

Writers' Showcase Magazine

A Journal of the Arkansas Literacy Association - Summer 2023 - Vol.2, No. 1

ARKANSAS
LITERACY
ASSOCIATION

Topic Chosen for ALA Contest

Each fall Arkansas Literacy Association chooses a topic on which all students in Arkansas might respond. Drawing from current events, the committee chose to focus on times of hardship and the positive moments that result, thus, juxtaposing the two to further emphasize the overcoming spirit of humanity.

In May, the winners were honored and recognized during a Zoom that included parents and their teachers being invited to participate and listen as several chose to share excerpts from the winning compositions.

Thanks to all who submitted. Congratulations to the winners!

ALA Announces 2023

Writers' Showcase Winners

Grades 2-3:

1. Clara McIlwain - 3rd grade - Sequoyah Elem. - Russellville
2. Serenity Davis - 3rd grade - Westside Greenbrier Elem - Greenbrier
3. Georgie Fuentez - 2nd grade - Crawford Elem - Russellville

Grades 4-5:

1. Rexi Webb - 4th grade - Clarksville Intermediate School - Lamar
2. Leah Taylor - 5th grade - Russellville Intermediate - Russellville
3. Phoebe Evans - 5th grade - Russellville Intermediate - Russellville

Grades 6-7:

1. Braelyn Washam - 7th grade - Mammoth Spring High School - MS
2. Roberto Polmerin - 6th grade - Hamburg Middle School - Hamburg
3. Isabella Chance - 7th grade - Pinkston School - Mountain Home

Grades 8-9:

1. Ava Berryhill - 8th grade - Cabot Junior High - Cabot
2. Anna Stone - 9th grade - Harding Academy - Searcy
3. Clairra Tittle - 9th grade - Harding Academy - Searcy

Grades 10-12:

1. Clayna Russell - 11th grade - Mammoth Spring High School - MS
2. Frida Campos - 11th grade - Danville High School - Danville
3. Calle City - 12th grade - Harding Academy - Searcy

Arkansas Literacy Association
Everyone's an Author!
Student Writing Showcase

Topic: The Educator Who Shaped My Life

- Compose an expository writing piece.
- Needs to accurately reflect student's thoughts.
- Does not have to be part of a school assignment.

Grade Divisions:

- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 8-9
- 10-12

Deadline

- March 1, 2023 to ALA
- Submit to local council to also participate in local council competition.
- See LC for deadline.

For More Info

- alaliteracy.org/Student-Writers-Showcase
- Email shelby@alaliteracy.org

5th Annual!

Plan Now...Think Now...Draft Now

Arkansas Literacy Association
Everyone's an Author!
Student Writing Showcase

Topic: Which famous person would you like to meet? Why?

- Compose an expository writing piece.
- Needs to accurately reflect student's thoughts.
- Does not have to be part of a school assignment.

Grade Divisions:

- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 8-9
- 10-12

Deadline

- Submit to local council and win there! Winners sent to ALA.
- No local council? Submit to ALA. Those submissions will be judged; winners then submitted to state-level.
- March 1, 2024 to ALA

For More Info

- alaliteracy.org/Student-Writers-Showcase
- Email shelby@alaliteracy.org

6th Annual!

THANK YOU

ALA thanks
University of Central
Arkansas'
Dr. Amy
Thompson's
students who read
and judged the
entries.

THE MISSION OF
THE ARKANSAS
LITERACY
ASSOCIATION:
dedicated to
promoting reading
and developing
literacy.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 2-3 - Clara McIlwain - Sequoyah Elementary - Russellville
Arkansas River Valley Literacy Council

Today I'm sharing with you the teacher who shaped my life. This teacher gives everyone two chances, makes school fun, and lets us be creative. This teacher is Mrs. Charton, and let me tell you a little bit about her.

She was my kindergarten teacher, but not just an ordinary teacher. She celebrates all the holidays including, Dr. Susse day, and on that day we ate green eggs and bacon. She even made her own holiday called Applesauce Day, and of course we made apple sauce.

Now I need to get to the real story. I want to tell you about her kindness. One time we were making a turkey. While we were cutting it, we found a hard edge. We needed to make it rounder, but none of us knew how to. Some of us waited for her to help teach us how and some wanted her to do it herself, and she still did it, and now I'm an expert at cutting. Another thing is that she always gives second chances. Let me tell you about a time when I wrote my first book. Once my kindergarten class was making a book/summary of *Dan the Flying Man*. We needed to make it pitch perfect. While I was trying to draw the most perfect line ever drawn my friend wiggled the table. I was so upset he messed up my perfect line! Mrs. Charton came and told me the bravest thing I ever heard, "Try again, Learn from your mistakes." I ended up getting the book finished with a good report, but I know that taught me more.

