

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.

I 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.

I was reminded why we chose The Willows for our kids. I've written about [homework](#) previously. The teaching style is [incredibly creative](#) and inspiring, using big concepts and ideas to help kids learn. Memorizing is used to support an assignment, not for its own sake or to make work. Of course, this was a very worthy homework assignment. It was just atypical for our school. Thankfully, my daughter isn't used to the type of endless memorization I grew up with.

We sat together on the bed and went through 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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