

I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had: My Year as a Rookie Teacher at Northeast High Study Guide

I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had: My Year as a Rookie Teacher at Northeast High by Tony Danza

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Plot Summary

"I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had" by Tony Danza is the story of the famous and successful TV actor and talk show host making a huge U-turn in his life. As the subtitle suggests - "My Year as a Rookie Teacher at Northeast High" - Tony took on a role that probably no one could have ever predicted.

After having big successes on two popular TV series, "Taxi" and "Who's the Boss?", Tony became the host of a local TV talk show in New York City. Tony had always been interested in education. In fact, when he was in college, it was his dream to become a teacher. But his life and career went into an entirely different direction. He became a professional boxer and then got into acting. But education remained important to Tony. One segment on his talk show was devoted to reaching out to corporations to make charitable contributions to schools that needed financial support. It was a successful program and the donations that were collected were used for essential supplies and musical instruments. Unfortunately, Tony's talk show was ultimately canceled.

At the same time he lost his show, Tony's marriage was faltering. His life was chaotic and uncertain. His thoughts went back to education and he decided to at last pursue a career as a teacher. When word got around about his plans, A&E expressed an interest in making a TV reality show out of Tony's venture into education. At first Tony was dismissive of the idea. But the producers persisted. Tony would agree only under certain conditions. The students had to always come first and could not be exploited. And Tony would not agree to any scripting, even soft scripting. The studio executives agreed to his terms and "Teach" was placed on the A&E schedule and would be taped and made into a series.

It took some effort to find a school that would agree to having a reality show filmed on its campus, but the producers finally convinced the Philadelphia public school system and the mayor that the show could shine light on the struggles of the teachers and the needs of the students that exist in today's public education system. Tony had to not only prove himself to wary students and suspicious teachers, he had to struggle with unfamiliar material and a stringent curriculum.

Tony brought his own brand of teaching and his ability to connect on a personal level to Northeast High. He helped the inner-city kids in his class with their personal problems and with the challenges of learning. He proved himself to be a valuable part of the school especially after the show is canceled mid-year and Tony stayed on without pay. The kids learned a lot from their TV star teacher that year but Tony did, too. When he left after fulfilling his year-long commitment, he told the kids he loved them, would miss them and that they had changed his life forever.



Chapter One: You're Fired, Go Teach!

Chapter One: You're Fired, Go Teach! Summary and Analysis

Tony is nervous his first day of school - the first day he would have his own classroom and be called, "Mister!" At Philadelphia's Northeast High, only his fellow teachers can call him Tony. "Engage the students," keeps repeating in his head - the mantra that he was taught in teacher orientation. His school room is scrubbed and ready for the students. His classroom rules are on the wall: "BE here on time and prepared; BE kind; BELIEVE." (4)

Tony had been shocked when the clerk at the local school supply told him that teachers get only \$100 for supplies for the entire year. Tony had bought loads of materials and charged them to his personal credit account. The clerk, who was also a teacher supplementing his income, warned Tony not to smile at his students before Christmas otherwise the students would eat him alive.

Tony's "big mouth" got him into this. In 2007 he was hosting a live one-hour TV talk show in New York City. In one of his segments, "School Room Makeovers," the show sought charitable contributions for schools from corporations. It was a successful program which gifted schools with much needed equipment including musical instruments. At the same time he was nearing sixty, his marriage of twenty years ended and his TV show was canceled. He felt it was time to do something that could make a difference. Even before the thought of being a boxer or actor had occurred to him, Tony had always wanted to be a teacher. He was inspired to step forward when he saw a documentary of kids putting a show on in an inner-city school that had just a handful of people in the audience. The kids had no support!

When Tony's former producer found out that he was planning on teaching, he suggested it would make a good reality show. Tony wasn't interested. He wouldn't exploit the kids. Another producer convinced him that it could be done in a tasteful way. Such a show could shine light on the inadequacies of the public school system. He met with A&E producers but insisted that the kids had to always come first and that there would be no scripting. The executives eventually agreed to Tony's terms and he committed to being in the classroom at least one year.

When the kids come in he asks their names and requests that they use a hand sanitizer he has positioned at the front of the room. He introduces himself to his diversified class as their new English teacher. The kids are curious about the TV cameras in the back of the room and why a rich actor would want to teach at their school. Tony tells them that he came from a similar background as their own in New York City. He wants to inspire the kids but sees that they're bored, yawning, texting and not listening. He tells them about his education and career. Some of the kids have seen reruns of his old TV shows.



