Social and Emotional Development of Talented Students

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Some of Us March to Different Music

Erma Bombeck

Every family’s got at least one. The child who will not conform...the rebel...the loner...the renegade...the one who is different.

As a preschooler, he’s the one with the active thyroid...the one who gets locked in restrooms because he stayed behind to find out where the water went when you pushed down the handle. He’s the one who wanders away from home and gets his arm stuck in a piece of construction pipe. He’s the one who rejects store-bought toys in favor of taking the registers out and making tunnels out of old oatmeal boxes. He gets more lickings than all the other kids put together.

In school, he gets checkmarks for daydreaming, for not being neat, for not working up to capacity. It doesn’t seem to bother him. In his preoccupation with other things, he is unaware that he drives his family crazy arriving late for dinner every night...wearing his socks and underwear to bed to save time in the morning...cutting the grass only when he needs the money.

The older he gets, the less aware he becomes of his odds with the world. There aren’t enough weekends for his interests and his projects. In the garage is his “pumping heart” which he devised out of plastic sandwich bags, tubing and cake coloring. Cluttering the bedroom is the remains of the puppet show with the blanket (curtain) tucked in the top bunk bed. On the table is his latest book (it takes an entire afternoon to write them) “Floyd: The Story of an Insecure Snake with Bad Breath.”

Parents are awed by genius. They are content with an average child. They are compassionate toward the slow learner. But the child who stands apart is none of these only puzzles, confuses, and tries their patience.

They confess to each other their fears for his future, this child who is unpredictable and not only out-of-step with the world, but whose feet rarely touch the ground, “What’s to become of him?”

Some of them, with their insatiable curiosity and hardheaded drive, will beat paths of greatness and discovery, the likes of Winston Churchill and Michelangelo. Others won’t be great at all, but with their enthusiasm, imagination, creativity and penchant for living life to its fullest, who is to say they are not the first to touch the stars?

So he is accident-prone because he daydreams...he gets hit by animals because he’s foolishly trusting...maintains a closet that the insurance company refuses to insure. Look at him closely. He is something special to remind us all that life is a precious gift to be lived to its fullest.

And as David Thoreau said, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears.”
Dabrowski’s Theory of Emotional Development

Level I – Self Interest
Level II – Group Values
Level III – Transformational Growth
Level IV – Self-Actualization
Level V – Personality Ideal

Examples of Heightened Sensitivities (Piechowski, 2006)

Psychomotor

• Organic excess of energy
• Love of movement for its own sake
• Rapid speech
• Pursuit of intense physical activity
• Impulsiveness and restlessness
• Intense drive

Sensual

• Heightened experience of sensual pleasure
• Seeking sensual outlets for inner tension
• Desires for comfort, luxury, and refined beauty
• Pleasures of taste and smell

Imaginational

• Dreams are retold in detail and vivid color
• Predilection for fairy tales and magic
• Love of poetic language, rich imagery, fantasy
• Speaking and writing in metaphors
• Imaginary companions
• Inventiveness

Intellectual

• Persistence in asking probing questions
• Sharp sense of observation
• Independence of thought
• Striving for synthesis of knowledge
• Striving for more understanding and truth than with academic learning and achievement

Emotional

• Compassion and empathy
• Strong affective recall of past experiences
• Intense desire to offer love
• Fears, anxieties, depression
• Enthusiasm and excitation
• Intense loneliness
• Attachments to persons, living things, or places
• Great intensity of feelings

Social and Emotional Traits, Characteristics, and Behaviors Evidenced in Gifted Students

• High expectations of self and others – perfectionism
• Internal motivation and inner locus of control
• Emotional sensitivity, intensity, and depth
• Empathy
• Advanced levels of moral maturity with consistency between values and actions
• Strong need for self-actualization
• Highly developed sense of humor
• Resilience

Hébert (2011)
Books that Inspire and Guide: Tom’s Top 10 Favorites

*Odd Velvet* by Tara Calahan King & Mary Whitcomb (1998)
Key Issue(s): image management; creativity; being alone; peer relationships
Description: Velvet doesn’t exactly fit in, but soon she is able to show her classmates just how empowering it can be to simply be yourself.

