

2013-2014 National Teacher of the Year Jeff Charbonneau on
"My Teaching Inspirations"



**Transcript of Talk delivered at the Annual Conference
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I actually had two different inspirations. Okay, I'm lying. I had like a *thousand* inspirations, but two that really stick out.

The first one was non-science, seventh grade, I had this teacher, this *woman*, who called my father every Friday and told him what I did not do. *She* got me in trouble every single Friday. And so I literally referred to her as *that woman*.

Until the Spring. You see, this *gal* was constantly, constantly, on my case: "You didn't turn in four assignments this week. You didn't turn in three assignments this week. Oh, you're almost there! You only missed two assignments this week!" Just kept harping and harping at me.

And then sometime in the Spring, I did really well on the test. In fact, I went up to the wall, and they had this nice little printout with the coded number because you can't display grades, right? So I find my coded number and I look on there and, *Oh, you have the highest grade in the class*. She came over and she saw me looking at. She came up and she almost kinda sorta in her way cracked a smile. [laughter]. But I saw this glint in her eye. And it threw me. She was proud of me.

And I didn't realize it *fully* until later in life, but it was her persistence, it was her not giving up on me, and then showing that little bit of spark of pride that turned me around as a student. Now don't get me wrong, I wasn't the *worst* student in the world. I was B minus, B, maybe. But she turned me around, got me to college, I graduated with honors, in the honors program at Central Washington University. I would never had done that if it wasn't for Louise Adams.

And every time that I see Louise now—she knows that I tell this story, by the way, it's okay—every time that I see her now I hug her so tightly, as though I am hugging my own parent.

Because she was willing to *not* be my friend. She was willing to be *that woman* for me. It was a huge influence on my life.

Then, within the science, I go on to Central Washington University. There was a chemistry teacher, Dr. David Legree. And he started out every single day of every one of his lessons, with a Science Fact of the Day. It's kinda lame, okay, but it's science, it's cool. There are things that are lame in the real world that are actually cool in the science world. It works that way. [laughter] And he starts off

with this science fact of, who was born this day or who did something cool this day, and it was so consistent, that we knew it was there.

One day he *almost* forgot to do it, and the class—I mean, we're college students, right? We almost erupt and “Wait, wait, wait! You're doing something wrong!”

So from him I learned that, you know what? Classrooms have to be this safe environment where you understand and can expect what's going to happen.

So I learned a lot about compassion, I learned a lot about, you know what, sometimes your role *is* to be the bad guy. Sometimes your role is to not be a friend. But you always provide a safe place that is structured, and allows students to learn. So those are my two greatest influences.