To engage the kids, he has them stand and tell their stories. There are football players, a tennis player, a metal head, musicians, singers, dancers, comedians and a Russian boy who loves American girls. There are twenty-six students in all and all have unique stories and dreams. Their homework is to be prepared to tell a story about their family or something that happened to them.

Lesson Plans

David Cohn who is assigned as Tony's teacher monitor meets with Tony after the kids leave. He tells him he did a good job for his first day but reminds him to stick to the lesson plan. David had forced Tony to prepare a lesson plan which he abandoned after the first ten minutes.



Chapter Two: Ignorance Is No Excuse

Chapter Two: Ignorance Is No Excuse Summary and Analysis

Even though Tony doesn't have to be in school until then, he doesn't want to start a morale problem with the other teachers and plans to arrive by seven o'clock each morning. He is wakened by his alarm at 4:30 in the apartment he rented for the year he'll be in Philadelphia. He pulls into school just after 7 am. Northeast is the largest high school in Philadelphia and has a football stadium, huge cafeteria and several gyms. There's even a Philadelphia police station located on campus.

The producers had a hard time finding a school that would agree to do the show. Finally, an education advocate, Sharon Pinkenson, appealed to the Philadelphia mayor on behalf of the show. It would be able to help the school system she told him. Mayor Nutter was interested but he still had to be convinced. Finally, the mayor recommended the project to the School Reform Commission who ultimately approved it.

There's so much security around high schools nowadays. When Tony went to school, no one ever felt unsafe with the exception of the occasional bully. Tony learns that even the teachers have to sign in everyday at school. Tony scrambles to the office and is reprimanded by the assistant principal, Ms. DeNaples, for being late and for not signing in the day before. She reminds him that he's not in Hollywood and that he'll be treated like a teacher not a TV star. Tony then meets with Linda Carroll, the principal, who has a softer demeanor than Ms. DeNaples. Miss Carroll is honest with him. She was a little apprehensive about the reality show. Tony hopes to shine light on the concerns about urban education, he tells her. She feels he is being sincere and stresses that the kids in his class must get what they need out of his class.

Before class, one of Tony's students, Monte, questions his qualifications. He wants to go to college and is uncertain whether Tony will be a good teacher. Tony assures him as best he can but a skeptical look remains on Monte's face. No monologues today, Tony writes on the board, "The most important _____ in my life is. . . ." He tells the kids to do the assignment now. Al G, a tall student with a wispy mustache, resists. Tony tells him he can turn his in the next day. Tony realizes that he has as hard a time focusing as the students do. He is sure he has ADHD although never had formally been diagnosed with it. Some of the kids stand up and tell their stories. Tony again doesn't stay on his lesson plan and is all over the place.

Teachers' Lounge - The Real Deal

David introduces Tony to another teacher, Joe Connelly, whose classroom is in the basement. It has no windows and Joe refers to it as the "dungeon." Joe is also a first-year teacher and gave up a lucrative business in construction to teach. Becoming a father changed his perspective. Joe hadn't finished college but went back to school



when his son was a year-old. He wanted to contribute to society and make it better for his son. Tony tells Joe that his level of dedication is what is needed to change public education. Tony feels he made a friend and a real connection with another teacher.

When Tony gets home that evening, he gets another boost for his morale in the form of a letter from a retired English teacher. He gave Tony some important pointers for success including among other tips what to wear, to always carry a book or notebook, to always assign homework, have regular testing and allow extra credits for extra work.



Chapter Three: Do Now

Chapter Three: Do Now Summary and Analysis

Tony is put on truancy duty by Ms. DeNaples. Part of his job is to spot stragglers and tell parents not to drop their kids off late. It isn't his favorite assignment but it is part of being treated like the other teachers. If Tony would get into any scrapes, he has his camera crew to back him up. He gets nervous when the bell rings and there are still way too many kids outside. He spots kids smoking pot and tells them to give up the "nasty habit." He stops some kids that are heading out of the school grounds and makes them come back. A woman drives up to drop her kid off twenty minutes late. She asks for his autograph. Tony gives it to her under the condition that she will bring her son on time from then on.

In class, the kids are no more engaged than they were the day before. No one volunteers to tell their stories so Tony has to call on them. He remembers not to smile too much. Emmanuel is too shy to read his story so Tony does. The trend continues and Tony winds up reading five more stories. It's not going the way he planned. Finally, one of the football players, Danny, wants to read his own. Yeah! Danny wrote about scoring a touchdown as a defensive player.