*Weslandia* by Paul Fleischman (2002)
Key Issue(s): being labeled “different”; creativity; image management; heightened sensitivity; individuality;
Description: Entrepreneurial, creative Wesley stays true to himself when others want him to fit in. Eventually his teasers and tormenters realize that conformity may not be the best way to go.

*Tomas and the Library Lady* by Pat Mora (2000)
Key Issue(s): culturally diverse learners; positive role models; creativity
Description: Tomas, the young child in a family of migrant workers, develops a meaningful relationship with the librarian as he falls in love with books.

Key Issue(s): image management; gender role expectations; individuality
Description: Elizabeth, a strong-willed young princess, fights off a dragon and decides not to marry the arrogant, shallow-minded Prince Ronald.

*The Big Orange Splot* by Daniel Pinkwater (1999)
Key Issue(s): creativity; identity development
Description: Mr. Plumbean lived on a street where all the houses were identical. When a seagull drops a big splot of orange paint on the top of Mr. Plumbean’s home, he decides to paint his house to represent his life dreams. When his neighbors resist his ideas, he succeeds in slowly convincing them to do the same and the neighborhood becomes a far more interesting place where people are comfortable expressing their individuality.

*Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco (2001)
Key Issue(s): gifted/learning disabled; relationships with others; perseverance; artistic giftedness
Description: An autobiographical account of an artistic fifth grader’s struggle to learn to read.

*Ish* by Peter Reynolds (2004)
Key Issue(s): individuality, creativity
Description: A single reckless comment from an older brother turns a young boy’s artistic expressions into painful struggles. A younger sister helps him to recognize and appreciate the unique quality in his creativity.

*Testing the Ice* by Sharon Robinson (2009)
Key Issue(s): facing one’s fears
Description: As a testament to his courage, Jackie Robinson’s daughter shares memories of him, from his baseball career to the day he tests the ice for her, her brothers, and their friends.

*An Angel for Solomon Singer* by Cynthia Rylant (1996)
Key Issue(s): being alone; image management; relationships with others
Description: Homesick for the Midwest, Solomon Singer spends his days in New York City unhappy and dreaming of a happier life. One night he strolls into a special diner and eventually realizes that, once you find a friend, everything else tends to fall into place.

Key Issue(s): being labeled “different”; empathy in gifted children
Description: A young boy is shunned at school because he sprouts flowers every full moon. He makes a distinctive pair of shoes for a classmate who appreciates his special abilities.

*A Quiet Place* by Douglas Wood (2005)
Key Issue(s): being alone; identity development; creativity
Description: A vivid description of the special places that a child can go to be quiet, to be alone, and to imagine.

Hébert, 2011
Guiding Students to Self-Understanding through Biographies

Tomboy

I remember the first and only time I wrote to the president of the United States. I was in the fifth grade at the time and I sent a letter to Ronald Reagan. I have no idea what I said to him (he probably didn’t either); it was just one of those assignments popular with fifth grade teachers. I didn’t even know what a political party was or what the parties stood for (I now wonder if the politicians know). I was not one of those kids who stood up and said that someday I was going to be the president of the United States. Nevertheless, even at that age, I believed I could become whatever I wanted to become.

I had, what seemed to me, good reason to believe this. One Christmas when I was little I asked for a tool belt. I don’t know what my fascination was with being a carpenter, but I was obsessed with that one gift. I got it. My parents didn’t seem to have an opinion about what toys were or were not appropriate. My sister Rachel and I even received football uniforms for Christmas one year, because I was convinced that one day I would be good enough to play for the New England Patriots or the New York Giants. Santa obviously supported the idea. Or, I wanted to play basketball for the Boston Celtics. When I was in the third grade, I wrote the following letter to their general manager:

Dear Mr. Auerbach,

I really like watching the Celtics play. You do a really good job. I want you to know that I am going to be the first girl to play for the Boston Celtics.

