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TEACHING STATEMENT

As a teacher, I am committed to making connections between the texts I teach and the lives of my students. Students often see school as a space for identity formation and discovery, and I tailor my courses to tap into that enthusiasm. I intentionally pose questions that enable students to examine critically their own histories, values, and identities and to think about how the materials we study might relate to their lived experiences. For example, I recall asking one student to reflect on how *The House on Mango Street* spoke to her experience as an Israeli immigrant; I then followed up by helping her connect those thoughts to the experiences of a classmate who self-identified as a second-generation Latinx woman. After that semester ended, the Israeli student remarked that my class had helped her come to terms with her status as an immigrant because it exposed her to “multiple universes”—her own, those of her classmates, and those of the authors we studied in class. This kind of interaction is possible only because discussions in my classes are interactive, feel safe, and foreground the relevance of literary studies to everyday life. Indeed, my students frequently remark on how open our class discussions have been and how they have opened up themselves as a result. I pride myself on building classroom spaces where my students can trust themselves to be authentic, vulnerable, and even uncomfortable.

Students also open up in my classes because I frame teaching and learning as both intellectual and affective activities—in fact, I treat the affective as the intellectual. One way I achieve this, perhaps surprisingly, is simply by reading aloud. Oral presentation is itself a kind of interpretation, and when students hear what they have read, they often find themselves reading and responding to it anew. Such an activity often initiates close reading, enabling students to slow down and inviting them to linger on the actual words. In addition to being a lesson in literary attention, performing the text in this way creates an environment where students are invited to engage with literature as more than an intellectual puzzle. I remember, for instance, how in one class my students reviewed a passage from *We the Animals*. They clearly understood the basics of what had happened when they arrived in class, but it was not until I stopped and carefully read that passage aloud that they felt the importance of it. When I looked up from reading, my students were visibly affected, and that response led to a more engaged, more intellectual discussion. In my classes, the emotional becomes an important entry into the intellectual.

This emphasis on teaching as an act of knowledge production and affect production is reflected in my teaching evaluations and in the awards that I have received over the years. And I find it easy to model such an approach for my students because I genuinely care about them and their success. This past year, for example, students commented on how “compassionate and caring” I was during the pandemic, noting that I went “above and beyond” to help them adjust, and referring to me as “relatable” and “understanding.” More importantly, however, my students recognized that these traits helped them to become better thinkers; the affective connections we formed in class

taught them how to care about what we were learning. While “passion” can be overused as a descriptor for teaching, I do believe that my passion for learning and my charismatic persona stimulate student learning.

Moreover, these affective relationships make it possible for me to mentor students long-term, not just for the short period that I have them in the classroom. I often get requests to advise student organizations, to support arts performances and athletic events, or to otherwise show up for my students outside of class. It is that long-term, holistic impact that brings me joy as a teacher. I am still writing recommendation letters today for students that I had in class seven years ago, because I am still in touch with them and tracking their progress. I have an entire folder on my computer filled with communications from former students who have reached out to share their successes with me. And, quite frankly, I am the teacher who has made multiple 16-hour weekend road trips just to support former students as they graduate from college in another state. Those road trips generally mean too much fast food and too many energy drinks, but that is who I am; those relationships are why I teach. Those relationships are also why I seek the opportunity to join an independent school where my primary focus can be on teaching and mentorship—and where those efforts are likely to be valued.

I should note, as I close, that these same characteristics apply to me as a colleague and as a team member. I thrive in an environment where I can demonstrate the same care and respect for my peers that I make evident toward my students in the classroom. I like just popping by somebody’s office to compare notes and share successes, and I love it when my colleagues drop by just to bounce ideas around or share jokes. In addition to bringing energy and enthusiasm to every project that I tackle, my former colleagues have noted that I always take time to encourage those around me. I am often the first person to jump in and help out when necessary, and I refuse to leave others by themselves when there is work left to do. Indeed, my work ethic and deep sense of responsibility keep me from assuming that somebody else will take care of things for me. In a world where standard practices have been disrupted by a pandemic, that maturity makes me an ideal colleague.