That was one of my favorite years but it came to an end early. That year was the start of covid. I left at about the mark at two thirds of the year. But it was not the end. She still made school amazing and that year I will never forget. Mrs. Charton shaped my life.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grade 2-3 - Serenity Davis - Westside Greenbrier Elementary
North Central Arkansas Literacy Council

Do you know a teacher or guardian who shaped your life? Because I sure do! Her name is Mrs. Reynolds and she taught me and my classmates lots about fractions, the human body, and way more. First, Mrs. Reynolds inspires many of us to read and write. She also encourages us to study hard and get good grades to keep us on track of not getting bad grades, then being upset about it when we're older. It turns out she decided to be a P.E teacher, so now we call her Coach Reynolds instead of Mrs. Reynolds. As a coach, she teaches us to work out and keep our body healthy. Lastly, she teaches us how to dribble and shoot balls in basketball and turns out, many of us are great at it because she taught us so well. Now, you know about the teacher who shaped my life.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 2-3 - Georgie Fuentez - Crawford Elementary
Arkansas River Valley Literacy Council

I have had many teachers, but I feel that the one that shaped me the most was my Pre-K teacher Mrs. Rachel. Here are some reasons why I like her, she went out of her way to have fun with me. Because of her now I have a good imagination. I remember she used to put me on her legs and pretend like I was an airplane and now I do it with my brother.

Another thing she did to shape me was she made me try everything on my plate at lunch. The reason I think that influenced me is because it taught me to try new things before deciding if I like it or not. Last thing, she did calender with me and taught me my ABC's, but most importantly she taught me to be self-directed. Did you know that self-direction is controlling your emotions? She did that by letting me sit in a room by myself. And she taught me to take deep breaths that will help me later in life to not get frustrated when something happens that I don't like. Clearly, the teacher who shaped me the most was my Pre-K teacher.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 4-5 - Rexi Webb - Clarksville Intermediate School

Arkansas River Valley Literacy Council

Who is the educator that shaped your life? The educator who shaped my life is none other than my beloved sister. During my homeschooled years, my sister would help me with my homework when my mother was not available. She also helped read to my brother and me often before bed. Her neat handwriting, creative ideas, and Christian attitude have helped mold me into who I am today.

First of all, writing is one of her many strengths. My sister's writing is so neat and I love the way her name is written in cursive. Her name looks so beautiful the way she writes it in cursive. When not written in cursive, she focuses on each letter and it looks like this: "Hello." I can only imagine having such beautiful handwriting someday. I'm thankful for her influence in teaching me how to print and write in cursive. She also loves to write poems. One example of a short poem that she wrote is: "Why is why a question I ask 1,000x a day? I don't know why I ask myself" That's one way my sister is an educator in handwriting.

In addition to her writing strength, my sister has influenced me with her creativity. She is so creative that in Beta Club, she made a gigantic octopus with a head of foam and aluminum foil and with tentacles made of compact discs, hot glue, and recycled cans! She even submitted a final picture of it attacking me and my friends on our sandy beach. In addition, my sister, brother, and I love to make videos. Normally, the videos are Disney or Pixar films that we change up and make hilarious. We dress up, apply face paint, and style our hair accordingly. She even interjects comical music into the videos. My sister also designed, painted, and redecorated my bedroom with LED lights and quotes. That's how my sister (and maybe just a little bit of my brother) are creative.

The last but not least reason my sister shaped my life is because she's a Christian. She goes to devos, youth group events, church, and church camp. She prefers good movies without bad language and her dress is modest. She also has outstanding friends that will sometimes chat with me. This is why your circle of friends matters. My sister has shaped my life since I was little with her extraordinary faith in God. That's how my sister shaped my life by her Christianity.

As you can see, the reason I picked my sister is because she is herself and her heart is huge to help others. I believe that I have a bewildering sister, who later in her life will do something breathtaking. That's why I chose my sister. I am currently only 10 years old, and I can only imagine all the other ways in which she will continue to impact my life. Currently, she is away for her senior year of high school because of life's circumstances. We love each other dearly, talk often, feed off of each other's laughter, and influence each other positively. I can't wait to see her again to catch up and for her to teach me something new!



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grade 4-5 - Leah Taylor - Russellville Intermediate School

Arkansas River Valley Literacy Council

The educator who shaped my life has bright blue eyes, long brunette hair, and she is always smiling. She teaches science, but that isn't how we met. Her name is Mackenzie Whitehead, and she was my competitive gymnastics coach for three years. Mrs. Mackenzie helped me with my confidence, coached me to win the state gymnastics meet, and supported me when I decided I was ready to leave the sport. These are just three of the ways that she shaped my life to become the person I am today.

I struggle with perfectionism, which affects my confidence. Gymnastics is a sport where it is constantly getting more difficult. Mrs. Mackenzie knew that I struggled with my confidence, so she placed me in situations outside of my comfort zone that she knew I could do. For example she placed me in the leadership role in our team. Most of the girls on my team were new to competitive gymnastics and were younger than me. Being in the leadership role made me feel more confident because I had others depending on me to set an example not only when things went well but especially when things were tough. I know she put me in that role to help me build my confidence. She taught me how to be a leader and what that means. Being a leader is not just about knowledge or experience. It's about dedication, confidence and having a servant's heart. That is something that I have taken with me to other sports, and life situations.

