



# Teacher Feature

HIGH SCHOOL  
ENGLISH &  
DRAMA

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WARREN AREA HIGH SCHOOL

**A**n oft-quoted proverb indicates that knowledge is power, but I find language—the tool for effective communication of that knowledge—can hold an even greater power. The ability to express myself logically, creatively, and thoroughly is one of the pillars of my personal contentment.

My name is Laura Demers—mother, wife, teacher. These are the consequential roles that best define me, at this point in my life. Ten years ago, I would have identified myself simply as “a writer,” as I was then unaware of the transformations that lay ahead.

In June, 1996, two weeks after receiving my Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, I began my career as a technical writer and editor in the technology industry. After quickly moving up the ranks, I realized that my passion for language was traveling in the wrong direction. What could be accomplished in software manuals and training modules could not reflect my true fascination with the power of our language. It was time to rethink my relationship with the words that captured me. There it was, the epiphany: those words captured rather than captivated me. I wanted more. Something more rewarding, more exciting, more important. Teaching!

In early 2003, my husband and I said good-bye to North Carolina and moved to Warren, the home town I left when I was 18. Three months after receiving my

Secondary English teaching certificate from Edinboro University in May, 2004, I entered my own classroom at Warren Area High School, my own alma mater.

The classroom environment I strive to create is challenging, rewarding, creative, and fun. A focal point in my Honors and Academic 10 English classes is analysis. The ability to analyze something—whether it's a piece of literature, a problem at work, or a situation with a friend—is essential for true comprehension and problem solving. Without this ability, we can only summarize. Our society requires people who can challenge rather than restate what we know, people who can expand rather than identify the limits.

Creativity also expands the limits of traditional education, allowing students to leave their own mark. One way in which I help students leave their creative mark is by advising the Dragon yearbook staff, a dedicated group of volunteers. The yearbook is a tremendous year-long responsibility, one I've enjoyed for four years. Working on the yearbook is an exciting way for students to develop creative skills in photography, design, and writing.

Another way I encourage students to develop their creativity is in my Creative Writing class, which allows students to explore the art of poetry, fiction, and personal expression. I also teach Drama classes, which help students develop advanced communication skills in ways that press the limits of their comfort zone. Additionally, I am the Drama Club advi-

sor and the school theater director.

Members of National Honor Society are students who illustrate the benefits of trying. These outstanding students are recognized for their scholarship, character, service, and leadership. As their advisor, I have the privilege of orchestrating their induction ceremonies and working with them in their group community service projects.

I'm reminded of the power of language every day as I watch my 18-month-old son develop his own repertoire of vocabulary and expression. His focus, determination, excitement, and curiosity as we read together often overwhelm me. Within moments of waking, he asks to “read-y!” I only wish more students would walk into class and ask if we could “read-y.” When I do see students discover their own passion for language, I am reminded of how utterly awesome it is to be a teacher.

The best advice I have for parents is to read with your child. Read books, read signs, read directions, read labels, read pictures, read everything! Just read. Use that time together to teach your child about all aspects of language by modeling appropriate vocabulary, inflection, and non-verbal communication. Show them how exciting language can be as it offers opportunity for exploration. Children who grow up with books grow up with an appreciation for the complexities and power of our language. ■



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