The long-term effects of childhood influences

Whether strict or caring, teachers can profoundly influence students in one way or another, but is this influence for the better or worse? In *A Teachers Rewards* by Robert Philips, an ex-con named Raybe Simpson seeks revenge on his primary school teacher Miss Scofield for her wrong doings to him in third grade. Raybe visits his old teacher to punish her in the same way she punished him: by hitting her hands with a hammer reminiscent of how she used to rap his hands with a ruler when he was her student. In *Long Long After School* by Ernest Buckler, we see a dark-skinned boy named Wes Holman reminisce about his high school life while he mourns the death of his third-grade teacher Miss Thretheway. Wes explains to his former classmate his experiences with racism and discrimination at school. The only person who defended him and truly cared for him was Mrs. Thretheway. By the end of this short story we learn that everyone has a story and that no one should be judged by their outward appearance. Wes and Raybe’s relationships with their teachers during their childhood affects them significantly as adults: Wes received support from Ms. Thretheway which made him a better person, and Raybe was traumatized by Ms. Scofield which lead him to a troubled future.

Miss Thretheway and Miss Scofield’s beliefs and biases influence the ways in which they relate to students. Wes dealt with bullying and discrimination during grade three because of his dark skin tone. Although being teased by many of his peers, Wes had one person in his life that stood up for him, Miss Thretheway. She was an old third grade teacher who always seemed to be there to help Wes was deal with class bullies. From helping him wipe snow off himself, to holding his hand during a school yard game when no one else would, she was always there for him. She gave Wes a sense of security and relief. Whenever Wes dropped Mrs. Banks’ wash in the snow, Miss Thretheway “helped [him] pick up the stuff and shake the snow off it” (50). When Miss Thretheway introduced a new school yard game, and no one wanted to hold Wes’ hand because they were ‘dirty’. Without hesitation she took Wes’ hand and held them. Miss Thretheway also gave Wes a new perspective on the beauty of life. Today, we say that beauty is not what’s on the outside, but on the inside. Wes was taught at a young age that internal features are more valuable than outer looks. The narrator of the story did not consider Miss Thretheway as someone beautiful, but Wes exclaimed, “She was a real lady” (52). He did not care about what Miss Thretheway looked like, he simply judged her beauty by her acts of kindness and her heart. Her kindness did not end there. When Wes put his hand through a window and lost copious amounts of blood, she was willing to donate her own A negative type blood, “a whole quart, just as soon as she found out that hers would match” (52). Her selflessness to give blood to one of her students and save his life had a profound impact on his life that he would never forget.

Just as Wes never forgot Miss Thretheway’s kindness, Raybe never let go of the humiliation he suffered in Miss Scofield’s class. Miss Scofield made Raybe think he was “worse than [he] was” (386). Even though Raybe was a troublemaker, almost every single student at that age makes mistakes. Miss Scofield scapegoated Raybe by blaming him for bad actions other classmates did simply because he was known to cause trouble. For example, Miss Scofield blamed Raybe for writing on the walls when it was really Nathan Pillsbury who wrote those horrible words. She punished him by “whack[ing] [his] knuckles good” (386). This belittled Raybe and made him think he couldn’t do anything right and wasn’t good at anything. His lack of motivation and encouragement lead him to a troubled future. Raybe did not have the support any loved ones which may have tempered his bitterness. All the family he had was his poor aunt who died. Some kids call school a home away from home because of the camaraderie of close friends that make it feel like a second home, but that was dwindled by Miss Scofield. She didn’t know or perhaps even care in the past that Raybe was an orphan as she states that “…it’s unlike me not to have remembered or known that one of my boys was an orphan” (383). Not only did she make Raybe feel alone and unsupported, but she sparked a ‘you’re on your own’ feeling in Raybe. He realized that no one really cared about him and what he did which lead him to a prison sentence.