On the day of the state gymnastics competition, I was very nervous but once I arrived I hid my nerves because I wanted to show my teammates who had never been to the state meet before that it wasn't a big deal and they should do their best and have fun. Mrs. Mackenzie once gave me a journal in which she wrote "Dear Lord, I pray you help her see how strong she really is." I was

prepared to compete at my best because I knew she believed in me and trusted me to lead. When it came time for awards, I wasn't even thinking about winning. I was so proud of my teammates and we were excited for one another. When my name was called for first place we all celebrated together. She always had us set goals for the season and one of my goals was to win state. We accomplished that long term goal together.

Mrs. Mackenzie supported me when I was thinking about leaving the sport. She didn't dismiss my thoughts about the subject. But instead she sat me down and really listened to me. It showed she was really hearing me and caring about me as a person. At first she was worried that I wanted to quit because she was leaving for her first full time teaching job. She said, "As your coach I would say don't quit because you're an amazing gymnast but as your friend I would say do whatever makes you happy." She didn't dissuade me. It felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders because I was nervous to tell her but she showed empathy in that moment. It must have felt the same way for her when she told our team she was leaving to become a teacher. I remember we both had tears in our eyes because sometimes even when we love something, you have to recognize when your path is leading you away.

The educator that shaped my life, Mackenzie Whitehead, helped me build my confidence, win the state championship, and supported me when I decided to leave the sport. She has helped me through the years by being not only an educator but a friend I can rely on. I will always be thankful and blessed that I have her in my life because she not only shaped my life but guided me to be the best version of myself.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life
Grades 4-5 - Phoebe Evans - Russellville Intermediate School
Arkansas River Valley Literacy Council

Educators are truly what leave the biggest impact on the life of everybody. There is always that one teacher that just touches us in a way that leads the way we live our life. Jesus is the educator that shaped my life. Jesus Christ has taught me that smartness goes beyond the books. He has accompanied me through the defiances of life. Jesus has taught me how to use the special gift he has given me.

Jesus has taught that knowledge goes further than the books. Kindness is one of the things that you are not physically graded over but perhaps it matters the most. If you are kind, people will want to be around you. I believe that kindness is the best life skill for anybody. Another example that can't be found being taught as a subject in school is respect. The Bible which is written by Jesus says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Everyone wants to be respected. Therefore Jesus tells me that to be respected I must be respectful.

Jesus has also held me through the hardships that life has thrown at me. One time was when I had pneumonia. Jesus healed me and got me through it. Another time was when I was dealing with a bully. Jesus helped me lead with love and reminded me that I wasn't alone. Jesus was there for me in the loss of my grandmother. He showed me his love and support. Jesus is the one and only way that I got through the grief.

Jesus has taught me how to use my gift. Jesus has given me the gift of kindness. He has shown me how to cheer up a dreary person with kindness. He has shown me that kindness helps me to make new friends. Jesus has demonstrated affection to me and I believe that him doing that makes me the person I am today.

Clearly Jesus was, is, and will always be the educator that left the biggest influence in my life. Jesus is the best teacher because he showed me that smarts goes beyond the books, has been by my side when things were hard, and has taught me how to use the gift of kindness.

**“The more that you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.”**
— Dr. Seuss, *I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!*



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 6-7 - Braelyn Washam - Mammoth Spring High
North Arkansas Literacy Council

Have you ever had an educator that has genuinely shaped your life? Well, I have, and it was my second-grade teacher Mrs. Vest. She was a fantastic teacher and an even better person. If it weren't for her, I probably wouldn't be able to write this essay right now, know my multiplication facts, or be able to recite the pledge of allegiance. She has influenced my life for the better, and even now in seventh grade, I still think back to my time spent in her classroom, and I doubt that I will ever forget it.

Mrs. Vest went above and beyond to ensure her classroom was a fun learning environment. She devoted time in class to show her students multiple ways to solve various problems. For example, when learning our multiplication facts she made us flashcards and let us watch fun interactive videos to help us study. Mrs. Vest also gave us many opportunities to correct or fix our mistakes. I struggled with second-guessing at that age, so I would just leave it blank, but Mrs. Vest always worked one on one with me to help me understand my assignments. I love Mrs. Vest's teaching and I will be forever grateful for my time spent in her classroom.

Furthermore, Mrs. Vest showed every student that she cared for them. She treated all her students like family. For instance, one day we got a new student and she opened her arms and gave him a big hug because she knew he was nervous about being at a new school. Seeing her care so much about that student whom she had never met was a really special experience. Mrs. Vest gave us rewards after we completed our work. For example, one Friday afternoon, after we had finished testing, she made all of us smores and gave us ice cream too. All in all, Mrs. Vest cared for every one of her students no matter what the circumstance was.

Even though I am no longer her student, Mrs. Vest continues to support me in all of my endeavors. Mrs. Vest has supported me in my basketball career. For example, she came to the finals of our jr. high basketball district tournament and cheered me on. Mrs. Vest also has never forgotten any of my birthdays. For instance, she always finds me before my birthday and gives me a card. I appreciate her support more than she will ever know.

