

DEAR Ms. D.

NOTE: This letter was written by a 25-year-old woman after watching a documentary on HBO titled: Journey Into Dyslexia. While the letter was never intended to be sent, I believe it contains a valuable message for parents, students and teachers.

Dear Ms. D.,

I am Samantha. You may not remember me; you were my fifth grade teacher in 1998. While I am sure whatever memory you have of me has long faded after years of teaching, you have made an indelible mark on education, my self-esteem and me. Before you assume I am extolling your virtues and teaching abilities, you should know that you are the worst teacher I have ever had, a title you win by a landslide. You instilled in me that I was inferior to other students, unintelligent, not worth your teaching time and too stupid to expect much of. Well, I am sad to say that the way you treated me, called me stupid, and belittled my intelligence hindered my initial ability to rise to my potential. As a fifth grader, if your teacher thinks you are dumb, who are you to think otherwise. I wish you were as insignificant in my life as I am sure I am in yours. But know this, I am not dumb and I was not a lost cause. While I struggle with believing in my own intelligence, thanks to your ignorance and deplorable behavior, I am a success. I went to Union College and am in my third year in law school. Yes, I am dyslexic and have ADHD, which makes learning in a traditional way a struggle, but I am not inferior and perhaps your lack of understanding reflects that you may be ill fit for teaching.

Without sounding overly dramatic and giving you any credit for my success, I want you to know that when I accomplish some big, like getting into a great college, scoring in the top percentile on the LSAT I think back to you forcing me to skip gym, the one area where I thrived, where I had self-confidence and where I was superior to other students in order to reprimand me tell me I will never be smart. So thank you for being blind to my potential and giving me the opportunity to prove you wrong, time and time again. Clearly, Ms. D., I am not dumb. I am intelligent, compassionate and am about to graduate law school. I still struggle, yes, reading takes me an inordinate amount of time, but I am not the fifth grader who you convinced was not smart enough to dream big. But I still have to remind myself that I am not dumb, that you and teachers who questioned my intelligence were wrong and should be embarrassed of yourselves. I hope with age, your ignorance faded and you matured beyond the point of calling an eleven-year-old child stupid. I have matured; I have realized that I am not dumb, that I have given your ignorant comments and horrendous treatment of me way too much credence. I have used your insults at times to justify not fully applying myself because the fear that I would fail would prove you right. However, as I enter the field of law,

a dream I had in fifth grade, but was embarrassed to admit out of fear that I would be told I was not smart enough, I realize how smart I am. Thank you for allowing me to prove you wrong. Turns out, I'm smarter than that ignorant, unqualified teacher who fostered not learning but shame and hatred of self rather than the ambition to dream big or not at all.

I hope you receive this letter as a lesson; yes, I believe I can teach you something; never cast doubt on a child's intelligence. I still bear the scars of your ignorant and simply put, abusive teaching which made waking up and going to school a daily struggle. I continue to question my intelligence at times and have to constantly remind myself, a difference in learning does not equate a deficiency in intelligence. I hope you have learned this. I implore you to foster all learning, to never create a reading group separate from the entire class and force them into the corner while the rest of the students read together. That was demeaning, embarrassing and belittling. I hope you are not the same Ms. Doty you were when I was a student, and if you are, and not much has changed, I implore you to switch professions.

While the letter is harsh and one I have thought about writing to you since high school I hope you receive this letter as advice of what never to do. I am a success, no thanks to you. As proud as I am and as much as I hate to admit it, you more than any teacher has made an indelible mark on me. My hope is that you can make an indelible mark on other students, but not the way you impacted me. I hope you can inspire those who learn differently and remind them, they are not "dumb" they are not "disabled" they simply need compassion, positive reinforcement and an advocate who reminds them they are smart and they have a gift.

I will continue to thrive. I am entering the field of criminal law, public defense to be particular. I hope you have grown smarter with age and more understanding. I hope you learned that there is no lost cause, only missed opportunities when teachers stifle learning and breed self-doubt. I wish you the best of luck and hope you are a very different teacher than the one I was forced to endure.

Sincerely,

Samantha

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