Rebecca Lobo

Obviously, I was keeping all options open. It was the early eighties, and Larry Bird and company had just won one of their world championships. I was about eight or nine years old and really meant what I had written. I didn’t think of myself as a trailblazer; I was at an age when I knew no gender. I was at an age when I thought I could do anything I wanted, and what I wanted was to play sports. I was also at an age when the physical differences between boys and girls were not very significant. In the summer I was perfectly comfortable without a shirt on shooting baskets in our driveway with my brother. Our chests looked pretty much the same. (Thank God that is no longer the case, and God, my brother thanks you, too.) Certainly taller, and probably stronger, than any of the boys in my class, I did not have any reason to think these circumstances would change. I also still believed in Santa Claus.

Now I’m a few years older and wiser. I’ve realized that I simply cannot play on a men’s professional basketball team, but it wasn’t easy to convince me of this. I first saw the physical differences between the men’s and women’s games “up close and personal” the spring of my sophomore year in college. I was sitting in Gampel Pavilion after a shooting workout and our men’s team was about to play pickup. They had only nine people and asked me if I’d like to join them. I ran to get my ankles taped and returned ready for action. The first time I got the ball on offense I was about four feet from the basket and took a hook shot that basically would have been unblockable in the women’s game. A second after it left my hand I saw it fly in the opposite direction as Rudy Johnson leaped in the air and rejected it. After we ran down court and got ready to play defense, I got into position in the lane. Then I saw Donny Marshall drive past me with the basketball. I was not about to get in the way of this 225-pound guy.

My next time down the court my nose was broken. As one of my teammates went up for a layup, I got on the other side of the hoop, in position to get the rebound in case he missed, I never expected him to hang in the air long enough to come over to my side of the basket before shooting. Upon landing, his shoulder went straight into my nose. It started bleeding immediately and I ran to the training room. I didn’t start crying until I looked in to the mirror and saw a nose shaped like the letter S on my face. (It was the first of many broken noses for me.) I begged the school doctor to make my nose straight again. He understood my concern; he didn’t want me to spend the rest of my life tilting my head in the same direction I wanted to kiss. He thought that a young woman needed to keep her options open.

In the third grade I thought I could compete with the men on that level. Now I realize that I can’t, although one men’s pro basketball team drafted me at the end of my senior year at UConn. It was flattering, but I knew it was a publicity stunt.

Growing up, I was definitely a tomboy. I liked playing sports and doing anything active. That same year I wrote to President Reagan, I was the only girl who sat with the boys at lunch. Our classroom was assigned two long tables in the cafeteria, and I always chose to sit with the boys. After all, they were the ones I played games with at recess and sat with during classes. At that time, there were soccer and football for boys, but nothing for girls to do, so along with a few boys, I organized races and kickball. The girls were more into hanging around the jungle gym and talking. I never imagined there was anything peculiar about being friends with the guys; I never even gave it a second thought. But one
day my teacher called me to her desk. I thought she was going to give me my grades just like she did with everyone else in the class. She gave me more than that.

It was clear from the start of the year, I think, that she didn’t like me. Earlier that year, in front of the whole class she had accused me of cheating on a test. I had gone home and complained to my mother. Since it was the beginning of the year, she didn’t want me to get off to a bad start. So she called and left a message for the teacher at the school. The next day, this teacher called out my name and, again in front of the whole class, asked me why my mother had called. I told her I didn’t know why. She then hauled me out into the hall and asked me again. I said that I guessed it was because she had accused me of cheating when I hadn’t. Then she said that if I were going to go home and tell my mother everything that happened in her class, it was going to be a long year.

The day she called me to the front of the class, she said things to me that she didn’t say to the others. After giving me my report card (I got very good grades), she proceeded to tell me that I was too much of a tomboy. She said that I should dress and act more like a girl. She asked me why I was the only one who sat with the boys at lunch. She addressed my appearance and the way I behaved. She said I had to change. I put my head down and didn’t answer or look at her.

I wasn’t getting into trouble (at least not too much) or slacking in school. I wasn’t breaking any rules I knew about. But for a reason that totally angered and confused me at the time, my teacher was “concerned.”