Mrs. Vest was a very remarkable teacher that I will never forget. She made learning fun, and she cared for others over herself. Seeing her care for others like that helped me build my character to be more like her. I still appreciate that she still supports me to this day. Mrs. Vest was an amazing teacher and an even better person. She has a heart made of gold! I will forever cherish my moments in Mrs. Vest's classroom.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grade 6-7 - Roberto Polmerin - Hamburg Middle School
South Eastern Arkansas Literacy Council

Mrs. Sarah Cardin is an educator who changed my life. By opening my eyes to language, teaching me to choose love, and inspiring me with art - she changed my life. She is a supercalifragilisticexpialidocious educator in my opinion.

Mrs. Cardin opened my eyes to language. She explained language in an understandable way so it would be easier for me. She would also add comedy to her speaking in a fun and teachable way, and pushed me to look at language in a different way than I saw it. She always helped me with my work, and taught me what was inconsequential, and what was not.

Mrs. Cardin taught me to choose love. She taught me to be like a protagonist in a story and forgive my adversary even though it may be hard. She was always trying to be nice, and handled conflicts in a way that I could learn to be nice and not perfidious. Finally, she taught me to be thankful for what I have, even though I might be a schlimazel person.

She taught and inspired me with art. She wanted me to push myself with art, and printed me ideas that I could use to draw. She also supported my art and taught me how to improve my art in many ways. Mrs. Cardin showed me different styles of fine arts such as painting, and crafting so I could admire other styles of art, not just drawing with plain pencil.

Finally, by opening my eyes to language, teaching me to choose love, and inspiring me with art are all reasons on how she changed my life. She will forever be known in my memory as one of the best teachers of all time.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 6-7 - Isabella Chance - Pinkston School

Over their lifetime, everyone who goes to a public school will have many teachers. Some may only be regular teachers, and other teachers change a student's life. I used to have a teacher who showed me a new perspective on the world from a young age. She taught me that I need to love myself, and she supported me through everything. If I had never known her, my life would be very different and I wouldn't be the same.

A teacher I had a long time ago taught me things I am so thankful to know even now. She not only taught me what was required, but she taught me how to love myself as well. I used to get bullied badly and I never told anyone. She overheard it one day and after talking to them about how wrong bullying is, she walked up to me. She told me "I'm not able to promise you that people will not be rude to you like this again, but I do know one thing. The people who treat you like this are the people you need to treat the best." I understand that everyone says that to make people feel better about themselves, but she proved it to me. Every morning when I saw her she told me I looked so beautiful that day and then at the end of the day she would ask me what my favorite thing about myself was that day. Eventually, the people who bullied me would stop because they realized it didn't affect me anymore. She taught me how important self-love is. I still try to do this every day because you never know how much it could positively change your life until you do it. I always try to help people just as she did to me because she changed my life for the better.

Although that changed my life for the better, she also taught me not to keep emotions bottled up. For example, when I was three, my biological father got into a motorcycle accident and was in a coma for a month. When he regained consciousness we found out he had severe brain damage and because of that, I haven't seen him since. I was upset about it one day, and I started to cry, but she immediately noticed and asked what was wrong. I had explained the whole thing, and she was there to comfort me. She didn't tell me to stop crying, instead, she took me to a private part of the room so my classmates couldn't see me and she helped me. She knows I have grown up a Christian and she told me that God is trying to help me. It may not be the ideal way but he only wants me to be stronger. He knows a lot of things later on in life will be extremely difficult to go through and he is building me up to that moment. She told me that the Lord makes no mistakes and that he only has good intentions. She also reminded me that crying is a good thing and that crying is my body's way of trying to heal. That teacher helped me realize that keeping my emotions bottled up can lead to anger meaning I could hurt the people that I love. I have always been overly emotional and I'm pretty sure she knew that. So whether she was trying to help because she knew I was over-emotional or because she felt sympathy for me is something. I still wonder about. I am just very thankful that she did that for me.

This teacher has changed my life for the better and never let me be left out. I know she has done so much for me but if I hadn't had her I don't know what I would do. I don't know how I would function without the knowledge of the things she has taught me. If I hadn't met her I wouldn't love myself as much as I do today. I also wouldn't express myself and I would be second-guessing my every move. Without her, my whole life would be so different and I wouldn't be able to say "I'm okay," and mean it.

This teacher has positively impacted my life since the day I was introduced to her and I don't ever want to think about what could happen if I hadn't met her. She taught me self-love and how to open up about my feelings and I wouldn't have had anyone to teach me those things without her. I know at a young age it may be difficult to understand the meaning of self-love but I now realize why she did all of the things she did. The bottom line is everyone needs at least one person in their life to build them up and set them up for success.

"Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you;
figure out what you have to say.

It's the one and only thing you have to offer." —Barbara Kingsolver



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 8-9 - Ava Berryhill - Cabot Junior High

To be shaped, to have a great influence on another, whether that be spiritually, mentally, or physically, from the smallest amoeba to the stars in our galaxy, there is an external force that has a say in how we turn out. For every person, that story is different. It could be a mentor or someone you've never met before, but the truth of the matter is, we all have someone who has helped to shape us and helped us become who we are today. Simply, anyone can be the light that helps us grow.