Tony volunteered to help with the football program and will be one of four assistant coaches under Head Coach Chris Riley. After school, he has his first practice. Tony is willing to help with any school program he can including sports, the band, the debate team. He'll do whatever he's asked to do and whatever will help the kids. Coach Riley welcomes Tony and is glad to have his help. After practice, Tony kind of thrown when Riley refers to him as "Coach Danza." He gives a little talk to the players and makes the mistake of referring to his home in Malibu. Tony recovers a bit and tells the players to do their best, depend on each other and have a good time. The next night the Vikings play their first game in a blowing rainstorm and lose. Coach Riley tries to console his team and himself by telling the players to learn from their mistakes, get over it and get back out there. Tony takes the words to heart, too.

Teachers' Lounge - Everybody Cries

Tony meets David in the teachers' lounge for his daily "postmortem." David reminds Tony that he's rambling too much and not staying on his lesson plan and topic. Tony made a big mistake by looking up a word in the dictionary for a student. The student has to learn to use resources himself. David tells Tony that he is trying too hard and is concentrating his great energy in the wrong direction. He talks more than all the students combined. David observed that when Tony asks a question, he often answers it himself. He advises Tony to not be concerned with trying to make the students like him and to remember that he cannot learn for them. David asks Tony if he cried yet. Everyone does, he tells him. Tony escapes as fast as he could. And just as David told him, the tears are running down his face and soon he is literally sobbing.



Lynn Dixon is a veteran English teacher who talks in class more than Tony does. She has taught in the tough Philadelphia school system for thirty years and has seen it all. Lynn leads the Small Learning Community or SLC that Tony has been placed in. The school is so large that it is broken down into eight "communities" where students have their core classes. Tony feels apprehensive about being in the community knowing that some of the teachers were not in favor of the reality show. But many of the teachers are kind and give him their best advise based on their own experiences. One teacher tells him that the teachers at Northwest have a huge responsibility because they have to try to make up for so much that's missing in the kids' lives.

Lynn passes out material about a new academic mandates that the teachers will be expected to fulfill. Tony notices that some of the teachers are talking, eating and in general not paying attention. He's reminded of his students. Lynn suggests an exercise that will inspire critical thinking. Have the kids write a six-word memoir. Hemingway did it first: "For sale: Baby shoes, never worn." She asks the teachers to create one themselves. Tony thinks for a minute then offers, "Once a fighter, now a teacher." Lynn likes it and then responds, "Now prove it." (51)



Chapter Four: The Half-Sandwich Club

Chapter Four: The Half-Sandwich Club Summary and Analysis

Tony tells his students that they are going to study myths. Monte is the only one who can accurately define myths as stories of supernatural gods and goddesses and their origins. The class will study how civilizations worshiped the sun and stars. Tony wants the kids to understand what a myth is and then write one of their own. To get his point across, Tony had written his own myth in rap. The kids laugh and clap along as Tony performs. The next day, many of the kids come up with very creative original myths.

The next day, the discussion segues over to heroes. The kids offer their personal ideas of heroes - some are their older siblings who have gone off to war in Afghanistan or Iraq. Some heroes are quite appropriately their parents and grandparents. Their next assignment is to picture themselves as heroes and write about that. Tony had given permission for Katerina to have her mother bring a birthday cake to class. The mother brings in a large chocolate cake and the class is eating cake and laughing and talking when Assistant Ms. McCloskey wanders in. Tony had broken a big rule. No cakes and no parties. Can you imagine if we let every kid have a birthday cake, she says as she reprimands him.

Tony puts off contacting Al G's mother as long as possible. He constantly disrupts class, and Tony has to keep moving him from seat to seat. Even a visit to the principal's office didn't help. He finally calls Al G's mother in. She isn't upset with Tony. She knows Al G is a problem. She was, too, at his age. She thought it was uncool to do well in school. Al G doesn't want everyone to know how smart he is. Tony asks for her help. Talk to him. It's about his future, he pleads with her. The next day, Al G was a lot more subdued. He turned in the paragraph about himself which Tony read before the class. Al G's story told of fights with other kids in which guns and violence were involved. Tony had a rough childhood but it never involved weapons and matters of life and death. Tony understands now what his mother meant when she told him that Al G had a lot going on in his life.