I went home and told my mother what this teacher had said to me. I’ll never forget her response because it was even more shocking than my teacher’s comments. As I had stood in front of the teacher listening to her, I knew my mother well enough to know that I could count on her to back me up. I knew she would tell me it was perfectly fine to dress like a boy, but I never expected the intensity of her response. Mom became furious. She found my father and repeated the story to him. She kept saying how she could not believe the nerve of my teacher. My mother was so angry that I wished I hadn’t told her. I was afraid she would say something to my teacher and, remembering the teacher’s threat, that I would get into even more trouble. Kids are totally powerless in those kinds of situations. Adults sometimes forget this but I don’t think I ever will.

If I were to get a letter now from a young girl describing a similar kind of prejudice, I would go to her school and tell that girl’s teacher that she (or he) was wrong. It is impossible to expect a young boy or girl to stand up for him- or herself, particularly in front of classmates. It is equally impossible to expect that you can legislate a change in others’ attitudes. The only thing that can make a difference is the support of parents, school principals, and community leaders. Nobody else can protect a kid’s sense of self.

Back then, I had yet to give much thought about what it meant to be a girl as opposed to a boy. (In fact, it wasn’t until I got to high school that the whole issue of femininity came up. And even then, questions about it seemed centered on what kind of hairstyle I chose or what kind of makeup I might wear.) My mother raised her children to believe they could be anything they wanted. Now she had to deal with a teacher who was sending a very different message. Good thing my mom’s message sounded louder and clearer in my head than this teacher’s. If I had listened to the wrong woman, I would probably have thought there was something wrong or unfeminine about playing basketball. I would have thought there was something wrong with having friends who were boys. Luckily, my mom taught me well. I knew that there was nothing wrong with who I was.

I didn’t change much after that lecture from my teacher. At the same time, I made sure I was no longer the only girl sitting with the boys at lunch, as I had arranged to have a couple of my girl friends join me at the boy’s table. I didn’t stop talking to the boys in my class. If anything, I talked to them more. Just seeing my mother’s response to what my teacher said hammered home to me that I was not to listen to that teacher. My teacher was right to say that one person in the class had to change. That one person was not the student. That one person was the teacher. I hope she sees now what I have made of myself. I hope she realizes that it was my difference from the girl she wanted me to become that got me where I am today.

As a ten-year-old girl, I can’t imagine what I had to say to President Reagan. Like the rules of where to sit, how to dress, and who to talk to, the idea of the president of the United States seemed to have nothing to do with me, particularly since I wasn’t as interested in becoming president as I was in playing ball for the Celtics. I’m beginning to understand, however, that our country’s leaders have a lot to do with who we are and who we can become. A good president, I suppose, can be a lot like a good teacher, a good principal, or a good coach.

I’m forced to think about such things on a flight to Washington to job with President Clinton. I missed our team’s visit to the White House because I was in Europe with the USA National Team. Unbeknownst to me, ever since that visit UConn alumni in Washington had been working with Connecticut’s senators and representatives, trying to set up a time for me to meet the president. They had been touching base with my brother, Jason, but he didn’t tell me exactly what they were up to. It was hard because all the planning took place right after I returned from Europe with the National Team when I felt like there were a million strings attached to my body and a million hands pulling them in all different
directions. I voiced my frustrations to my brother about my schedule, and apparently he felt it was better if he didn’t mention that another string was attached.

So, following two weeks of nonstop appearances in Connecticut and day trips to New York for various events, my brother informed me of the possibility of meeting the president. We were in Boston for yet another banquet and he casually asked me if I would like to go running with the president. I was so tired and worn out that I said no. Of course, I didn’t think that the offer was in any way serious. Two days later, when he told me that we were leaving for Washington, I felt a bit lost and overwhelmed. It wouldn’t be the first or the last time I felt that way.

