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Let Them Teach You

Marisol León

Abstract

Everything in italics either comes from a text my seventh graders read in our English class or from my students’ writing. I wrote the poem as a parting thank you gift for my students and shared it with them on our last day of classes.

Let my students teach you about violent inequality warfare, and repression. About armed struggles fought against U.S.-backed militaries in their native countries, and the murders of their brothers and sisters in L.A. neighborhoods-turned-war-zones.


Let them teach you about the war of terror waged against their ancestors.

About countless narratives of resistance, including those found in the obituaries of their great grandmothers, uncles, and classroom “legends.”

Let them teach you about unfair and unjust immigration laws.

About the African Diaspora—un pedacito de la historia negra/de la historia nuestra to the sound of Afro-Colombian rhythms and beats.

Let them teach you about the cuts to their education, and no, they’re not just referring to the current “budget crisis.”

About the inefficiency of tracking and test scores, and how a classmate never identified as “gifted and talented” fought his way into a Stanford program for gifted youth.

About endurance and strength of mind, let them remind you that you’re pretty young, so keep living your dream and don’t let no little pink slip stop you from what you want.

Let them teach you about past and future revolutions, and their visions for other worlds and utopian societies.

About their wants and needs: Wouldn’t you like to have clean streets, no violence, a government that tells the truth, a community that values peace?

Let them teach you the meaning of solidarity, environmental justice, and grassroots development.

About their Solidarity Garden... and how the organic seeds they once planted are now strawberries, squash, cilantro, and tall stalks of maize.

About setting aside differences and working collectively—guided by common values of respect, humility, and human dignity.
Let them teach you about fighting for their rights through community organizing, never forgetting that our word is our weapon.

About marching, protesting, and staging a sit-in and walkout—all despite the criminalization of student activism on campus.

About the protest chants and gritos that brought together students, teachers, and parents, as new words formed. Bitter/With the past/But sweet/With the dream.

Let my little brothers and sisters teach you...

All they have taught me.