



Dear Teacher: An Open Letter

Dear Teacher:

Thank you.

Thank you for being a teacher, for choosing to use your time and talents to teach when you had so many other career options, most of which offer better pay, more comfortable working conditions, and much more respect from the general public than the teaching profession does.

Thank you for taking yet another exam to prove your competence, although you have already completed five or more years of college and hundreds of dollars' worth of standardized tests.

Thank you for getting up at 5 or 6 a.m. every day to work in a graceless room bathed in artificial light or a windowless closet or a dilapidated trailer that has been desperately labeled as a learning center—and for continuing to teach higher-level thinking skills and advanced academics, in spite of having test after test after test added to your curriculum requirements, without any additional instruction time.

Thank you for coping so often with ancient, malfunctioning, or nonexistent air conditioning and heating, and for eating your lunch out of a paper bag in a sparsely furnished lounge where a working coffeemaker is a treat and a functioning microwave oven is a luxury.

Thank you for spending your so-called time off grading papers; making lesson plans; and attending professional development conferences, committee meetings, restructuring meetings, parent–teacher conferences, school board meetings, and continuing education classes.

Thank you for working countless hours of unpaid overtime because it is the only way to do your job well and because you cannot do less—and for not reminding people constantly that if you were paid for your overtime you could retire tomorrow and never have to work again.

Thank you.

For spending your own money on pens and pencils, erasers and chalk, paper, tissues, bandages, birthday gifts, treats, clothing, shoes, eyeglasses—and a hundred other things that your students need but don't have.

For accepting the achy back, creaky knees, tired legs, and sore feet that go with the teaching territory.

For consistently giving respect to children who don't know what to do with it and don't realize what a valuable gift you are offering.

For caring about children whose own families don't care—or who never learned how to demonstrate their love.

For spending sleepless nights worrying about a struggling student, wondering what else you might do to help overcome the obstacles that life has placed in his or her path.

For raiding your own children's closets to find a pair of shoes or a jacket for a child who has none.

For putting your own family on hold while you help a struggling student.

For believing in the life-changing power of education.

For maintaining your belief that all students can learn if only we can learn how to teach them.

Thank you.

Thank you for giving hopeless children enough hope to continue struggling against the poverty, prejudice, abuse, alcoholism, hunger, and apathy that are a daily part of so many tender young lives.

For risking your job to give a child a much-needed hug.

For biting your tongue and counting to a million when a parent insists that your incompetence is responsible for the misbehavior of his or her undisciplined, spoiled, obnoxious child.

For taking on one of the most difficult, challenging, frustrating, emotionally exhausting, mentally draining, satisfying, wonderful, important, and precious jobs in the world.

Thank you for being a teacher.

You truly are the unsung American hero.

You have my respect and my gratitude,

LouAnne Johnson