We see both protagonists in the short stories as adults that are either living a peaceful or violent lifestyle based on their childhood influences. Raybe was verbally and physically abused by Miss Scofield which influenced his future actions as an adult that ultimately landed him behind bars. Wes was positively influenced by Miss Thretheway as a student to find a new perspective of inner beauty and being selfless in order to care for the important people your life. *Long Long After School* takes place in the future and we see Wes Holman as an adult living a simple and quiet life as the caretaker of the town who could quote anything from British to Latin literature. Miss Thretheway’s caring personality and actions have shaped Wes into a genuine and thoughtful man. Miss Thretheway taught Wes the importance of caring and selflessness. When Wes was in the hospital for throwing his hand through a window, Miss Thretheway not only donated her blood, but she visited Wes every day. Even though many years have passed, Wes still looks after her cemetery plot in memory of her daily visits to him in the hospital. Wes knew how to make someone feel special like when “his little bunch of flowers” (48) were placed onto Miss Thretheway’s grave, it symbolized her school dance that she never attended as a child. As Wes tries to tell stories about his bad childhood experiences to the narrator and mentions that night when he steered his sled into Wes’ going down Parker Hill, the narrator did not remember. Wes forgives the narrator for his awful actions as he says, “That’s all right…” Wes grew up to be a forgiving person and does not dwell on people’s wrong doings of the past as it will never bring him peace and happiness.

Even though the short story *A Teachers* *Reward* takes place in the future, Raybe cannot let go of the wrong doings of the past. He is trying to relive the past and ‘settle the score’ with Miss Scofield. We see Raybe as a muscular and intimidating man who has just served ten years in prison. Raybe has lived a hard life without any loved ones or anyone to trust or care for and we can see that in his adulthood. Miss Scofield had a huge influence on Raybe. She constantly bullied Raybe by calling him names like ‘baby-Raybe’, humiliating him in front of the whole class or rapping him with a ruler. The constant bullying made Raybe become very insecure about himself. This insecurity may have compelled Raybe to befriend delinquents, “Was it the fellas I took up with in high school?” (386) and perhaps adopt certain traits of these friends he spent time with the most. Raybe may have been persuaded to do illegal activities. Even after high school Raybe could have been involved in the thug lifestyle which landed him in prison.

We see how Raybe and Wes turn out as they get older based on their childhood experiences. Wes is at peace by living alone in a tiny house while keeping busy as a town caretaker. Raybe is sadly the opposite as he’s just coming out of prison and is fueled with resentment and anger.

Perspective is everything. It dictates how we view life and the things surrounding it. Wes and Raybe have both experienced traumatic experiences in their childhood that have completely changed their view of the world as adults. As a kid Wes was bullied by his classmates. They would always make racist remarks about his dark skin color such as, “Look at Wes. He’s so scared he’s turning pale” (50). Although it was terrible, Wes learned many valuable life lessons. He learned about acceptance. It doesn’t matter who you are, where you come from or what you look like, we should all be treated equally no matter what. Even when his former classmate forgot about his part in bullying Wes, Wes forgave him in an instant. Wes learned that its easier to forgive then forget and that forgiveness is the best way to heal wounds. Healed wounds were not on Raybe’s mind. Raybe was also bullied as a student but by his own teacher, Miss Scofield. She would always rap his knuckles with a ruler while embarrassing him in front of class. After being locked up for ten years, his perspective certainly changed for the worse. He reminisced of his past and blamed her for him being locked up. Like the tea he drank with Miss Scofield, his feelings of revenge and anger towards Miss Scofield was “strong and bitter” (382).

Wes and Raybe’s relationships with their teachers during their childhood affects them significantly as adults: Wes received support from Ms. Thretheway which made him a better person, and Raybe was traumatized by Ms. Scofield which lead him to a troubled future. School is a crucial time for children’s development and teachers play a very important role. Some teachers aren’t perfect, they can be nice or strict, but sometimes they forget how sensitive students are. Something as simple as calling upon you in front of the class can have a very negative impact on them. Or if it’s a simple act of kindness like a compliment, students can gain a lot of confidence from that simple gesture. They are in school for almost a quarter of their lives, so during that time of development the teachers, friends, and environment they surround themselves with will have an everlasting effect on their future endeavors.