Applying Kwanzaa Principles to Education: Kuumba

By Educator Barnes – December 31, 2021

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1. According to the book "The Seven Days of Kwanzaa" by Angela Shelf Medearis, "In 1966, Dr. Karenga created Kwanzaa, a cultural holiday based upon the ancient customs of Africa ... Dr. Karenga hoped that the things

that were studied and practiced during Kwanzaa would guide African-Americans all year long." Each day of Kwanzaa covers one of the seven Kwanzaa principles. On each day of Kwanzaa, Indy K12 will explore how these principles can be applied to education.

The sixth principle of Kwanzaa is kuumba which means creativity. In a 1982 interview with Bell Telephone Magazine, Maya Angelou said, "You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have. It is our shame and our loss when we discourage people from being creative … Too often creativity is smothered rather than nurtured. There has to be a climate in which new ways of thinking, perceiving, questioning are encouraged."

At times, education seems to be the place where creativity goes to die. I did not create my first lesson plan when I was a college student. I created it when I was a kid. I enjoyed making activities to play school at home with my sisters and our stuffed animals. I would spend so much time making the lesson fun and creative. After I graduated with a teaching degree and obtained my teaching license, I had high hopes that I could bring the same level of creativity, fine-tuned with collegiate knowledge, to the classroom. However, year after year, I felt that my creativity was being chipped away little by little due to school mandates, district mandates, and state mandates. I want teachers to be able to have more autonomy and bring their creative selves to the classroom.

The teachers I remember most were the teachers who took a non-traditional path in the classroom. They had us participate in activities that were out of the box and even outside of our comfort zone. Most importantly, I loved the teachers who saw my creative spark and pushed me to pursue it.

In fifth grade, I wrote a story called "Twin Trouble."
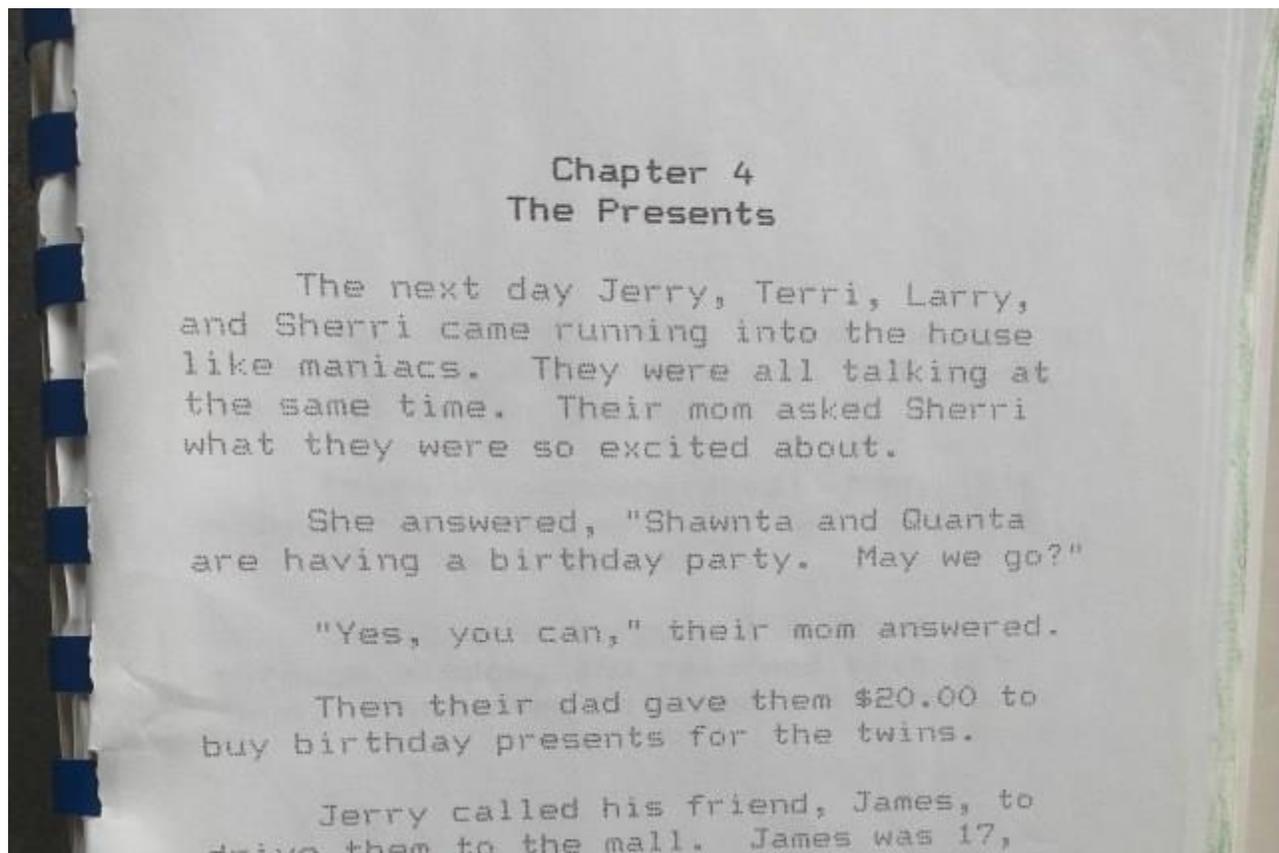
Twin Trouble

PARTY !!

Have Fun !!

Eat cake + ice cream

Eat candy !!

The teacher wanted us to feel like real authors. We had to have a title page, copyright page, and an about the author's page. She even put a school seal on it and had it bound. The story was about multiple sets of twins who became friends after their parents met in a parents of twins club. No, the fact that I have twins now is not lost on me. It actually is a little weird because one pair of twins were named Jerry and Larry. Jerry had a friend named James. My twin sons are named Jeremiah and James, and Jeremiah goes by the nickname, Jerry.

I did not exactly predict the future, but the similarities make me pause for a moment. My fifth-grade teacher told me I was a good writer and I should keep writing.

I can look back at that story and laugh because it really reads as an elementary student wrote it, but my teacher's goal of making us feel like real authors went way beyond what was required to teach the academic writing standards. I want all teachers to have the financial resources from their schools and the freedom to be able to bring their creative selves to the classroom. When creative teachers blossom, their students also bloom.

Fifth-grade me is grateful for the teachers that pushed me to explore my creativity.

Educator Barnes, 5th grade

Had they not, you might not even be reading this.

I am not saying that I have the power to write the future just because there were some similarities between a book I wrote in 5th grade and my real life. (Parents of multiple clubs are a real thing. I used to be in one but didn't know they were real when I wrote my story.) If there is just a little possibility that it is true, I hope that any administrator that reads this article does not dismiss the teachers who come to their office with big ideas. Listen to them and support their creativity.