



Teacher: The One Who Made the Difference

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In 1969, Mark Edmundson was a typical high school senior in working-class Medford, Massachusetts. He loved football, disdained schoolwork, and seemed headed for a factory job in his hometown—until a maverick philosophy teacher turned his life around.

When Frank Lears, a small, nervous man wearing a moth-eaten suit, arrived at Medford fresh from Harvard University, his students pegged him as an easy target. Lears was unfazed by their spitballs and classroom antics. He shook things up, trading tired textbooks for Kesey and Camus, and provoking his class with questions about authority, conformity, civil rights, and the Vietnam War. He rearranged seats and joined in a ferocious snowball fight with Edmundson and his football crew. Lears's impassioned attempts to get these kids to think for themselves provided Mark Edmundson with exactly the push he needed to break away from the lockstep life of Medford High. Written with verve and candor, **Teacher** is Edmundson's heartfelt tribute to the man who changed the course of his life.

Teacher: The One Who Made the Difference Details

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Jeffrey says

This book was great inspiration for anyone who wants to become a teacher (especially if you're male) because for once, the book connected to the reader. Granted it takes place during the late 1960s and early 1970s so we cannot relate to the problems in society but the reader can connect with the author in the experiences that he has. Also, Franklin Lears (the teacher) is one of the most influential people and one of the best literary characters. He makes the kids think for themselves by using off the wall, not by-the-book teaching techniques; a technique that I myself admired greatly. This book is great because it not only inspires the reader but it paints an accurate picture of how one ordinary man changed the lives of fifteen people that we see walk the halls of our high school everyday.

Katie says

I went into reading this book as others did, as evidenced by the message board, I wanted to find some tips about teaching. Although I did learn a lot and loved to learn about Mr. Lears I thought that the book was kind of misleading. Hidden, and not very well at that, is the author's desire to write a memoir about himself in that year entirely separate from the classroom. Unfortunately, this mix didn't benefit the book- but the rest, the in between was great.

Ellyn says

The author grew up in the 1960s in working class Medford, Massachusetts, and this memoir is about the high school philosophy teacher that inspired him and changed his life forever. I liked the overall message, but the writing is not very good. The author rambles A LOT, and the book moves very slowly as a result. I had trouble getting through it.

Anneke says

Bepaald geen zoetig verhaaltje over de 'super teacher' , wel een zeer motiverend en realistisch, eerlijk verhaal over filosofie onderwijs met literatuur. Zo kan het eruit zien! Zo te kunnen les geven! Highly recommended, in het bijzonder voor literatuur docenten.

Hans Guttman says

Mark taught at my boarding school. He seemed quite intellectual at the time. He had an alternative bent as we all did. This being the case, it was surprising to hear about the background he came from, that of the dreaded jock culture. An interesting story and well told.

Ali says

I enjoyed another book by Edmundson called Why Read, which gives an indepth perspective on what he believes about teaching, reading, and our culture: we need to live out the truth of literature. Teacher was very different because it is written as a memoir rather than as an academic essay. I found it difficult at times to maintain my commitment to it; it is slow and Edmundson does not discuss Frank Lears as much as I thought he would. Edmundson is more interested in portraying the change which he underwent, which is a great idea in theory.

Esme Lorraine says

I just could not finish this book. I would not recommend it. He writes like he wants to prove to everyone he is an English teacher, words that are rarely heard are used frequently in the book. Just not my style.

Alli Poirot says

Recommended to me by the headmaster of the new school where I will be teaching starting in August. There are some interesting connections here-- the author grew up in Malden and Medford, just one town over from where I live and have lived for the past 9+ years; he also went to Bennington. Me too.

The book is a memoir about the author's experience of a philosophy class taught by an inspiring, but mostly very alien and nonconformist teacher in his senior year at Medford High School.

I have to say, I found the prose style of Edmundson kind of inflated. At times there is too much description-- every person's facial structure, typical clothing, and parentage is relayed, and even though some of it is genuinely entertaining, it's done too much to really focus well on. There is a lot about football that I found confusing and totally non-interesting. The main story is engaging, but slow to get going, and I suspect it is quite simplified. As a teacher, I wanted to hear more about the teaching. However, the point of this book is to recognize the power of Edmundson's experience, and therefore it's told through his eyes.

The message is that teachers can actually open up the world and new ways of thinking to their students, and don't have to stand on desks or invite students to their houses to do this. Providing provocative resources, encouraging conversation, and modeling openness, skepticism, and critical thinking can revolutionize an adolescent's thinking.

I appreciate that.

