

Teacher vs. Mom: The Back-to-School Battle

I woke up on August 10th from a horrible nightmare. It was the first day of school and I had nothing planned for my art class. I got out some papers and crayons and told the students to draw whatever they wanted. The 4-year-olds just stared at me, the 8th graders laughed, and Collin, my son and 1st grade student, cried.

This wasn't the first time I found myself awakened from a deep sleep, covered in sweat and panting because I'd just escaped a fictitious, yet painfully realistic experience in the land of nod. But it was the first time my subconscious reminded me in my dreams that I was both a teacher and a mom, all at once; all in the same place.

It was 4:00 a.m. and I couldn't get back to sleep. A train came wailing by and I convinced my mind to load all of my troubles on it. As I drifted back to dreamland, I vowed to spend the next seven days preparing for my best year yet. I wanted to wow my students; I wanted to wow my son.

I submerged myself in Pinterest, stealing ideas for my environmentally-themed units left and right from fellow teachers and stay-at-home-moms. My good friend Gina, who has become my coworker once again, joined me in my quest to engage students in art projects inspired by oceans and trees, the rain and the bees. I imagined guiding Collin through the activities designed for my younger students. His masterpieces would be sure to dazzle the visitors to my refrigerator museum.

I spent the following week purging the art room of spoiled paint and yellowed paper, shelving returned books, and decking the halls (and the library) with paintings and posters reminding students of the rules, encouraging them to think positively, and celebrating the glorious bodies of water God created when he made our Earth. (Water is the art and library theme for August and September.)



When I stepped back Sunday afternoon (the day before school) and took in the beautiful and tidy spaces I'd created, I decided that it was good. But the bliss didn't last for long.

In preparing for my own return to school, I'd completely neglected to tend to Collin's back-to-school needs. He had a cool shark backpack from his great-grandmother and the same blue geometric lunch bag he's used since he was two, but that was it. Immediately, I was faced with a new nightmare: the failed parent.

So, like millions of moms and dads across America, I rushed to Target on Sunday night, where I scavenged the last two packs of glue sticks, a 24 pack of crayons (they were out of the smaller size his teacher requested), paper towels, tissues, juice boxes, and a family pack of rainbow Goldfish crackers for snack time. It was as if we were all preparing for a major storm — and in a way, we were. An avalanche of homework and a whirlwind of carpools were imminent — we'd better sharpen our #2 pencils.

Unfortunately, I forgot the most important thing - socks. I scrambled through last year's uniform bin for a gym shirt. The only one I could find fit like a wetsuit and was splattered with permanent pink and red acrylic paint. I allowed myself to hyperventilate for one minute before deciding, "He's the art teacher's kid. They'll understand."

After another restless night of battling my way through bad dreams centered on the notion of my occupational failure, the first day of school inevitably arrived. After stopping to take a brief selfie on the front porch, Collin and I went on to have a great first day at St. Joan of Arc. No one stared or laughed at me. No one cried - not even me.

The story ends well, but it could've taken a smoother course. The problem was this: I was so worried about planning mind-blowing lessons to impress my students - especially one - that I forgot about the basics. More importantly, I forgot about balance. I can't let myself focus too much on teaching or too much on being a mom. I need to learn a better way to be both.

I have since obtained Collin new socks and a new gym shirt. My decorations still

look awesome, my lessons are going to be great, but most importantly, my students (one in particular) and I are happy to be learning together again.

