

7 Lessons for Teachers from Dumbledore

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One of my favorite times of the day is when I settle in with my two young daughters for read-aloud time. For several years, we have been working our way through the Harry Potter series. I had read them all before, but it has been a delight to read them again with my girls, using as many voices as possible, and seeing the incredible story through their eyes.

It has also shared many secrets about teaching and living with me on this second reading, especially when it comes to Dumbledore. The way he interacts with Harry, fellow teachers, muggles, and various magical creatures has lessons for all of us -- especially teachers and parents. Whether you have read the Harry Potter series or not, there is wisdom from this character we can all learn from.

"You do care," said Dumbledore. He had not flinched or made a single move to stop Harry demolishing his office. His expression was calm, almost detached. "You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it." - Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Calm Acceptance: No matter what Dumbledore is faced with, he calmly accepts this reality. When Harry is throwing Dumbledore's belongings around his office -- devastated from the loss of a parent-like figure -- Dumbledore is a witness to Harry's emotions. He doesn't escalate the situation by getting angry, yelling back, or sending Harry to a break or time out. He simply allows Harry to have

those emotions and reflects them back, showing that he is listening. He is witnessing. He is calm. Isn't that what most of our students want? To be heard, witnessed, and have a calm adult to help them? There are many lessons for me in this as a parent and a teacher.

"I don't mean to be rude -" he [Vernon] began, in a tone that threatened rudeness in every syllable. "- yet, sadly, accidental rudeness occurs alarmingly often," Dumbledore finished the sentence gravely. "Best to say nothing at all, my dear man." - Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince

Kindness in the Face of Rudeness: The Dursleys (Harry's relatives) are mean, spiteful and rude to Harry and Dumbledore. They bluster, they insult, and they neglect. Dumbledore isn't shaken. He says what he thinks should happen, such as "Let us assume that you have invited me in, shall we?" It is disarming, but it shows what the behavior could be. He is calm. He is kind. He doesn't sink to the level of spite or sarcasm when faced with bald rudeness and discomfort. What is behind the Dursleys' behavior? Fear, self-doubt, uncertainty? The same is likely true for many of our students.

"Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!" - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Self-Deprecating Humor: Dumbledore does not think he is perfect. He breaks uncomfortable silences with a pleasant joke or comment. He diffuses stressful situations instead of making them worse. He knows he is a work in progress just like everyone else. This is an excellent tool for parents and teachers. It helps everyone have more joy and a growth mindset. We all have progress to make - every single one of us.

"Everybody finished the song at different times. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand and when they had finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest. 'Ah music,' he said, wiping his eyes. 'A magic beyond all we do here!' - Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone

Being Humble: Dumbledore is one of the strongest wizards in all the land. You wouldn't know that though. He is approachable, calm, and humble. He doesn't assume he has all the answers or is the best. He lets his actions speak for him and does not boast of his accomplishments. Being fallible is a gift we can give our students. Look, we are saying, we make mistakes too.

"It matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be" - Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Looking Out for Inequality: Dumbledore fights for the underdog, the underrepresented. Those who

Looking Out for inequality: Dumbledore fights for the underdog, the underrepresented. Those who are vulnerable. He protects them with his magic and his decisions. As teachers, we must do this everyday as well. We must remember and apply this lesson from Dumbledore day in and day out. We dwell in potential.

"I am not worried, Harry," said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. "I am with you." - Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince

Showing Up: Even when he has an injury or personal struggle, Dumbledore puts the needs of others before his own. He shows up and is present for his students and staff despite personal challenges. The gift of showing up, being persistent even in challenging times, is inspiring in a time of conflicting information and strife in public education (and parenting).

"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends." - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Being Brave: It may be hard. You may be sitting in a staff meeting, a school board meeting, on a committee, or at a professional development training. Being brave looks like speaking up for kids and teachers and what you know is true. You have lots of experience and should have a voice in how your school works and how you can be the best teacher (or parent) possible. Trust your voice, be brave, and share it regularly. Just as Dumbledore would do.

In fact just today, I told my students about these lessons from Dumbledore. When something went wrong in the classroom (the technology did not work), a student simply said, "Dumbledore!" That was all I needed. I searched for what Dumbledore would do, and decided calm acceptance and patience was the way to go. I need to keep Dumbledore's lessons in mind each day as I teach, parent, be a colleague, partner and friend.

Did I miss any lessons from Dumbledore? Please let me know in the comments!

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