Marjory Munson says

I enjoyed this book very much, but didn't feel that I learned much from it - maybe because I already knew from my own experience that students often learn more when they are not nailed to their seats.

Sean Blevins says

As a teacher, I came to this book looking for tips, looking for insight into how to be "the one that made a difference." Edmundson says that there are two kinds of great teachers: ironists, like Socrates, who ask rather than lecture, who admit that they do not know, rather than insist that they do. Their agenda is not to convince the student of a particular view, but to convince the student to live thoughtfully, mindfully, and honestly by his own lights; and truth-tellers, like Freud and Jesus, who have a truth to impart to the world and attract disciples who become convinced of this truth.

If, in writing this memoir, Edmundson is a kind of master teacher - teaching teachers how to teach - he's not half bad in blending these two roles. And, as any reader of this book will see, that's quite a compliment.

I expected to see more of Frank Lears - the philosophy teacher who turned Edmundson's life around - and less of football, high school social dynamics, and Johnny Carson, but those things are an essential part of who Edmundson was-is. And as a tribute to Lears, a teacher who seemed to want nothing other than to see people think and become reflective about their own lives and worlds, this kind of thoughtful engagement with life is a fitting homage. It shows not only the teacher, but the teacher's fruit, the harvest twenty years later.

Teacher had the beneficent effect of inspiring me in the short-term - "how can I change my 101 class to get students to take these ideas seriously?" - and sustain me for the long run. I have to remind myself that teachers are a little like Wendell Berry's Mad Farmer: they "invest in the millenium: plant sequoias"

Sandy Anderson says

I have heard Professor Edmundson speak several times with pleasure and read another of his books "Why Read?". As a retired teacher myself, I'm always drawn to books about teaching, teachers and learning. This one surprised me. The title seems quite clear but the book is more an account of a less than inspiring working class high school, a working class family and a senior with little love for learning and few dreams for his future living in the late 60s in the U.S. where accepted values were being challenged.

I stayed with Professor Edmundson and was drawn into this account of his intellectual coming of age -- so radically that he was catapulted into a new life, away from his family, his school friends and all he had previously known, thanks to a young, inexperienced and iconoclastic teacher. I would have liked to know more about Lears but it is quite probable that Edmundson himself didn't know much about him -- except the effect of the books Lears introduced him to and the confidence Lears gave his young student in his ability to comprehend and learn from them - and in their value to help a young man change his life.

You don't expect an established Professor of English in a major university to have come from such a background. You don't expect such a life-changing teacher to leave after just one year and change his life and career path so completely. So, though it wasn't the book I was expecting to read, it was a very good book and it enriched me.

Mary says

Up front: I highly disliked this book.

To be fair in general I don't enjoy memoirs, but this one seemed particularly tedious.

I found the story rambling weighed down by tedious details and superfluous metaphors. While many of them were interesting, when there are a dozen within a page it becomes harder to appreciate them.

As someone training to be a teacher, I did not find this inspiring or educational but terribly depressing. As a student, I found this to be a poor example of high school even though Edmundson seems to think his experience is typical.

Erin says

I have to concur with most people's assessment of this book: I get the need to describe things in vivid detail, but this is too much to slog through. For being titled "Teacher" there wasn't enough about the actual teacher for me. As the story took place in "Meff'ahd" MA, I had moments of recognition and "hey, I know that place!" But without that, this book is a total pass.

richard says

Good book. It's a memoir about the author (now professor) as a high school senior who was going nowhere before his philosophy teacher came to teach. About both of them. Very real picture of teenage boys in the 1960s - pretty funny actually. Very inspiring story about what a teacher can do.

Ellen says

I really enjoyed this book. At first I was a bit disappointed that there wasn't more about the teacher that Edmundson sets out to honor, and it took me a while to get into the book. But in the end, I really got absorbed. I like books that are set in the 60's, and I like to read different points of view about the war and the protesters and the hippies. This was a pretty good memoir of that time (as judged by me, who wasn't even born then) - what it was like to be a normal, slightly confused, mostly disinterested high-schooler during a really tumultuous time. I also loved the author's description of his relationship with his father, especially their time watching Johnny Carson together. His father was a smart, tough, not entirely easy man, and his discreet shows of affection for his son were really moving. I loved the part of the book where Edmundson discovers the love of reading - there's a really great scene where he and his friends go out for an evening of drinking, and he is so absorbed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* that he brings the book with him. His friends eventually drop him off at his house because he's so involved in the book that he's not paying any attention to them. And then he goes inside and keeps reading! I admire the courage of a high school jock who is willing to be seen as a newly-minted bookworm.
