



The Best Benefits of Teaching

By Jan Wilton, Public School and Homeschool Representative

Can you recall teacher appreciation week during the last school year? I can! I was excited to be teaching in-person that week and could enjoy all the gifts of the week. In 2020, we had a drive-through appreciation and received a gift bag of items.

Gifts for Teachers

The year 2021 was so different. The teachers and staff were showered with something each day: popcorn, cookies, Whataburger breakfast taquitos, an Awesome Teacher clipboard with matching socks, soda pop, Chick-fil-A gift card, as well as McDonalds giving all teachers everywhere a free breakfast any day that week! This list does not include the other gifts a teacher may receive. What more can a teacher wish for? These items seem like fantastic perks for teachers.

As I reflected on that week, I began to see perks as kind and thoughtful tokens of appreciation. The true perks were those which came from the students. No, I am not talking about presents; I refer to the children's responses to the time spent in the daily teaching.

A Day in the Life

Each day I serve as an academic reading tutor, aka Title 1 small group reading teacher, to Grades 1-6. On some days, I feel as though I am beating my head against a brick wall! The students are not listening, and they do not seem to understand the strategies I am trying to convey at all. The first graders guess at the letter sounds, and many times they are not paying attention. The second grade class is filled with

hyperactive boys that don't get along. The third grade class is just coming back from recess. The fourth graders are always excited, and their focus is challenged. The fifth graders need encouragement just to stay awake and focused. Then there are the sixth graders, who are thinking only about graduating to middle school. It takes all my expertise and energy to keep each group on task.

Hasn't every teacher had those days when, no matter how animated and prepared you are, the students refused to be motivated? We all have had those days when we wonder why we are still teaching. Why do we spend hours in preparation?

The Best Perks

And then something clicks and we experience the reward of teaching!

We all look forward to the moment when a student says, "You mean that when I hear the sounds, I think of the letters, and I can spell the word!" or "I just got a 100 percent on the science test because I remembered how you told us to take time to think, read, and reread all of the passage and questions. I examined the questions and carefully chose the best answer!" The fourth, fifth and sixth graders became so interested in the story that they were incredibly sad when class time ended. Can you believe they even asked if they could finish the books we have been reading in small groups and read them during testing week? These were the real perks, the real gift to teachers for their efforts.

The popcorn, cookies, tacos, and stuff will be gone, but what will last are the memories of children learning the lessons we strived to teach. The memories of these children will be forever in my heart with Harold, Charlie, Carrie, and so many from the past. The benefits of teaching are the children's responses, not the other stuff.

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