An Unusually Vexing Homework Assignment At The Willows School

Description



The Declaration of Independence

Not long ago, my 5th grade daughter came upstairs and said in a shaky voice that she needed help with her homework, due the next day. This isn't her usual pattern or demeanor. Normally, she goes into her room and does her homework, popping out if she has a question. So, when I saw her face, I knew she wanted help with the assignment.

"l have to memorize the Preamble to the Declaration Of Independence,†she said in a quivering voice. Handing me a paper with the Preamble on it, she said she needed to understand its words before she could memorize it. The class is studying the American Revolution so the assignment fit with the theme she's been working on. What didn't fit was the rote memorization aspect of the homework.

We sat together on the bed and went though the incredible Preamble, line by line. I explained each premise and we talked about how America is unique and unduplicated because of the Declaration of Independence. I explained the concept of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.†Thinking about it gave me chills. It is carefully nuanced and profound. It is, at once, both simple and stunningly complex. Imperfect, but as close to perfect as any country has come. This document has powered through the decades, helping define who we are as a nation.

Despite my daughter's uneasiness with the assignment, I loved sitting with her talking about the history of our country, written in antiquated language we no longer use, but whose eloquence and brilliance still guides our founding principles.

The next morning, my daughter woke up and asked to recite the Preamble. In a sing-song voice, she nailed it. Off to school we went.

After school, I asked her how the test went. "Great†she said as if the previous night had been

unnecessary. That's my girl!

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