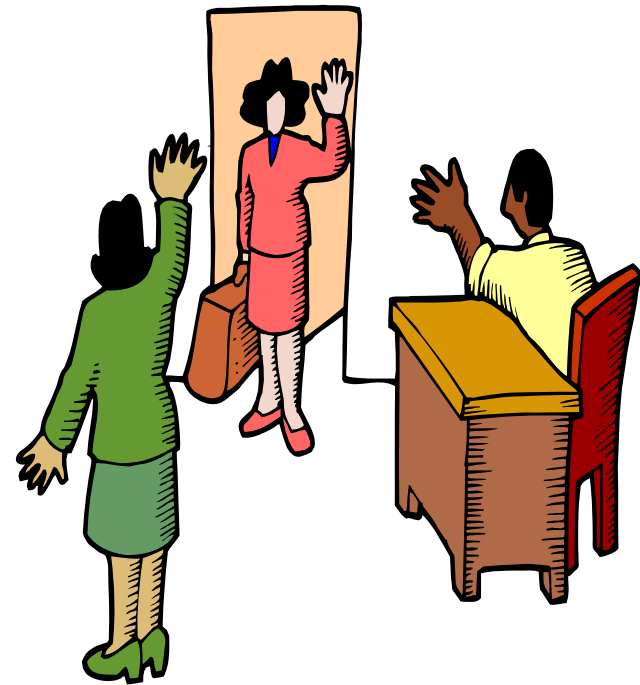


“Only then did the gravity of leaving teaching truly seize her.”

- This is how Jessica felt when she received notice of her admission to Columbia’s journalism school.

- Have you ever thought about leaving the teaching profession? Explain.

page 228



“Jessica can only assume she has failed, but for the first time in months, Aracelis feels hope.”

- Jessica reaches out to a student who seems distracted. The student takes comfort in knowing someone cares.
- How important is it to you that you feel like you are making a difference?

page 311



“Now I want you all to be Sherlock Holmeses”

page 245

- Jessica encourages students to think critically in her lesson.
- How do you encourage your students to arrive at their own conclusions?



“Being in journalism has made me strive to do better academically and socially”

page 401

- Rosie Sanchez testifies to the transformation she has undergone as one of Jessica's students.
- Briefly describe a teacher who you feel transformed you.

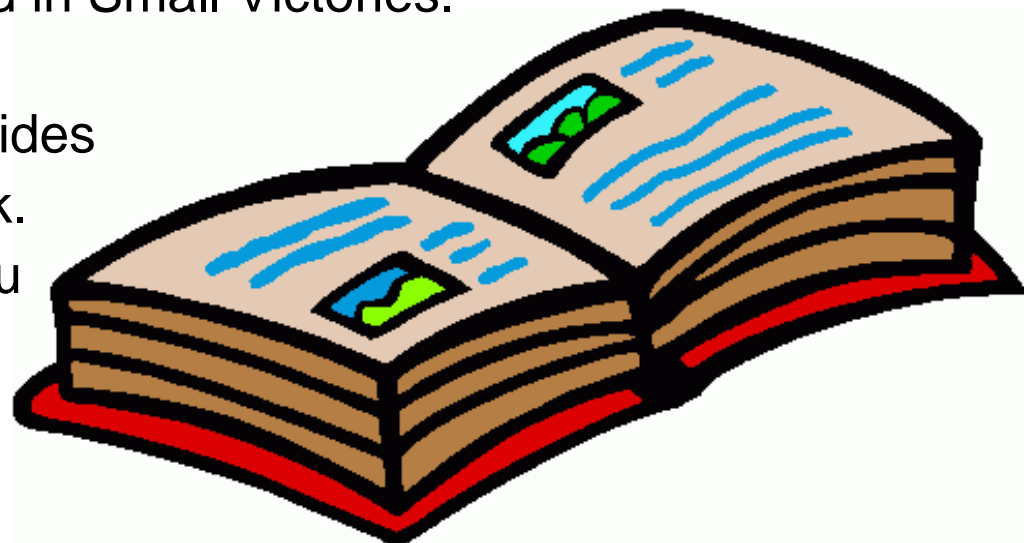


Conclusion to Presentation

In reading this novel both Alex and Joe found themselves relating to Jessica's experiences. Numerous times, the novel touched on hidden curriculum, as well as the transformation approach to teaching. A teacher does not always know the impact he or she has on students. Sometimes it feels like no one supports you in what you are doing.

We invite you to post in the WEBKF site a brief personal reflection that relates to one of the points raised in Small Victories.

The next couple of slides summarizes the book. Read them only if you do not intend to read the book.





Book Summary

Leaving Trains

- Jessica is tired of working this way. All she does is work. She has no life. Two years ago, Jessica was close to leaving teaching profession for Columbia University's journalism school, but she could not because she was emotionally attached to Seward Park High School. However, now she has to leave in order to survive. Jessica freely donates her time. She does so to educate intellectually insecure students and repeatedly push them to succeed. Yet the donor of time, unlike the donor of blood, cannot regenerate what is given. Jessica must finally save something for herself before there is nothing left worth saving. If she cannot revive herself with whatever elixir her teacher idols have discovered, then what is her choice?
- There is only one choice: to walk away. She feels laden with bitterness in her sunless apartment on a sunny afternoon. When her anger cools, Jessica knows that even if the principal relieves her of a class in exchange for advising an award winning Seward World school newspaper it would not make much a difference. A decision to stop teaching would be the product not of anything temporary. It would be due to working conditions that are largely beyond a principal's control – five classes a day times thirty-four pupils a class times nine years, all without money for enough guidance counselors or social workers or new textbooks or photocopier machines, all for a pittance in salary and respect.



Book Summary Continued...

- Jessica has occasionally likened herself to a marathon runner, and like a marathoner, she possesses a tolerance for pain, isolation, and deferred gratification that a spectator may confuse for masochism. If she drops out of the race, then, it is not because a boulder fell on her head, but because she has been plodding for twenty miles with the same pebble in her shoe. Jessica would not quit her job, no matter how painful its conditions were, if she believed she was failing. Jessica could resign only from a position of success. So as abject and enraged as Jessica now feels, she still cannot utter the oath of departure. There are still tasks to be completed. There are still futures to be arranged.
- Jessica thinks of a metaphor of a leaving train to describe her struggle for her senior students' access to higher education. She sees them all running toward a leaving train, grasping at its closing door and charging down the tracks in pursuit, missing it barely at a second station and a third. She sees herself running with them, watching the caboose light grow more and more distant, and then watching it come closer with the train stopped at the next station. She sees her student scramble aboard safely now, sees them totter down the aisle looking for seats. She sees herself stand between the rails, lungs beating like bellows, as the train churns away. What incredible kids! Had she ever had a more amazing bunch of seniors? If leaving Seward Park might ever feel a little easier, it will after seeing this group off. Now she can begin thinking about herself. Now she can board her own leaving train. Ms. Jessica Siegel leaves Seward Park High School to pursue a career in journalism.

Adapted from: Samuel G. Freedman, *Small Victories*, 1991.