Another teacher put Al G in detention for some rather minor infractions. Tony stops by and gives him a pep talk which he seems to appreciate. Miss Greene, Al G's math teacher, is having problems with him, too. She decides to have Al G teach her math class which Tony attends as a student. He makes his point by behaving just like Al G does in class. He even opens up a sandwich and eats it during class. It is obvious that Al G gets the point and appreciates the effort of both teachers.

Tony doesn't have a regular advisory class but has an unofficial advisory capacity with random students. Kids like coming there. He gives the kids half-sandwiches if they're hungry. Tony focuses on four boys he calls the Wanderers because they're always wandering the halls. He talks to them to try to convince them to take school seriously.



The other teachers tell him he's wasting his time. He is able to make some progress with one of the boys, Phil, but the other three have no interest in changing their ways. Phil is failing all his classes because he's never there! Tony asks Phil's teachers to give him his assignments and he'll work with him on a one-on-one basis. Unfortunately, before they can get started, Phil is arrested for credit card fraud. Tony feels frustrated - how do you help kids like this?

Tony helps other kids in the "half-sandwich club" including a good student Courtney who had fallen behind in physics and Matt a kid with an anger problem who is on the verge of being expelled. Tony works out on the punching bag at a gym and decides to order a Cobra punching bag to be delivered to school. The bag is installed in a small room near the gymnasium. Matt is excited with the Cobra because he's ready to punch anything. Tony brought boxing gloves and shows the kids how it's done. The kids all take turns but Matt excels. He's a natural. Tony eventually arranges for Matt to go to Joe Hand's Gym to work out with professional trainers. This regimen helps to temper some of Matt's anger. He also agrees to see a counselor on a regular basis. His parents come to a meeting at school and are thrilled with the progress their son has made. Unfortunately, a group of black girls fling insults and racial remarks at Matt and his parents as they are leaving. Matt's father agrees to let his son finish the school year but next year Matt will be attending a parochial school. Tony has to agree that the discipline at a parochial school is probably what Matt needs.

Teachers' Lounge - Bobby G

Tony meets with an old friend, Bobby Governale. They were in college together and Bobby went on to realize his dream and became a music teacher with a career that spanned thirty years. Tony is down in the dumps about his teaching venture. Bobby shares with Tony some of the problems he had over the years. He tells Tony that he has the right stuff to be a good teacher and that things will start to click for him. He tells Tony that he'll know when it's working because it will be when the kids "get it" and that that will be obvious. Tony appreciates Bobby's words but he is still filled with self-doubt.



Chapter 5: Making the Grade

Chapter 5: Making the Grade Summary and Analysis

Tony wrestles with the best way to reach his students. He hands out copies of "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck. They screen the film version in class. They discuss the story in class and Tony gives them frequent quizzes on what they're reading. Howard, a big athletic kid comes to him after one class, and tells Tony that he just doesn't get the story. Tony tells him to make notes and highlight passages and re-read them. It's just like playing soccer, the more you read, the better you'll get Tony tells him. Tony learns from David that Howard is on the school's list of gifted kids. Tony thinks that perhaps he's just not getting the right material for the kids to read. The kids can all read but just don't. He needs to inspire the kids to read more. He gathers reading material about athletes and celebrities. He gets copies of the "Twilight" series because the movies are popular with the kids. His plan works. The kids really get into the stories and do well on the quizzes. Even Howard likes the stories and no longer complains that he doesn't understand what he's reading.

Because it's part of the curriculum, Tony has to return the class to "Of Mice and Men." Tony has become more adept at creating interest in the story and developing good study guides. The class is more practiced at reading and does better with Steinbeck. He focuses the quizzes in a way that will engage the students. In preparation for the final unit test on "Of Mice and Men," he creates a scavenger hunt and separates the kids into groups. He hands out clues to where the different items that represent elements of the story and plot are located around the school. The grand finale is a game of horseshoes on the school's baseball diamond just like in the book. It is a great success. He has never seen his class so energized. The next morning is the actual test. He patrols the class to make sure there's no cheating. But Tony feels confident that the kids have absorbed the story. All the kids pass with flying colors.

Ms. Carroll had made the decision to require the kids to wear uniforms. It wasn't a popular decision and many of the students blame Tony and his show. To assuage their concerns, Tony agrees to wear the same suit and tie everyday to instill a feeling of solidarity. Kids not wearing their uniforms on the day the policy takes place are sent to the the auditorium.