I met Jason and his boss David at their office and we drove together to the airport. Since the season ended I had gotten quite accustomed to flying first class, so I could do nothing but laugh when we pulled up to the Valujet terminal. The plane was late in arriving so the three of us chatted and joked while we waited. We were quite certain that we were the only people in the airport who were going to meet the president. If not, we knew that any others were on a different airline! Fortunately, my brother got the seat next to the woman who never stopped talking, and I was able to sleep the entire flight. We arrived at the UConn Alumni Club about half an hour late. It was a good opportunity to meet people and say a lot of thank you’s as they continually congratulated me on our team’s success. The number of people’s lives that were touched by our basketball team will never cease to amaze me. I eventually crawled into bed around midnight. While I was lying in bed it finally hit me that in seven short hours I would be lacing up my Reeboks for a run with the president. Good thing I was completely exhausted or there is no way I would have fallen asleep.

We sat in a room and waited for further instructions. Two other people who were running with the president that morning waited with us. One was a woman whose husband was in the military and was about to be shipped off somewhere, and the other was an old friend of the president’s from Arkansas. At about 7:30 am. I looked up and saw President Clinton walk through the doorway. He was yawning and stretching his arms over his head like most people do right after waking up. He wore black sweat pants and a black tee shirt, and I was pleased to see the UConn women’s basketball National Champions hat given to him by my team perched on his head. His face was very thin, but he basically looked exactly like he did on television. I don’t know why he wouldn’t have. He was fairly tall, about 6’2”, and much thinner in person than I had imagined. I stood and greeted him. He asked me when I was going to Oxford. Apparently he aide who remembered to give him the UConn hat forgot to tell him that the Rhodes people booted me from consideration back in November. He also commented on our season and the team’s visit to the White House.

The three invited runners and Mr. Clinton got into his limousine and took a ten minute ride to the site of our jog. He chatted with us the whole time. The more he spoke, the more comfortable I felt. He talked about getting to sleep late because he was waiting up for Chelsea to get home the night before. This struck me as funny because my dad always had the same difficulty sleeping when his kids were out. He couldn’t slip into his comfortable snore until all his children were home. The president also voiced his frustration with the fact that he was no longer able to run in downtown D.C. now that a person had opened fire on the White House with an automatic weapon. (I made no comparison to my father at this point.) At last, we reached the park where we were to run.

When we got out of the car, I realized how many people were with us. There had been police cars and vans following the limo the whole time. I hadn’t really noticed them before. I felt bad that our president needs this kind of security, although I must admit I never felt so safe preparing to go for a jog.

We started our run and Jason and David were able to join in. I ran behind the president for the first one and a half miles, with the fear of catching the president’s legs and tripping him never far from my mind. That would have been great for my image – I would have gone from Rebecca Lobo: the basketball player from Connecticut, to Rebecca Lobo: the woman who had shown up in a “Bob Dole for President” car and tripped Mr. Clinton from behind.

Right before we reached the press, the president invited me to run beside him. I was on his right when we reached the horde of photographers and journalists shouting questions to him about some vote. He smiled and ignored their inquiries. When we were out of earshot he remarked, “I never answer their questions.” I had to laugh. We continued to chat until we finished the three-mile jog. I was so caught up in our run that I never noticed the boats on the river or the agents with binoculars along the riverbank looking for anything suspicious. What I did notice were the people’s faces as we ran by them. Some were completely amazed while others acted as if they saw the president every day. I appreciated the ones who were nonchalant. They realized the president was a human being just like they were. Then again, perhaps they were just Republicans.
My brother and David joined us in the limousine for the ride back to the White House. The limo was a bit cramped since four of the six people in it were over six feet tall. It also smelled quite a bit worse than the rose garden we were to walk through as soon as we arrived at the president’s home. I don’t remember if the windows in the car were tinted, but they didn’t need to be because we fogged them up so completely on the return trip. The gossip columnists would have had a field day if they had seen the president’s limousine drive by with those windows.