When I was younger, I looked to those who were constantly around me; my parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, those were the people who shaped me. But as they helped me become who I am today, I began to look for others. It was essential to find people who could impact and shape me in ways they merely couldn't. Some could say I was looking for a mentor, others would say a teacher, and to be honest I didn't know exactly either. I can't pretend I didn't find it, although it wasn't quite what everyone was expecting. In between my first and second-grade years of school, I was told I had to move elementary schools. While now it doesn't seem like a very big deal, in my seven-year-old brain, these emotions were very real. Not only was I scared or nervous like everyone else on the first day of school, but I was also entering new territory. I felt lonely, how would I know which pack of heathens was going to react well to me, and which wouldn't? My mind was racing with all the negative thoughts you can think of, but there I was, walking through the door with my backpack, and I had a smile painted on my face. There I found the warmest smile and a laugh that could fill an entire school. Someone with a bright enough personality to let me grow and flourish. And from that moment forward, she began to change my life.

I stepped into that classroom knowing no one, and I left 178 days later with lifelong friends. Two girls whom I never would have found myself with, are now two I can't imagine my life without. My afternoon time slowly found itself filled with playgrounds, classrooms, offices, and old supplies. Those may seem random, but they became our favorite toys because we were mimicking our favorite people. My best memories took place in that classroom, and they made me the person I am today, one who thrives off of being around and being in front of others. Without those afternoons, I'm not sure where I would be today, but I do know I would be missing out on some of the two greatest people in my life. The friendships this teacher fostered are ones

I know I can trust to last and are ones that I know will never give up on me no matter what happens. These are people that I recognize will always be there for me, despite what may be going on in our world. I wish I could say I would have come across these people on my own, and that I would have become friends with them anyway, but I can't be honest and say those things. These two girls, my sounding boards, are the work of that teacher, and I know she used them to help shape me. She used my closest friends to help make me who I am today.

Studies have proven that children learn from observing those around them. Anyone can be a person who shapes us. But we also have a natural ability to seek the light that will help us grow. It's time we begin to learn how to find beauty in all of those around us, even when change is frightening because we might just find solace. I resisted change, but as a wise person once said "don't be afraid of change, beautiful things can grow when you're willing to let go." That beautiful thing is different for everyone, but for me, it was a teacher, a teacher whom I have grown to love.



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 8-9 - Anna Stone - Harding Academy

Three Rivers Literacy Council

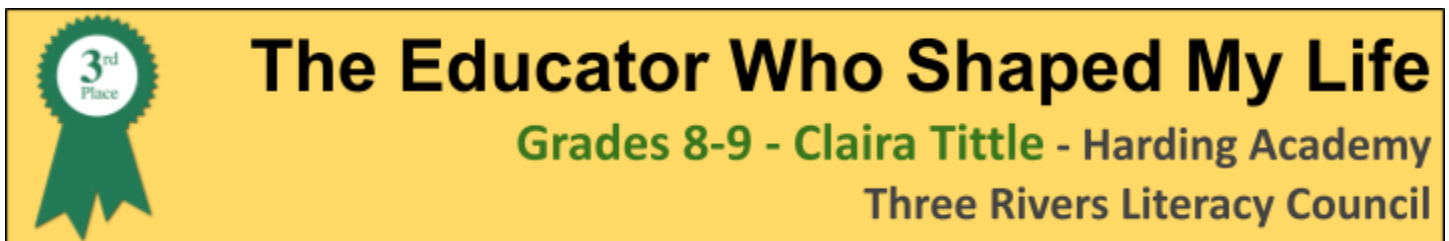
In my current time at my school, Harding Academy, my favorite and most impactful teacher was my fifth grade teacher Mrs. Henderson. Mrs. Henderson isn't only a teacher I favor for her sweet personality and kind heart but also for how she has helped me in many aspects. She helped me grow my wisdom in academics, my spiritual life, and in maturity. Mrs. Henderson was the teacher that made a big difference for me.

Mrs. Henderson made a large difference in my academic life. From my biggest tests to smallest assignments, she helped the whole class thoroughly understand the material she covered. She covered science, math, and history. Mrs. Henderson not only taught the subjects to us slowly and thoroughly, but she made class and lessons interesting; there was never a dull moment. She had

lots of variety in her lessons, homework, and tests, and she was one of the first teachers that made sure I understood what I was studying.

Additionally, Mrs. Henderson helped me grow in my spiritual life. Not only did she teach thoughtful and understanding lessons from the Bible and about God, but she also brought the Lord up in casual conversations and during her academic teaching, Mrs. Henderson also didn't just teach and talk about God's word, but she also followed it. Mrs. Henderson to me is a great example of a Christ-like person and someone who strives to follow God's word and to be like Christ. I know my friends and I were very encouraged by her kind and patient Christ-like spirit.

Lastly, Mrs. Henderson was one of the educators who I found helped me become much more mature. Mrs. Henderson did give the fifth graders more responsibility than some other teachers, but that helped prepare me for later years to come. She expected a lot from us when it came to studying for tests, accomplishing assignments in a timely fashion, and behaving in a way that would be a role model for younger students. Mrs. Henderson taught us small and some larger life lessons during her classes as well. Most anyone who knows Mrs. Henderson knows she is a great teacher and character. As most can tell, she helped in many different ways and aspects of my life. She personally helped me grow in many places in my life as a fifth grader. After I left the grade, she still continues to check in and be helpful and kind. Mrs. Henderson will always have a special place in my heart as one of the best educators I've had.