Tony has his class write compositions on how they feel about the uniforms. They are eager to share their strong opinions. Charmaine says that it's America and she should be able to dress like she wants. Monte says that wearing uniforms will save their parents money. The kids are so engaged in debate that Tony decides to make debate a weekly event.

Teachers' Lounge - No Fear Shakespeare



Tony discusses teaching Shakespeare with David. He's intimidated himself. David suggests that Tony first get them familiar with Shakespeare historically so they can connect to the man before diving into "Julius Caesar." David reminds Tony to make a distinction between engagement and entertainment.



Chapter Six: Never Smile Before Christmas

Chapter Six: Never Smile Before Christmas Summary and Analysis

Tony takes on the challenge of teaching Shakespeare. The students all make artistic creations that represent some element of Shakespeare. Ultimately, he wants them to rephrase Julius Caesar in their own words. The first quiz shows that the kids are understanding and retaining the story. On the day of the first quiz, Howard is late to class and as it turns out Matt texted the answers to him. Tony confronts Howard and Matt who both deny it. Tony intends to make all the kids turn off their cell phones in class from then on.

Gwen is having problems at home. Her father lost his job and her mother has to work two shifts. Tony tells her that when his show was canceled he lost his job and was unemployed. He tells her that things will get better and they do the very next week. She tells him that the situation at home is improving.

Tony gets approval to take his class to Washington, DC, for a field trip. The production company will cover the expenses and video tape the visit. As the trip grows nearer, Tony gets nervous. It is quite a responsibility to take all the kids out of town. Right when he's worried about behavior on the trip, one of his kids, Pepper, is involved in an altercation. He claims that he was just standing in the hall and got hit. Checking the video tape in the police station proves that Pepper was telling the truth. The police identify the boy who hit Pepper and haul him in. Tony feels protective toward Pepper which David warns him against doing.

The kids are happy with the meals that the production team provided for the bus ride. Driving through Washington, the kids are all looking out the windows seeing the famous structures they've only seen in books or on TV. One of their first stops is at the Folger Shakespeare Library which fits right in with the curriculum. The kids enjoy the tour and can actually relate to it. They particularly enjoy the Elizabethan replica theater where a troupe of actors is acting out scenes from several Shakespearean plays. They also pay visits to the national Archives, Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial.

Tony's production partner Leslie Grief discusses the show with Tony. There's no drama. They are going to have to start scripting the show. Tony is against it. Leslie suggests they may have to pull the plug on the whole thing. Tony gets in trouble with Ms. DeNaples again for not notifying the kids' other teachers that they'd be on a field trip.

Tony spends Thanksgiving on the football field. The Vikings win the game. Ms. DeNaples suggests Tony act as chaperone for the Winter Formal. He's warned that the



dancing gets pretty dirty and his job will be to stop it. Sure enough the dancing gets dirty and Tony has a time trying to control it. The dancing makes even Tony blush.

Teachers' Lounge - Northeast's Got Talent

Tony decides to help coordinate a talent show starring the teachers! He has only two weeks to put it all together. He holds auditions a week before the show. Those who try out are singers, comedians, musicians and poetry readers. Tony recruits Nakiya from his class to MC the show. A few teachers have stage fright. A duet of two male teachers sings and sings and literally have to be pulled off the stage. After the last performance, Nakiya holds her hand over each act and the audience applauds for their choice of best in show. The winner is Voltron a lip-syncing "boy band" of first-year male teachers. The kids love it almost as much as the teachers do.



Chapter Seven: Field Tripping

Chapter Seven: Field Tripping Summary and Analysis

After Christmas break, the class is sluggish. Tony requires them to write a short story using specific vocabulary words. Everyone in class has different learning capacities. Several have been identified with learning disabilities. Those students can get extra help from the school's Resource Center. The challenge for the teacher is to keep a balance, accommodate the gifted kids and those with learning problems.

The class has less than two weeks to rehearse for a student variety show that the kids dubbed, "Extravadanza." The kids want to use some of the money from ticket sales to help the hurricane victims in Haiti. The kids also organize a separate donation campaign. Tony promises to match the funds that they collect. The show is a great success and the kids collect \$400 which Tony matches. To reward his class for the empathy they've shown for the Haitians, he gets permission to take them to New York City. He gets tickets for "West Side Story" which, he explains, is a modern take on "Romeo and Juliet."

