

EXPELLING THE RACIST

“So which one of them is going to be with us this time?”

Tim drawled disdainfully.

I knew exactly which “them” he was referring to. Our class is always accompanied by a security guard when we go off on a field trip. Sometimes I’m not entirely sure whether the guard is there to protect the class from the outside world, or vice versa. My students are not your regular students. They’ve all dropped or been kicked out of every other educational institution there is, and I have the challenge and honor (it really is an honor) to keep them learning in our small class at the edge of the school.

“Abdul will be with us today,” I growled, furious at Tim.

“Them” in Tim’s eyes was the rolling roster of three security guards, all of whom originate from Pakistan. Tim’s next comment was all too predictable, and no less infuriating for that:

“Doesn’t really matter. They all look the same, anyway.”

I glared at him. His racism was so blatant, so deliberately provocative, that I was speechless for a moment. I looked at the other kids wavering between sniggering and frowning. That decided it. I took him off to the detention room and sat with him in silence for three hours. I found myself going over the other offensive comments he’d made all semester.

At the end of the school day, I went into the principal’s office and told him I want to expel Tim.

Expelling a student is a serious business, but not quite so serious as in a regular class. These kids are officially only at school “voluntarily”, and we only “welcome” them into our school as a service to the school district and the neighborhood that benefits from keeping them away from gang violence. I’m hugely proud that I got at least 10 of my kids out of the gangs and into the books. Expulsion is entirely up to me and the principal.

“Expel him?”

The principal moved uncomfortably in his chair. He trusts me. He knows that I’m the fifth teacher he’s had in three years, and all four of my predecessors resigned in the first year of the program.

“It’s not like you, Lisa. Why give up on him? Another year or two with you, and you might be able to turn him around. Teach him. I’m not looking lightly at his racism at all, but he’s fourteen. Maybe by sixteen he’ll be different. You can have a huge influence on him.”

“Perhaps,” I said unconvinced, “maybe. There’s a slight chance. But when I tell the class Tim’s been expelled because he’s a racist, I’ll definitely be influencing the 27 other kids in the class. That’s for sure.”

GUIDING QUESTION:

- Do you think the outspoken student should be expelled?

QUESTION FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- When, if ever, is educating an individual more important than educating a group?
- When, if ever, should the benefit of a group be outweighed by the possibility of altering one person's life?

