

'She believed in every one of us': ex-pupils on their inspirational teachers

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Adele is one of the most talented and famous female singers in the world. Do you know where she is from? Match the singers with their nationalities.

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| 1. Adele | a. Australian |
| 2. Rihanna | b. Colombian |
| 3. Sia | c. Canadian |
| 4. Ariana Grande | d. British |
| 5. Shakira | e. American |
| 6. Celine Dion | f. Barbadian |

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

bully instrumental lasting peer spiral
spot on transition trigger upbeat viral

1. If something goes _____, it is shared by a lot of people on the Internet.
2. If circumstances _____ something, they make it happen.
3. If something has a _____ impact, it continues to have an effect for a long time.
4. An _____ person is happy and positive.
5. If a person is _____ in something, they are involved in an important way in making it happen.
6. A _____ is someone who frightens or hurts someone who is smaller or weaker than they are.
7. A _____ is the process of changing from one situation to another.
8. A downward _____ is a situation that gets worse and worse.
9. A _____ is someone who belongs to the same social or professional group as another person.
10. If someone is _____, they are absolutely correct.

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After Adele's tearful reunion with a former teacher, four readers recall their own school memories

Jamie Grierson

22 November, 2021

- 1 "So cool, so engaging." That's how the singer Adele described her English teacher at her school in south-west London, Ms McDonald, when asked who had inspired her. Answering a question from the actor Emma Thompson, Adele said: "She really made us care, and we knew that she cared about us and stuff like that." Images of the singer breaking down in tears when McDonald surprised her on stage at the London Palladium have gone viral, triggering conversations about the impact teachers can have on the lives of their pupils.
- 2 Max Daniels, 28, a communications consultant, described how the humanity shown by his teacher Miss Coyle had a lasting impact. "Miss Coyle was this upbeat, enthusiastic Irish woman who taught me English and media studies," he said. "I could go on about how fun she made classes or how she injected life into her lessons, but the impact they had was far more personal. My father passed away when I was 14 and, during a parents' evening shortly after, Miss Coyle gave my mum a huge hug. It was something that made me realize how much she cared about the lives of the people she taught."
- 3 Sometimes teachers can be instrumental in helping pupils face deep, personal challenges. Jack Haywood, a 29-year-old doctor, said his last teacher at primary school, Miss Stuart, helped him deal with anxieties about his sexuality at a young age.
- 4 "Miss Stuart would regularly pull me aside and talk to me one-to-one, giving me the courage to push on. She told me it was OK if I was gay and that there was nothing to be afraid of. Alongside dealing with the bullies, she made me feel safe and valued. Because of her, leaving primary school was a smooth transition, and I worked hard all the way through secondary school because of the confidence and reassurance she gave me."
- 5 Haywood added: "My schools were in a small town in Scotland, and I have since moved to London to go to medical school and I am now a public health doctor. I have absolutely no doubt that if Miss Stuart had not provided me with the push I needed, I was heading for a downward spiral and I wouldn't be where I am today. So thank you, Miss Stuart. I am sure you have inspired and motivated many more after me."
- 6 Sophie Smith-Tong, 37, a primary-school teacher who lives in London and the founder of a centre for educators and their families, Mindfulness for Learning, said her teacher Ms Rea changed her journey in education.
- 7 "We met at 13 when, in a drama lesson, she had dressed up a classroom as a police station," she said. "She has continued to inspire me throughout my life. She is the reason that I realized I could apply to go to university and that I had something to offer even though I felt so different to all of my peers."
- 8 "She took me to perform my first professional theatre production at the Edinburgh Festival at 16. She believed in every single one of us and it gave us the space to fly our own individual journeys. We are still friends 24 years on and she still has a major impact on the life decisions I make today. She is the reason I created Mindfulness for Learning."
- 9 For Mandeep Rai, her teacher Mr Holmes helped her with the challenges of being a child of immigrants to the UK, particularly language difficulties. The 39-year-old, who is a global head of function for a pharmaceutical firm, said: "English was not my first language – I was born in the UK but my parents insisted we speak Punjabi at home to ensure I could communicate with my grandparents. They felt it their duty to ensure they passed on their mother tongue to their children."
- 10 "This meant I only learned to speak English when I started school at around three years old. I struggled with English, in particular vocabulary. In my first year of secondary school, I did poorly in an end-of-term geography exam, which surprised my teacher Mr Holmes as I was usually the first to raise my hand in class and clearly enjoyed the topic."

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- 11 "He encouraged me to read as much as I could, anything I enjoyed, to better understand sentence structure and improve my vocabulary," Rai said. "It was tough feedback for an 11-year-old but he was spot on. I took his advice and, in short, I think it was a huge help in passing exams and performing well in the workplace."

First published in *The Guardian*, 22/11/2021

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What did Adele think of her English teacher?
2. What personal tragedy did Max Daniels suffer when he was fourteen?
3. In what way did his teacher show her humanity?
4. What anxiety did Jack Heywood experience when he was young?
5. How did his teacher help him to overcome this anxiety?
6. What does Haywood do now?
7. What is Mindfulness for Learning?
8. What difficulties did Mandeep Rai experience as a young child?
9. Why did her parents insist they should speak Punjabi at home?
10. What did her teacher encourage her to do?

4 Key language

a. Match the verbs with their meanings.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. break down | a. die |
| 2. push on | b. talk for a long time about something |
| 3. pass away | c. give someone something that you have been given |
| 4. pass on | d. go towards something |
| 5. go on about | e. start crying |
| 6. head for | f. continue doing something |

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "After your parents, your first teacher is probably the most important person in your life."
- "You never forget a good teacher."
- "Good teaching isn't just knowing your subject."

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6 In your own words

- a. Think of a teacher (good or not so good) who has influenced your life in some way. Write a short account (150 words) of what they taught you and how that has affected your life in some way.