When we arrived, the president gave us a personal tour of the Oval Office and his private office. He took great pride in many of the personal objects on his shelves and delighted in giving us detailed descriptions of them. After about forty-five minutes, the president, responding to the impatience of one of his aides, went to start the rest of his day. I had been somewhat wary of keeping him from his job but he seemed a little reluctant to go. Afterward, we took a tour of the rest of the White House and then began the journey home. I no longer felt as oppressed as I had earlier, nor did I feel the tug of those millions of strings in the same way after that. Instead, as I settled down in my seat of a puddle-jumper airline, I felt relaxed and happy. Looking around, Jason, David and I smiled and shared the secret pleasure of the day. Jason craned his head over the back of his seat and remarked, “Not a bad twenty-four hours, huh, Bec?!?”

When I wrote that letter to Ronald Reagan, I may not have imagined that I would one day run with the president of the United States. I may not have dreamed that I would get a personal tour of the White House. However, I was never told by my parents that I could NOT do any of these things. I was never told by my parents that I could NOT play for the Boston Celtics or the New York Giants. If I had heard such words, then perhaps I would have listened to my teacher, started having doubts about my femininity, whatever. I never would have played basketball. I never would have run with the president. I never would have written a book.

When I look back, I see that growing up doesn’t happen all at once or even gradually, but in fits and starts. The year I wrote to President Reagan, wrote the note about the substitute teacher’s mustache, and was told to dress and act more like a lady, was also the year I stopped believing in Santa Claus. I came home from school one day and found my mother in the kitchen cooking dinner. I put my books down and asked her in a rush of words:

“Mom, the kids were talking at school and they said there was no Santa Claus. I said there was no Santa Claus, too, but then I remember that time when we didn’t have a lot of money for Christmas, but we still got the Ping-Pong table. So people are telling me there is no Santa Claus and I kind of think there is no Santa, but then things happen where I think there is one. So is there?

My mom stopped stirring the pot on the stove and looked me straight in the eye and told me there was no such thing as Santa Claus. I started bawling and before I knew it she was crying, too. Just because she’s my mom, I guess. When we finally stopped she said, “But promise me not to tell Jason or your father because they don’t know.” I promised her.

Even without Santa and the Boston Celtics, I was taught that anything was possible. I wasn’t born with that knowledge, I was taught it. Each day something happens in my life that proves it to be true.

Tony: A Dilemma for Parents and Teachers

Tony has just turned sixteen. He is a tenth grader at a suburban high school known for both academic excellence and a strong sports program. Tony has always shown superior verbal abilities and is also an outstanding soccer player. He is tall, with dirty blond hair that is long in the front and often hangs over his right eye. When he talks, his gaze is usually directed toward his Nike sneakers. His voice is soft, and sometimes he mumbles his words. When he is more animated, which is not often, he may look up and make eye contact. Tony is like a traveler standing outside a door, uncomfortable in the cold, but tentative about coming in.

It is April, approaching the last grading period of the year. Tony has been sent for counseling because his grades are slipping. His parents and guidance counselor don’t know why and wonder whether I can figure it out. In looking through Tony’s school file, I see that his teacher’s comments show a pattern of concern over the gap between his ability and his performance as a student.

"Some of your teachers thought I should talk with you."
"Yeah. I figured. My dad told me I would have to see you."
"Tell me what’s going on."
"I’m doing really badly in English."
"Tell me."
"Well, I’m kind of flunking."
"Why?"
"Well, there was this big paper I was supposed to do, and I couldn’t get it done, and now my grade for the semester is ruined."

His failure might not have been a cause of concern in some cases, but Tony’s test scores have always been quite high. Reading comprehension has been a particular strength, with scores that place him among the top 2 percent of students in the country. But it’s not just that he didn’t complete the one paper. Tony has been pretty much of a no-show all year more so in English than in other subjects, but more or less across the board. Underachievement of this sort tends to set teachers off: they take it personally. From their comments, it’s clear that they like Tony but are frustrated. One end-of-the-year comment from his ninth-grade English teacher reads: "In class I don’t hear as much from Tony as I used to. It hasn’t been hurting his writing, but more participation ought to help him extend his ideas even further." His advisor sums up the ninth-grade year this way: "I am concerned that, although Tony is making an effort, the work is slipping away from him and that he may be sensing some real frustration."

