



## Teachers Who Dress As Mexicans and the Border Wall Have No Place in the Classroom

By Shawnta S. Barnes – November 3, 2018

During my second year in the classroom, my 6th grade English students studied the origin and history of holidays celebrated in America. One of the holidays we studied was Halloween and we watched a few video clips and read some articles from History.com. [On History.com today, it states:](#)

*Halloween's origins date back to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in)... This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31 they celebrated Samhain, when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth.*

I remember one student stating during our discussion, “How did Halloween change so much and morph into people dressing up in scary costumes like zombies or killers?” Today, I ask, “How did Halloween in America morph into people being insensitive and dressing up as people of another race?” The answer is racism and prejudice in America.

Many of my nonteacher friends were appalled when they learned teachers at Middleton Heights Elementary School in Idaho showed up to school dressed as Mexicans and also made a border wall with the words, "Make America Great Again" to accompany their costumes. In the article "[Middleton school district to investigate staff dressed as border wall, Mexicans](#)" published by the *Idaho Statesman*, the authors provide data that shows, "12.9 percent of Middleton Heights Elementary students are Hispanic/Latino." I'm extremely disturbed these children had to enter school and see their teachers dressed offensively. How is a Latino child supposed to sit behind a desk and learn when his or her teacher is dressed like that?

I was not shocked by these images. The harmful views that have been amplified by the media since Trump entered the White House are held by some teachers. [Racists are teachers too](#). I just thought they would not be stupid enough to come to school like that. Where was the principal? What about other colleagues? Had these pictures not gone viral on social media, this would have just been another day at Middleton Heights Elementary. I seriously doubt these educators in this school are providing a culturally responsive education that is inclusive of the diverse learners they serve.

The other concern I have is the [video](#) of Superintendent Dr. Josh Middleton addressing this situation. When I was younger, my dad was tough on me when I had to speak in public. He would give me an evaluation of how I did afterward. My dad would tell me to not consistently say "um" or "uh" while I was speaking because I would appear to the audience that I was unprepared or not confident in what I was saying. As I watched the video, I thought of my dad's words. Dr. Middleton was nervous and it was clear this district was not prepared for an incident like this. I have little confidence that actions taken by the district administration will prevent and stop future incidents that traumatize children, especially children of color, from happening in the future. This is probably not even the first problematic incident of this nature; it's only the one that went viral.

Some people online are saying that firing these teachers is too extreme. As a parent of two black sons, I don't want teachers like this in front of my children. I don't want teachers like this as colleagues. If they keep their jobs, then someone please tell me how many hours of cultural sensitivity training will help them change their hearts. I don't want teachers to go through the motions to keep their jobs; I need them to have the right heart. If you are a teacher and you are not smart enough to know that dressing up as a Mexican and the border wall at school is wrong, you don't need to be a teacher.