

# Level up

Business



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Introduction It was 11: 00 pm on April 2 and my entire family was in a foul mood, the kind that reeks of “ touch me and you’ll scorch your hand.” We practically fell through the door of the utterly barren, frighteningly alien house. The place smelled like isolation and looked worse. Ready to both pass out and tear each others’ heads off, the four of us hurriedly set up crude mattresses and promptly fell asleep. That memory is similar to another in my files.

Ten years prior my family tumbled into our new house in Columbia, Maryland, fresh from Philadelphia where both my sister, Carly, and I were born. All I know is that I was three, Carly was one, Mom was being scary, and my room had garish yet pleasing dinosaurs on the walls. I was blissfully unaware of the gargantuan change taking place. April 2 was a completely different story. A week after turning thirteen I was being torn away from a perfect house, a perfect school, and perfect friends. At least, that what was going through my mind at the time.

Of course that’s simply an illusion created by a distraught brain. Distance makes the heart grow fonder, as the saying goes. The one lifeline, the one fleeting hope for my flustered past-clone, was school. School, the place where every word, every motion, every decision counts towards your “ image,” how you’re perceived on the first day. Yet I was not afraid. I’d been the new kid before with success, I could do it again.

The first day came. A thousand billion jillion eyes scanned and probed and hunted. “ Who is this person? Why is she here?” I was uniformly casual, adding a wave here and a slight chuckle there, just for flavor. Nodded ever-

so-subtly whenever a name was introduced while mentally drilling myself on the it over and over again. “ Hi, I’m Taylor” was my world.

Every single kid was friendly, striving to make me feel welcome by initiating conversation. It was all very polite, trivial, yet colossally important. But then the kid would mention my name and I’d think: Drat! They know who I am but I’ve forgotten their name. They told me earlier, why can’t I remember? Okay. It’s fine.

I’ll just play it off, be cool. That’s how I lurch-waltzed through my first day. It went much smoother than expected. After that the training wheels came off. All of a sudden I was swimming in a pond of hundreds of kids instead of just 40. Even though I had been taking Algebra in Maryland, the course at my new middle school might as well have been taught in Danish.

There were MAP tests, PASS tests, STEM tests, DEJ’s, EOC’s. Mnemonic devices were coming out my ears. Language Arts, a subject not categorized by Honors or otherwise at my old school, spiked in effort demand. It was a whole different ball game. Most of it was a blur, but there was one class that reminded me of something. My new Honors Language Arts class was vaguely reminiscent of a not-so-distant part of my life.

One that had dominated nearly everything else until my last day at my old school: Latin class. The dynamics of this class didn’t really resemble a middle school foreign language course. More like a small team of adolescents, plus one adult, on a quest for intelligent discussion. The actual Latin language was simply a worthwhile vehicle. Which is what HLA seems like it would be should it contain less students. So without further ado, I shall delve into the <https://assignbuster.com/level-up/>

lessons learned in both classes and how they've changed my outlook on things.

Lesson One: Think and Act This lesson has two components, as represented by the title. The first, think, is taught in any acceptable classroom. In the exceptional, extraordinary ones, it's not just taught. It's implemented, almost breathed. Mrs. Gams, my new HLA teacher, emulates this through the assignments she gives, as well as the Socratic Seminars.

Although I've only been her student for a month, I have newfound ideas and stances thanks to my interaction with Lois Lowry's Giver series. Whether it was the references to earth's various government systems or the Bible ["Drifting there, he looked down and saw his own self becoming motionless" (Lowry, Messenger)] or the importance of memory [♦[" without the memories, it's all meaningless." (Lowry, Giver)] those books stirred my mind. If Lowry's works aren't thought-provokers, I don't what is. Mr.

Doughty, teacher, Magister, what have you, entertained a practical balance between teaching and conversation. The Latin 7B class would oftentimes veer off-topic and, although the new strand might have been thoroughly fascinating, Mr. Doughty would have to casually nudge us back in the prescribed direction. Other times, though, he'd join in and let us talk. Perhaps he sensed an impending epiphany, or maybe those intellectual tangents were rewards of sorts. Either way, we ten students were sometimes allowed to shape the curriculum for a day.

Looking back at it now, even on those days, we always seemed to walk out of the room with exactly the lesson Mr. Doughty had wanted us to learn. The <https://assignbuster.com/level-up/>

discussion had been planned all along. On one such day, we students were feeling particularly philosophical. Somehow we went from discussing the proper use of ablative prepositions in conjunction with neuter nouns to how this might all be a dream. After all, how are we to know that humans are not just lab rats hooked up to some elaborate simulation? We really got into it, talking about Descartes' theories, arguing over semantics, and musing about the future.

This prompted an entire philosophy unit. And so the intrepid, cognitive explorers of Latin 7B had their brains packed jam-full with noteworthy life lessons in about a week. Most of those tidbits were small, but the overall message was large: the mind is a wonderful place. There's next to nothing in this world not worth being thoroughly thought over. Moreover, deep, strenuous thinking can lead to great things. That is, if those wonderful thoughts are acted upon, which brings me to the other side of this lesson.

For the second part, I must briefly go back in time. It was the second quarter of sixth grade and Mr. Doughty strode into the small room with a satisfied grin on his face. Typically for us, the then-Latin 6B students (soon Latin 7B), that meant he had a new whooper of an assignment prepared. That day's surprise consisted of an open-ended project.

