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English 12

The outcome of childhood experiences

As people grow old and reflect on who they have become as a person, the memories that stick out have typically influenced them the most. Their personalities have developed around the lessons and experiences they have been through and are from moments of their best high’s and worst low’s. From the short stories “Long, Long After School”, written by Ernest Buckler and “A Teacher’s Rewards”, written by Robert Phillips, it is evident that childhood experiences stay with a person as they grow up. The main character’s Wes and Raybe are bullied as students, left out as children, both going through similar experiences and yet in the end their outcomes are different. Although, had they been treated the same as the others, their lives could be as normal as anyone else’s. In the short story “Long, Long After School”, Wes is African American and gets bullied by his peers based off his skin colour. With all the bullying, his teacher Miss Tretheway, was able to show him kindness when no one else would. She saved his life in a potentially fatal situation by giving him blood and this act of kindness created a friendship between the two of them. After her death, Wes brought her a corsage of flowers to symbolize his gratitude for her kindness and friendship towards him. Whereas in the short story “A Teacher’s Rewards”, Raybe went to visit his old 3rd grade teacher, Miss Scofield. He blames her for the outcome of his life. Raybe has recently been released from jail and comes to realize it all started with his 3rd grade teacher. When he was younger, Miss Scofield accused him for inappropriate behaviors and rapped his knuckles. She made him out to be trouble and doing so, he started to get left out by others and bully him based on his appearance as he was not able to present himself in a proper manner as other kids. As a result of all this anger building up over the years, Raybe has been seeking his revenge on Miss Scofield and smashed her knuckles with a hammer. Likewise, they both went through similar experiences in school, being left out and bullied by others, Wes suffered from mental abuse and Raybe, physical abuse. With the influence of their teachers, they have come to learn different lessons in life and their growth is a reflection of their childhood experiences.

At young ages Raybe and Wes were experiencing loneliness from being excluded at school, the kids making fun of them and being treated differently because of factors they could not change. As children they did not know how to react and defend themselves. Everyone had the same point of view about them. In the 3rd grade, Wes was bullied and made fun of for his skin colour. The kids around him would try and single him out with their jokes, “’Look at Wes. He’s so scared he’s turning pale.’” (Buckler, 50). The kids wanted Wes to feel singled out in front of everyone for having a darker complexion than everyone else, wanted him to feel like an intruder, someone who doesn’t belong to them and they made sure he knew about this. In the same way, Raybe was also left out from his teachers influence on the other kids, “’The other kids left me out of things, because you were always saying I was bad.’” (Phillips, 386). Miss Scofield wanted others to treat him differently because she thought he was a bad boy. The main reason behind their discrimination from others comes from the fact that they both have factors in their lives that they cannot change. Wes is African American, “” ... and I thought about a boy the colour of whose skin was such that he could never blush...’” (Buckler, 52). Obviously, someone’s skin colour is not something that can be changed. On the other hand, Raybe was white but grew up without a stable home, “’My folks are dead. They were dead when I was your student... Grandfather died too. I lived with an aunt. She’s dead now.’” (Phillips, 383). Growing up outside of school, Raybe had personal issues and most of his family had died. Living with his aunt, she had struggled to keep him in clean clothes and Miss Scofield called him out for that as if there was something he could possibly do. Consequently, if both of these factors had been taken out of the picture, they would have been treated as anyone else during school and had good experiences growing up that would have most likely shaped them into normal men.

As students, a big part of who influences a student’s life is a teacher. Being a teacher is to be seen as a role model towards students, teaching them life lessons, manners and having a positive effect on their students. This scenario is true for Wes, yet Raybe experienced the complete opposite. While both Wes and Raybe are influenced by their teachers, Wes was changed for the better and Raybe was influenced for the worst. During all the bullying Wes was experiencing, Miss Tretheway was the only one to stand up for Wes, “’Why Marilyn, Wes’s hands are much cleaner than yours. Maybe Wes doesn’t like to get his hands dirty...’” (Buckler, 50). Fulfilling her duties as a teacher, she did not stand by and watch her student become a victim of bullying. Evidently, she took a stand for him as he was lonely and had no power against all the kids. She protected him that day and wanted him to feel as if he did belong with the others. Miss Tretheway cared for Wes and with her actions, they were able to build a friendship. Wes learned that people are more than simply their looks, but rather their personality and kindness towards others. However, Raybe learned the opposite. Miss Scofield did not stand up for Raybe; instead, she wrongfully accused Raybe of inappropriate actions and disciplined him with physical abuse. She did not look beyond his appearance as Miss Tretheway did, he was not treated as an equal. Rather than guiding him through life and trying to help him, she made him believe he was only meant to be bad. Raybe believes the cause of his life ending up so badly and going to jail all started with Miss Scofield, “You punished me for everything that happened... You hit me so hard my knuckles bled. My hands were sore as boils for weeks.’” (Phillips, 387). From this point on, Raybe believed he was meant to be bad, even though he was innocent from the beginning. Being too self-centered and needing to be right, Miss Scofield did not try and listen to him. As a result, she disciplined him consistently. With this in mind, it is evident how a teacher’s influence has affected them as they’ve grown and how much one person can really change a person and their future.

From being left out and made fun of at school to having teachers who have impacted how they think and act, their outcomes are drastically different. Eventually, at the end of both stories it is clear who they have become as people by their actions towards their teachers. It is evident that their actions towards Wes and Raybe will never be forgotten. Miss Tretheway was able to get through to Wes and make him happy for once, “’’Miss Tretheway, you’re making me blush.’ And do you know, that was the first time I’d ever been able to say that, and laugh, myself.’” (Buckler, 52). With this in mind, Wes came to the realization that people can be kind and yet, Raybe realized the opposite. All of Raybe’s crimes had started from Miss Scofield, “’I had a long time to figure it all out. Ten years to figure it out... How I come to be there... And then one night it came to me. You were the one.’” (Phillips, 386). The initiating incident that has caused Raybe’s mess in life, Miss Scofield. In response to how their teachers have affected their lives, Wes is thankful for Miss Tretheway for being able to show him some compassion, love and kindness while everyone else made him believe he was hard to be around. Miss Tretheway was able to teach him a valuable lesson and that is to look beyond physical appearance, “’She was beautiful,’ he added softly. ’She was a real lady.’” (Buckler, 52). Clearly, Miss Scofield had no control, abusing her power and singling out a student. Her wrongful discipline has caused Raybe to crave revenge. He wanted Miss Scofield to feel the suffering that she caused him, “wrenching her quivering hands and forcing them to the tabletop. Then with his free hand, he raised the hammer. For once, he finished something” (Phillips, 387). The huge difference shining through to us is that Wes is thankful for everything she has done for him while Raybe wanted her to suffer.

While they repeatedly suffered from bullying, Wes experienced mental abuse and Raybe experienced physical abuse. Throughout school they have been influenced by their teachers, Wes in a positive way and Raybe in a negative way. As adults, the lessons brought upon them have stuck with them as they have grown and will always be with them. From both stories, it is evident how being left out and made fun of at school for factors they simply cannot control can affect someone. As well as the influence of a teacher can shape a person into how they look at life and who they grow up to be. In a sense, both Wes and Raybe have become a mirror image of their teachers. Overall, the most important lesson that can be drawn from these stories is the teachers. Raybe and Wes felt excluded by their classmates and were made fun of, however, Wes had a teacher who helped him see the good in people and Raybe had a teacher who only made it worse. Without the impact of their teachers, they have gone through the same experiences. All in all, this comes to show how one person can really shape out the rest of someone’s life.