How do you change someone's life? For me, the answer was simple; you teach them. Teachers impact us daily, sometimes more than we realize. Jasmine Dymas has influenced my life by teaching, encouraging, and supporting me.

Mrs. Jas is my high school theater teacher. While in her class, I have gained many skills relating to the subject she teaches; I am also learning much more. Along with the basics of tech and acting, we learned to give constructive criticism and analyze different literature or performance pieces. Aside from those things, I have learned much from being in the same room with her. In the fall, our school performed *The Sound of Music*, an experience which taught me so much; watching Mrs. Jas be the leader of rehearsals and seeing all the background work she does has continued to amaze me. In a class project, we learned how to be the director of a short scene; there were several times I had to think, "How would Mrs. Jas do this?" We learned all about how to successfully take part in a creative team, something that will be very helpful in the future. Having her as a Bible teacher has also been a great opportunity. She pours out her extensive knowledge of theology into all of us. Mrs. Jas teaches by example to everyone she is around.

Not only does she teach, but she also encourages me. Whether I'm having a hard day or I'm feeling worn out about a project, I can count on Mrs. Jas to encourage me to persevere. This year for my Arkansas Thespian project I chose to design makeup looks for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; this was no simple task. However, Mrs. Jas challenged me and provided encouragement to me even when I was tired and unmotivated. Her constant confidence in me gave me the strength to finish the project and do well without the judging. I wouldn't have done it without her going the extra mile to stay after school and help me record and re-record my presentation until we were pleased. After talking with Mrs. Jas for a while, I feel like I can do things I may have been apprehensive about. She also encouraged me to explore my interests and helped me discover what I am passionate about. I would have never known if she hadn't prodded me to start searching.

Having a support system is very important in everyday life. Someone I have often found support from is Mrs. Jas. Sometimes I just need someone to talk to and ask hard questions. I know I can count on her to be there for me, even when I'm not at my best. She knows how to help carry something that is too heavy to carry alone, and often reminds her students that we weren't meant to do this by ourselves and that it's okay to ask for help. Recently Mrs. Jas noticed I was not in a good place and helped me reach out to the school counselor to ask for help. I didn't really want to get help, but I knew that she cared about me and wanted what's best for me even if it was hard. The dictionary definition of support is "to endure bravely or quietly" (Merriam-Webster). Mrs. Jas never makes me feel like a burden, but she tries to help me find a better way to live my life. She endures it quietly and without complaining.

In conclusion, it can be seen that Mrs. Jas has truly changed my life for the better. She teaches, encourages, and supports me every day. I will carry what I have gained from her for the rest of my life.

"First, find out what your hero wants; then, just follow him!" —Ray Bradbury



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 10-12: Elayna Russell - Mammoth Spring High
North Arkansas Literacy Council

Growing up in a small school, with few resources, I often found myself trying to evaluate the ways I would use this education that my teachers are providing me. As I absorb things like the quadratic formula or the fact that the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell, to me, it all seems sort of unnecessary. For some of my peers, they will use this knowledge everyday, and for others, once we leave these classrooms forever, we won't give it another thought. Yes, these things are important to know, but how will they affect me? I'm just a normal teenager with no plans to become a botanist, an anesthesiologist, or any other big word with an *ist* on the end of it. How will these facts prepare me for the future outside of education? How will this knowledge shape my life? I have come to understand that real "shaping" is not done through knowledge brought by people, but by life lessons shown through people. When you first think about educators with an influence in the school setting, principals and teachers are your usual initial thoughts. For some, your thoughts may stop there, but mine don't even start there. The people that have made the most influential impact on my life are those working behind the scenes. The best educators are the counselors, the janitors, the cafeteria workers, the bus drivers, and the handymen that are often given our last thoughts. They don't know everything and they don't teach with lectures, but they do know life's most important things and they lead by example.

I have thousands of paths laid before me and the world ahead of me, but I'm not ready. I'm ready for direction and stability, but I'm not ready for the world. I'm a Junior and I still have so much to learn. Thankfully, there are people who have already met the world, found their path, and know how to live. Thankfully, one of their paths has crossed with mine. School counselors wear many hats. Through the years, Mrs. Smoot has been a teacher, flourishing new thoughts and bringing color to the minds of Mammoth Spring youth, a cheer coach, providing confidence to the insecure, a Beta sponsor, encouraging students to give something new a shot, and so much more. I have had the privilege to be the Mammoth Spring youth, the insecure, and the student in need of a push in Mrs. Smoot's life. Now I am the excited and scared student in need of counsel sitting in her office. Just this year, she has helped improve my education, calm my nerves about scholarships and applications, and find opportunities for me to be involved in my community. However, sometimes the unspoken things are the most important. Without saying anything, Mrs. Smoot has taught me that I can do anything, be anything, and achieve anything if I smile big, try my best, and stay determined.

