

Building Empathy Through Writing: An Exercise

Have your students read the passage below. Ask them to rewrite the passage from the point of view of Charlie, then Sam, then the teacher- Mr. or Ms. Hudson. Then ask them to write what happens next in the scene. Charlie, Sam and Mr./Ms. Hudson can be any gender the student chooses.

To me, there was one good thing about second period and that was my seat, just behind Charlie. Charlie is tall and has big hair and likes to answer questions in class. It's easy to hide behind Charlie. Mr./Ms. Hudson didn't call on me a single time until the day that Sam showed up.

Sam had that new-kid, deer-in-the headlights look. Sam had on blue jeans that you could tell were new but were trying to look like they were old—with three matching holes in each pants leg. The shirt was definitely not dress code. Sam's Converse shoes were covered in blue-inked triangles and drawings of crows in every pose.

"Sam just moved here from Montana," Mr./Ms. Hudson said. "Let's make our new student feel welcome. Who wants to be Sam's school ambassador?"

No one answered.

Mr./Ms. Hudson's eyes scanned the room and landed on Charlie. For the first time ever, Charlie didn't say a word. His/her fingers were shaking. He/she tried to cover it up by fake-stretching, but the shake was still there.

Mr./Ms. Hudson took one step to the left and her/his eyes landed on me. “Chris, I know you’ll do a great job.” Mr./Ms. Hudson guided Sam to the empty desk beside me.

I tried to make eye contact, but Sam just looked down. I pointed to his/her shoes. “Did you do those yourself?”

Slowly, Sam nodded and held out a blue pen.