Ms. Carroll, the principal, joins them on the trip. Tony discusses making the best of a bad situation with the kids. Tony is thinking to himself that a bad situation is having the principal come along on the field trip. The kids bring up examples of their own and discuss how they've handled bad situations. They take a chartered bus and arrive in New York by eleven in the morning. Their first stop is at Central Park. After walking around the park, the next stop is Times Square. Al G is a problem because he keeps straying away from the group.

It's show time and the group takes their seats at the Palace Theater where "West Side Story" is playing. The kids are so enthralled with the play that a couple of them scream when Tony is shot at the end. After the show, they walk the short distance to Patsy's restaurant where Tony made reservations. There's a statue of Frank Sinatra at the bar because he ate there so often. Tony slips away to the bar to talk to the owner and has a quick drink. Everyone loves the food and the ambiance.

After they arrive home, Ms. Carroll tells Tony that they could both be fired because he had an alcoholic drink. Tony apologizes but Ms. Carroll does not seem very forgiving. The issue is covered up by making the excuse that Tony had a virgin martini with no alcohol. Leslie is not happy with the video from the trip. The trip was expensive and there was absolutely no drama.

Tony is struggling with the A&E situation as he focuses on teaching the class about sonnets. If the show is canceled, he doesn't get paid. He'd be working as a teacher for the rest of the year with no pay. He passes out copies of Shakespeare's "Sonnet Eighteen." He instructs the students to compose a sonnet about their trip to New York City. The final version of the sonnet that the class does together is brilliant. His worries



about not getting paid all vanish. What he is doing is more important than getting a paycheck.

Teachers' Lounge - Gone Bowling

A&E agrees with Leslie and decides to cut the show after the first six episodes that have already been taped. The crew will return for some final pick-ups later in the year. Tony will be on his own after that. He really is a teacher now. The production company throws a wrap party to which the teachers and students are invited. It takes place in a stylish bar that has games and its own six-lane bowling alley. The first episode is screened for everyone on monitors located around the bar and is well-received.



Chapter Eight: Poetic Justice

Chapter Eight: Poetic Justice Summary and Analysis

The kids have a mixed reaction to Tony remaining on after the show ended. Some give him the thumbs up. Others are suspicious about his still being there. To get the kids engaged in the poetry curriculum, Tony creates a contest based on "American Idol". On the day of the contest, each student will recite from memory a poem by a notable poet before a panel of teacher judges. First prize will be a flip cam, a small portable video camera. Tony asks if anyone knows the lyrics of a rap song. It's poetry, he tells them. Al G recites the lyrics of "Gangsta's Paradise" by Coolio. Tony relates the lyrics to the question of equal opportunity for all. The kids become engaged and a discussion and debate ensues.

At the contest, Matt recites Carl Sandburg's "Among the Red Guns." Pepper's selection is "Hurrah for the South!" by G. W. Hopkins. Al G gets through Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Paige recites "Unwanted" by Marvin Bell which is fitting because she's having family issues. It's an emotional recitation for Paige but she manages to get through it. Daniel, Emmanuel and Janae are the three finalists. Daniel is the grand winner with "He Sits Alone." Tony surprises everyone and gives flip-cams to all three finalists.

Teachers' Lounge - Happy Hour

Tony gets permission to organize a happy hour for the teachers. He had noticed that none of the teachers socialize and felt it would be a good idea. The get-together is a huge success and the topics run the gamut from school issues to politics and current events. Some of the teachers share interesting and funny stories about themselves.



Chapter Nine: Our Atticus

Chapter Nine: Our Atticus Summary and Analysis

A kid named Alex wanders into Tony's classroom before school. He admires the poetry hanging on the wall. He writes poetry he tells Tony. He writes about his father who was killed in a car accident and about his mother who was stabbed to death. Tony gives him a bear hug and fights back his tears. Alex and his sister live in a foster home with his step-uncle. The next day, Alex brings in a binder of his poetry. The kid is a prolific and talented poet. Alex becomes a regular in the "half-sandwich club." Ms. DeNaples permits Alex to read a poem he wrote in honor of the earth across the loudspeaker on Earth Day. Alex went on to compete in the Philly Youth Poetry contest and went to the national finals in Los Angeles.

To engage the kids in "To Kill a Mockingbird," Tony devises some games like "Hollywood Squares" and Jeopardy as learning and study tools. He separates the kids into the "X" team and the "O" team. Just like the TV quiz show, the kids who are sitting in the three rows of chairs can answer a kid's question correctly or incorrectly. If the student asking the question agrees or disagrees correctly, his team gets an X or O in that position. For example, a student asks on what writer did Harper Lee base the character of Dill. Monte, who is sitting in that spot, answers, "Ernest Hemingway," but the right answer is "Truman Capote." The O team agrees with Monte's incorrect answer and the X team wins the point.

