

A Letter to My Incoming Students

By [Christina Torres](#) on August 6, 2016 7:29 AM from [Edweek Teacher](#) (online)

My Dears,

I'm so excited to welcome you into our classroom this year! I'm excited to get to know you or, for some of you, get reacquainted with the wonderful humans you are becoming.

Here are three important truths I want you to know:

1. **Things are going to get real this year.** I'll be honest, we're going to enter into some uncomfortable conversations. In some ways, that's part of growing up. When I was your age, I heard all kind of things about me that hurt-- about my race, or my parents, or the way I looked. Dealing with that stuff is part of growing up, and so we're going to talk about why those things happen and how to deal with them. I want to make sure you leave this room as mentally prepped to know and love yourself as possible.

We also have a unique opportunity, however. **Think of this: out of all the people in the world, the universe conspired to bring the group of us together in this room right now.** There are a million other ways the day could have gone-- you could've been late for school, I could've taken the job in San Francisco instead of here, the person next to you could have gone to another school. A million little things had to happen for you to end up in the room with each other.

And you all bring something special to this classroom. You bring stories from your life and your family's history. You bring a cultural set of perspectives and beliefs that, literally, no one else in the world shares. You have something special and wonderful to add to our discussion, and to not challenge, push, and learn from those unique beliefs would be criminal.

So, I'll be honest, some of my motives are a little selfish. I want to learn from all of you as much as possible, which means we're going to try and talk about the things that make us tick. It might get uncomfortable and we might get frustrated, but I think if we all see each other as filled with *some* kind of knowledge and remember that everyone has a story, we'll be able to get through it.

2. **It is your job to ask tough questions-- especially of me.** I know, normally as the teacher I'm supposed to talk to you about my rules (or "norms" or "procedures" or any other of the words we use to mean "a set of behaviors I want you to follow"). Yes, to make things run smoothly, there are some norms that would be good for you to follow.

Still, like I said, we're going to have some tough conversations. **Here's an important thing to know: I may not be right.** I'm only human, just like you. I know that I'm not always going to be right. I'm quite a bit older than you (makes dinosaur noises), but that doesn't mean I always have the answer or even know more about a topic. I want you to know that you should be asking me tough questions, especially, "why?"

A few years ago, I was reading The Giver with a group of 7th graders. One of them raised their hand, and asked me a question about the book and presented me with a possible theory. Everyone looked at me, expectant that I would confirm or deny their belief. Here's the thing: **the idea had never once crossed my mind. I had never even *considered* the theory before!** Though this student was 15 years younger than me, they had completely blown my mind about a book that I had read at least 50 times.

This is what I'm talking about: **you should always share your opinions or thoughts with me, or feel free to ask me questions.** We may not always see eye-to-eye, but I truly believe we'll all be better for it.

3. **I adore all of you.** Truly. I may not always show it (I am human after all), but I hope you know that I wake up every single morning and feel lucky that I get to spend the day with you. Even when we drive each other nuts. Even when I'm frustrated and tired. Even when you all don't do your homework and I'm just like, "BUT WHY FAM?!"

Even on those days, I look up at the blue of the sky over Hawaii and the green of Diamond Head and thank my lucky stars that you and this work are in my life.



So, let's get to work.

With lots of love,

Ms. Torres