The instructions were simple; we were to create some physical, interactive manifestation of what it would have been like to live as an Ancient Roman (entirely in Latin, of course). Class and teacher alike were excited. It was a huge concept. What freedom! What complete creative freedom! We verbally mulled the task over, brainstorming with each other, throwing ridiculous yet

fantastic ideas willy-nilly. I started into the preliminary work on the “ life as a Roman Emperor” strategy game. It was exciting, a project of such proportion.

But as the weeks passed, our 6B Latin class was swallowed by the required curriculum. All energy had to be focused on the textbook learning. Mr. Doughty routinely lamented the fact that, yet again, we would not be able to work on the Second Quarter Project. Then..

. the project vanished, gulped up by unfortunate circumstances. Even our gleeful inspiration, produced by one thought-fest, turned out to be inadequate fuel for the endeavor. We had the think ingredient, but we unintentionally missed other equally important element: act. It’s the push, the gumption, the “ just do it” attitude, and it’s essential to any success.

A year later, we’d become 7B and learned from our mistake. The next big project was in the works. This time it’d started with me grumbling over the lack of decent, educational, Roman-life video games. And just like that, teacher and students were consumed. We just HAD to carry out this accidental idea.

Using the failure of the Second Quarter Project as leverage, 7B began production on Carpe Diem Online, an entirely historically and linguistically accurate MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) simulating Ancient Rome while retaining the fun factor. While the project will most likely never be more than Minimally Multiplayer, it’s making progress. At the launch of the project I was unaware of the impending move, so it did sting a bit when I had to leave my joyous ambition behind in Maryland. (It is, <https://assignbuster.com/level-up/>

after all, my wish to become a creative lead designer within the video game field.) But judging by my brief time as the de facto student project leader, I'd say my friends can handle making the game without me. After all, they can think and act just as well as I.

Lesson Two: The Problem With Here On my last day there, Mr. Doughty talked to the ten of us one last time before 7B turned into nine students. "All of you live in Howard County," he began, "the most wealthy county in one of the most wealthy states in America. And the US as a whole doesn't do too bad, either." He went on to explain that none of us were, in fact, living in the real world.

Howard County was our primer, the simulation designed to prep us for real combat. Some day we have to leave the simulation. I know what you're thinking. No, I'm not in the real world yet. This is just the next level of the game.

Mr. Doughty also expressed his hope that each one of us would go on to travel, see the real world, learn more lessons. I believe I'm one step closer to that dream because with each passing day I gain a new tributary. "For me, memories are tributaries." (Lowry, *Newberry Acceptance*) Every conversation, blunder, triumph, jeer, and kindness is a new tiny trickle of experience.

One such droplet is my time as a kinda-big-deal-locally-know-public-speaker. See, the school holds a mandatory public speaking contest every year called the Barlow Public Speaking Contest. All students must participate, but very few actually go for the gold. Which is understandable, considering the fact <https://assignbuster.com/level-up/>

that, according to several polls, public speaking is generally feared over death in America. From fourth grade, the grade at which I entered that school, to sixth I'd racked up a win record for the contest.

The pressure was on for a fourth trophy. I put additional stress on myself since by then I knew I might be doing my last Barlow that year. I poured over poetry book after poetry book, seeking that perfect piece to select. I found it in Amy Gerstler's "For My Niece Sidney, Age Six," a non-rhyming poem about encyclopedias, growing up, history, and love. To use Gerstler's words, "this humming, aromatic, acid flashback, pungent, tingly-fingered world is acted out differently for each one of us by the puppet theatre of our senses." (Collins) That quote is almost too true.

Because senses code memories. Memories house experiences. Experiences shape people. One sensory input could conceivably change someone's life. And it doesn't matter whether my most important experiences are gained during the simulation or otherwise. In a way, I can learn even more profound lessons within this prep level than I could outside it, because these years we call childhood are life in its simplest form.

Sure, I'm on the back half of that stage, but I'm still comparable to clay. You know, the ever-present metaphor of moldable clay for student's minds? It applies. But it's not just teachers like Mr. Doughty and Mrs. Gams who may shape that clay. It's the peers, too.

My 7B classmates were just as much a part of my learning experience as Mr. Doughty was. And I don't feel the need to say whether I won the contest or not. Conclusion There was a time I used to think I belonged nowhere besides <https://assignbuster.com/level-up/>

my old school: discussing both serious and silly topics with good friends in Latin class, standing up on a stage performing poetry, adding to the river. I probably still think that.

But I'm not so stubborn as to think there are no memories to be made or lessons to be learned here. It's just that I'm a very cognitive person. Most of life goes on inside my head. That's why I have such a hard time getting over mistakes or embarrassing moments; I'm constantly drawing on my memories for reference. Everyone does this. My memories of Latin class are among my most precious.

It truly was my home, and I'll always remember the lessons learned there. But I'll always remember other things, too, such as how distraught I was when forced to switch schools. Or how much it stunk to move away from my oldest friend in Philadelphia. It almost feels like *deja vu*. My personal history is, in a way, repeating itself. But guess what? Those stories all had happy endings.

So I'm pretty sure this one will, too. Level up. Work Cited Collins, Billy, and David Lehman. *The Best American Poetry*, 2006. New York: Scribner Poetry, 2006. Print.

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