Unfortunately, Matt, Paige and Ileana get into some angry fighting and name-calling. Tony tries to break them up but Paige keeps it up. Out of frustration Tony tells Paige to get out and never come back. As soon as the words came out, Tony was sorry. The bell rings and everyone leaves. Then Tony gets word that Al G was arrested in the cafeteria after getting into a conflict with a cop. Al G is in cuffs when Tony arrives. Tony convinces Al G to apologize to the cop who then releases him. Tony feels like a complete failure. Nakiya and Tammy tell him he needs to get tough on the bad kids.

In an incident involving Daniel and Mr. Smith, Tony learns that the complaints of teachers are often ignored by parents. Daniel mouths off to Smith. He is very disrespectful but when Tony calls Daniel's mother, she won't even listen and insists that Daniel be taken out of Smith's Latin class. Daniel's complained about the teacher. Due to the bad press that the schools get, parents are predisposed to blame the school or the teacher. This allows kids to get away with murder.

Monte thinks Tony is taking too long to go through "To Kill a Mockingbird." Remembering the other teacher's tactic with Al G, he gives Monte a whole period to teach the class with his own lesson plan. After Monte has to deal with Al G and Matt and several others he is glad to give control of the class back to Tony. Al G returns from a suspension for cheating. After Tony convinces Al G to apologize for cheating, he promises Tony he'll do better the rest of the year.



The class gets into a discussion about Atticus Finch, a main character in "Mockingbird." They agree that Atticus represents with highest state of moral development. A discussion about behavior follows. Some kids admit they misbehave to impress their peers. Tony begins helping an older student named Brittany read. He learns from her counselor that she, like many of the children, is having family problems. She is violent and hangs with the wrong crowd. Brittany's reading ability begins to show a marked improvement the longer Tony works with her. But Brittany still has problems controlling her anger. When Tony learns that she has a 99-year-old great-grandmother, he suggests they make her a birthday card out of some construction paper and write a poem inside it. Tony starts to take a Polaroid picture of Brittany to put in the card but she insists that he be in the picture. Her great-grandmother is a big fan. The next day Brittany tells Tony that the card was the best present her great-grandmother ever got. Tony learns that Brittany is being sexually abused and reports it. As a result, she is moved to another foster home.

Teachers' Lounge - Adequate Yearly Progress

Tony meets a teacher at the gym. They discuss how crowded the classes are and how troubled the children are. The kids need so much more than a teacher can give them. There's just not enough hours in the day. Teaching for a year has had an emotional drain on Tony. He can't imagine what it does to a veteran teacher like this woman who's been at it for decades. After his talk with the teacher, he imagines how much better things would be if a teacher had three instead of five classes per day. It would be expensive and it is a pipe dream but it would improve education. The PSSA tests that are given to one grade level every year at the schools measure the effectiveness of the teacher. Kids are in jeopardy if they don't learn but so are teachers. Miss Carroll calls a meeting and emphasizes the importance of the juniors scoring well on the PSSA tests. The teachers will have a practice round before they have to administer the actual test. The practice test starts out well. Only two boys in Tony's class have some math problems. Another teacher jumps all over him when he sees that Tony let the boys have calculators. If that were the real test, the school's testing could be nullified.

After the PSSAs are administered, there were gains but the school did not attain its AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) target. It was a frustrating and disappointing result for the teachers and parents. Inner-city schools are at a disadvantage because all the kids in their districts are counted into the scoring even though some of the kids never spend even one day at the school.



Chapter Ten: Spring Fever

Chapter Ten: Spring Fever Summary and Analysis

Returning from spring break, Tony has the kids write about something that happened to them on the break. Daniel tells the class about finding a kitten out in the rain. Howard pipes in and says it reminds him of Lenny, the guy with the dead mouse in "Of Mice and Men." It gratifies Tony that Howard retained the Steinbeck story and was able to apply it to a real-life situation. That's learning! Tony hands out his first pink slip to Charmaine for being late and her punishment is detention. Tony tells her that she won't be in school forever and that she can do well at school and she can have fun. One is not exclusive of the other.