Grit. Grit was the word of the day in my English class a couple of weeks ago. To exhibit grit, you need to have courage and strength of character. To make our little, rural school's world go round, it takes a lot of grit from men, women, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, janitors, builders, officers, fixers, and problem solvers. With smiles on their faces, these people keep the lights on, the classrooms clean, and the kids safe and fed. These are ones that go unnoticed the most. These are the people that show up early and go home late. Rows of classrooms have taught me Science, Math, and English, but the hard workers all around have taught me the importance of grit and finding joy in every job. Everyday these men and women deal with the struggle of humbling themselves to these jobs. Some of them love what they do, but most of them just love us. I'll never forget all the greetings, smiles, and thoughtful conversations. In return, most kids in our school mock, mess, and break, yet, our staff continues to work harder and love harder. Humility can make a hard worker a hero, and I am proud to say that these leaders in my school are the ones who've taught me this lesson.

Some of life's most important lessons are something that can't be explained in a classroom. These lessons are more important than making good grades or doing well in school, because they are what helps the new generations know how to succeed in life. At the end of the day, the best knowledge for us to learn will not always help us pass a test and the best educators won't teach at all. But they do work hard. They do love. They do lead. They do change lives, and they've changed mine. That's what the best educators do, and I'm beyond grateful for their influence on my life.

"And what, you ask, does **writing teach us**? First and foremost, it reminds us that we are alive and that it is **a gift and a privilege**, not a right." — Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*



The Educator Who Shaped My Life

Grades 10-12 - Frida Campos - Danville High School

Arkansas River Valley Literacy Council

Educators are builders of society. They choose to dedicate their lives to molding the future of the world in classrooms. With substantial hearts and immense amounts of love for others, educators encourage their students to achieve excellence. As someone who has had the title of student attached to them for their entire life, I can say that the education system has not failed to precisely construct me as a student. My world has never been of large scale. I've unfolded my entire academic career in one small town, though I believe it is this that has allowed me to come across life-changing people. I've had thirteen first days of school, thirteen homerooms, and twenty-six semesters at my school district. Forty-three different individuals have provided me with the gift of education, but I credit one woman with truly shaping me into me. My fifth year of elementary school at S.C. Tucker would introduce me to Mrs. Hern. Mrs. Hern would change my life, and make me the person I am today.

It was the summer of the year 2015 when I received a letter in the mail informing me that my teacher for the upcoming school year would be Mrs. Hern. I had always had an endless love for school, and another year just around the corner reminded me why. When the time finally came, and I was walking down a yellow lit hallway to what would later become one of the most memorable school years of my life, feelings of both anxiousness and thrill were filling my body. Mrs. Hern's classroom quickly proved to be a reflection of her personality. It was the complete opposite of dull, the opposite of all the other classrooms I had sat in the past five years. The chairs were a token shade of mint green, and she had bulletin boards adorned with quotes about creativity and imagination in eye-catching writing that turned out to be her own. I quickly fell in awe with her ability to turn such a small space into a stunning atmosphere for young minds. I fell in awe with the way she was so unique to all the other teachers I had before her. Mrs. Hern made a remarkable first impression on a room full of twenty-two fourth graders. That sunny day in August established the kind of school year I was about to experience.

As the year continued, Mrs. Hern made school something I jumped out of bed for. I remember being upset when my parents informed me I'd have to miss a morning of school to get my bi-annual check-up at the dentist. Language arts and social studies with Mrs. Hern was something I couldn't bear to miss out on. Every day in her class contrasted the last; we would dig for the bones of lost colonizers on the playground when we were studying Jamestown, and she made "flap-jacks" in the classroom when we read the novel *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt. One of my favorite and most significant memories of Mrs. Hern's class was when she announced to us that we would be creating our own products to sell to parents and the rest of the elementary at "The Fourth Grade Market Fair." I recall not wanting to paint rocks or make bookmarks like many of my other classmates were doing. My need to be creative had since stemmed. I went to Mrs. Hern with my group of "business partners" and proposed the idea of publishing a book. Mrs. Hern could not have been more supportive. She devoted her time to helping us make fifty copies of a book titled, "Bee Happy", an activity book that circulated the theme of always seeing the positive. Our book sold out the day of the market fair. A book written by fourth graders produced money, all thanks to Mrs. Hern's push towards students that could go above and beyond.

Mrs. Hern's ability to inspire was boundless. Every assignment challenged my creativity and intellect. When I repeatedly found myself feeling discouraged by her need for something outside of the box, she was always there to lift me up and put me on track. She never failed to offer a word of encouragement or a hand on a scavenge toward a new idea she knew I could come up with. As an elementary student, I hated reading. I despised it. I couldn't think of anything less enticing than sitting down for hours and repeating words back to myself. Mrs. Hern changed this view on books for me. She was obsessed with displaying to her students how altering choosing the correct book could be. She encouraged reading in untraditional ways, ways that truly captivated ten-year-olds. Through her I was able to finally find my love for reading, because she recommended a book she thought I would like. Books that I sat down and repeated the words from for hours.