"Do you like English? Is Mr. Roberts a good teacher?"
"Yeah, I like English and all, but his class is kind of boring. The books we have to read are pretty stupid. It’s like all the books are about like how we screwed the Indians, or they’re by some other people that were oppressed. They’re not very good."
"What kind of books do you like?"
"Stephen King is pretty cool."

When we meet together with his father, he is especially worried, since the eleventh-grade year is pivotal in terms of getting into college. His dad talks about the situation in the context of soccer playing. Tony had made the varsity as a freshman, and his father thinks Tony has enough talent to get a soccer scholarship to a good college.

"But with those grades, he’ll screw himself," says Tony’s father. "The good schools won’t even want to look at him. I could have bought a Cadillac with all the money I’ve spent on soccer camps, and now it’s going down the toilet."

He says all of this as if Tony weren’t even in the room.
His disregard for Tony’s feelings is startling. Tony’s father had somehow come to view him as a commodity. As part of my evaluation of Tony, I give him a picture from a stack on the desk an illustration of a casually dressed man standing alone leaning against a wall and ask him to write about it. His story is well written, with few spelling or grammatical errors, but its content is unnerving:

> John had been housed in a federal penitentiary for eight years. He wasn’t your average prisoner. He wasn’t insane, and he wasn’t even guilty. He just went about his business quietly, and never got into trouble with the guards. None of the inmates give him trouble. Not even the most vicious ones. He had one good friend named Peter, but one day the guards killed him. Now he knew that he would have to escape or he would die, too.

It’s clear that Tony feels locked away and desperate. When I look at him, I see a boy who ought to be mad as hell at his father for being so callous and emotionally absent, or at least sad and I see a boy who could be talking about all of this to his friends to relieve some of the pressure that’s building up. Instead, he is just confused. He doesn’t know what’s going on with himself.

> "Why do you think your grades are so bad?"
> "I don’t know. I just have to work harder, I guess. I can be pretty disorganized. I was really trying at the beginning of the semester, but that paper really screwed me. I guess the Ivy Leagues not in the cards.”
> "How have you been feeling about all of this?"
> "I don’t know. I’m usually pretty tired. I stay up late trying to get my work done, not that it helps much. So I’m tired in school. That doesn’t help my enthusiasm much.”
> "Does any of it bother you?"
> "I don’t know. I’d like to get better grades, I guess.”

These are very powerful . . . Implement whatever you can.

Take a 10-30 minute walk every day. And while you walk, smile. It is the ultimate anti-depressant.

Sit in silence for at least 10 minutes each day.

Tape your late night shows and get more sleep.

When you wake up in the morning, complete the following statement, “My purpose is to . . . today.”

Live with the 3E’s – Energy, Enthusiasm, and Empathy.

Play more games and read more books than you did last year.

Make time to practice meditation, yoga, tai chi, and prayer. They provide us with daily fuel for our busy lives.

Spend more time with people over the age of 70 and under the age of 6.

Dream more while you are awake.

Eat more foods that grow on trees and plants and eat less food that is manufactured in plants.

Drink green tea and plenty of water. Eat blueberries, wild Alaskan salmon, broccoli, almonds and walnuts.

Try to make at least 3 people smile each day.

Clear your clutter from your house, your car, your desk and let new and flowing energy into your life.

Don’t waste your precious energy on gossip, energy vampires, issues of the past, negative thoughts or things you cannot control. Instead invest your energy in the positive present moment.

Realize that life is a school and you are here to learn. Problems are simply part of the curriculum that appear and fade away like algebra class but the lessons you learn will last a lifetime.

Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a college kid with a maxed out charge card.

Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.

Don’t take yourself so seriously. No one else does.

You don’t have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.

Make peace with your past so it won’t spoil the present.

Don’t compare your life to others’. You have no idea what their journey is all about.

No one is in charge of your happiness except you.

Frame every so-called disaster: “In 5 years, will this matter?”

Forgive everyone for everything.

What other people think of you is none of your business.
Social & Emotional Development of Talented Students

Helpful Resources


Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you’re supposed to be and embrace who you are.* Center City, MN: Hazelden.