My academic well-being was not the only thing she prioritized. Art has been a passion of mine for as long as my heart has been beating. I have always devoted my hours away from school toward putting my ideas onto paper or canvas. My fifth year of elementary school was the year I completed the most art projects. A vast amount of those projects began in Mrs. Hern's classroom. It was as though she had magic when it came to encouraging creativity. I had never felt such a sense of confidence in myself and my art as I did when I was in fourth grade. I was always eager to begin a new project because I knew I would be able to tell Mrs. Hern all about it the next morning. She would always be so proud, which was something I was not used to experiencing. I never had a figure so supportive and so encouraging in my life until I met Mrs. Hern. Not only was I thankful for her ability to provide me with a love for literature and a love for my own creativity, but also thankful to have someone so dedicated to me and my learning. I was thankful to have someone who cared.

I believe that educators are truly unaware of how much they impact their students' lives. I believe Mrs. Hern is one of those

educators. Her kindness and love for youth comes so naturally. She has served as a role model, an inspiration, and a constant memory of how great I can be. School days slip away from you. I am a year away from graduating and can say that my memories of past school years have become blurry, but my fourth grade year will stick with me forever, thanks to Mrs. Hern. I believe she doesn't realize it, but she has impacted me in a way no other teacher has: she has shaped me into the person I am proud to be today.



Every day of your life, you are impacted by others, as you are also influencing others. Some of the most influential people in most young adults' lives are their teachers. We begin to go to school as early as three years old and leave around eighteen. Throughout my many years in the educational system, I have had far more positive interaction with my teachers than I have had negative. One of the most influential teachers I have ever had the privilege of learning from was my seventh grade English teacher, Mr. Kevin Ganus. He was one of the most kind, gentle, compassionate, and godly teachers I have had. Though he only taught me for one year, I learned so much from him during that time. Mr. Ganus taught me humbleness, self-appreciation, and most importantly how to live as a child of God.

Mr. Ganus never wanted to be looked upon as more important than anyone else, but in the eyes of my seventh-grade class, we thought he was the most important person in the world. Anytime our class would talk to him and tell him what an incredible teacher and Christian he was, he would thank us then proceed to tell us who he viewed as strong Christians. This immediately pulled the focus from himself to someone else. Mr. Ganus was also diagnosed with cancer the following year. He never wanted attention when he was sick, so he would not talk about it, but instead he would tell us that there were other people in worse situations. He always re-directed the attention off of himself and onto others. He wanted to lift other people up and humble himself, and that is something that I admire in him that I struggle with. Humility is a gift, and it seems to be a hard one to open for many people; if I could have just a fraction of Mr. Ganus' humility, I would be so grateful.

Next, he influenced me to practice self-appreciation and to be confident in my abilities. After tests, he would ask us what we thought about the test, and our class would range in answers from "It was so easy!" to "That was so hard." His response was always "Well, easy or hard is relative," and that puts things into a different perspective when I reflect on it. Even then in seventh grade, I realized that with that statement I had to learn that I'm not the same as other people, and other people are not the same as me. Each and every person has different gifts and abilities, and it is okay if I do not match up with someone else in that aspect. In a more holistic view, I learned to be appreciative of my body and mind and how I can learn and do things without any disabilities because not everyone is granted that advantage in life. I know to always be grateful for what I am capable of, and to not compare those capabilities to others because everyone is different.

Lastly, Mr. Ganus taught me what it was like to live a Christian lifestyle. He always exemplified the Fruits of the Spirit in everything he did. Whether it was asking someone how their day was, correcting us if we were being rude to one another, or just being with his family, I always saw God work through him. Anytime Mr. Ganus asked me how I was doing, I felt a sense of security that someone did care for me. I believe God was using Mr. Ganus as an example that there are people who truly care about my well-being just as God does. Our class gave Mr. Ganus the nickname, "The salt of the earth," as his actions and spirit were always reflective of Jesus. He taught me that no matter what you are doing, you can always reflect Christ through the smallest actions such as a smile, high-five, and even a small nod of the head. His spiritual impact on us as teenagers is something that I am so very grateful for.

As I look back and remember all of the good that Mr. Ganus taught me, I see how important it is that our educators care about their youths and try to make a difference. Students spend so much time with their educators, so it should be a place of security and wisdom. The impact made on my life by him is incredible, and I will remember all of the good he influenced within me. Though I could not see all of the benefits of having him as a teacher and mentor in my early youth, I am so grateful to now comprehend all of the virtuous lessons I have learned from him.

Congratulations to the above published authors!
Thank you for submitting to The Writers' Showcase Competition!

Arkansas Literacy Association Everyone's an Author! Student Writing Showcase



Topic: Which famous person would you like to meet? Why?

- Compose an expository writing piece.
- Needs to accurately reflect student's thoughts.
- Does not have to be part of a school assignment.

Grade Divisions:

- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 8-9
- 10-12

Deadline

- Submit to local council and win there! Winners sent to ALA.
- No local council? Submit to ALA. Those submissions will be judged; winners then submitted to state-level.
- March 1, 2024 to ALA

For More Info

- alaliteracy.org/Student-Writers-Showcase
- Email shelby@alaliteracy.org

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— Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

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