Over the next few days, student behavior is exceptionally good. Everyone arrives on time including Charmaine. But it doesn't last. The kids are anxious for school to be over. The kids are making fun of Eric and Ileana who are "in love." Matt gets arrested for fighting. Eric writes poems about his feelings for Ileana and he's showing some talent. Ileana and her former best friend, Stephanie get into a spat. Their feud spills over into the next day. Ileana is an angry young girl. Tony talks to Stephanie about it. The only resolution she can see is if Ileana dies or if she quits school. Tony decides to get the two girls together to talk it out. The girls are able to come to a truce although it's a fragile one.

Leslie calls and tells Tony that A&E approved a reporter from "The Philadelphia Inquirer" to come and interview him. Tony was scheduled to show PowerPoint presentations that the kids were to send to him the night before on "Mockingbird." It is an awkward moment with the reporter sitting next to him when he realizes that only one presentation was sent to him. Tony had printed out a story his daughter sent him about a girl in 1945 who posed as a reporter so she could interview Frank Sinatra. Tony scrambles and picks up the story and reads it to the class. The class gets into a discussion about Frank Sinatra. Al G says he's the guy that P. Diddy likes. The kids talk about who the Sinatra of today is. Tony stresses that being famous takes talent and a lot of hard work. The reporter is happy with the visit and thanks Tony for letting her stop by.

Teachers' Lounge - Fight Night

Tony has tickets to Philadelphia's legendary fight club, the Blue Horizon. He invites two teachers who had never been there before to go with him. The men have dinner before going to the fights. They enjoy themselves and their conversation switches between boxing and education during the evening. Having boxed himself, Tony tells the other teachers that boxing is a tough way to make a living but he has learned that teaching is a lot tougher.



Chapter Eleven: Finals

Chapter Eleven: Finals Summary and Analysis

In May, the class is in countdown to summer break. Six weeks remain for Tony to complete the curriculum and administer finals. David tells him that attendance is usually a problem at the end of the year and that there are no finals at Northeast. The teachers grade on the work done by the students during the school year. Standardized tests are the only thing that the school system is interested in. But Tony wants to measure how much the kids learned. David tells him that he should go for it then.

Katerina will miss the last month of school because she's going to Russia with her mother. Tony spends class time doing review and plans to have another scavenger hunt. At the final challenge, Ben-Kyle falls over which he's half-way to the finish line. Tony thinks he's kidding at first but realizes the kid is out cold. Ben-Kyle passed out but Tony finds a pulse. He comes to and is taken to the nurse's office. The nurse tells his father when he picks him up that he needs to be checked out by a doctor.

Tony tries to get in as much review as possible before Katerina leaves. She'll have to take the test on line. One day the kids are so rowdy that Tony slams out of the room and stands in the hall with four minutes left before the bell rings. The kids run out and have a group hug with Tony. They apologize and tell him they love him. The day of the final, every student, except for Katerina, is present. After the test, Tony is anxious to learn the results. He is gratified that no one failed the test. All three of the students with learning disabilities did even better than he had hoped. The test ends with an essay question. In every test, he finds something that Tony had stressed that year. He feels he made a difference. David is so impressed with the test and the whole year in general that he tells Tony that he doesn't need him any more. The next week is just for fun. Unfortunately, a water balloon fight breaks out in the auditorium during an assembly. The principal stops it as soon as she can. No one is hurt but everyone is soaked.

Teachers' Lounge - The Sons of Happiness

Tony is honored when he is invited to join the Sons of Happiness, a fraternal society for men at Northeast. He and other new inductees go to a meeting of the society where they are welcomed in. They have a barbecue afterward and talk about - what else - teaching! Tony is asked if he's coming back next year. He tells them he doesn't know but he really does. He needs to go home and work on being a husband and a father.



Chapter Twelve: If. . and Epilogue

Chapter Twelve: If. . and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter Twelve: If. .

It's the last week of school. The camera crew needs to film the end of the year. Tony is on edge and is ready to snap when Leslie Grief shows up. Tony refuses to let the camera crew film an emotional goodbye between Tony and the kids. He'd still be there a week so this is not goodbye and he's not about to fake it! The kids watch as the two men have words. One of the kids asks Tony what wrong and the waterworks begin. He tells them he loves them and will miss them and that they changed his life. As the week goes on, the number of kids declines. By the end of the week, only a handful are left. Tianna and Paige bring a DVD of the movie, "Freedom Writers" to watch. Tony is in tears by the time the movie ends. The girls smile. It was a test. It showed them that he really was a softy.

Commencement was held outside. Tony was sweating it before he had to give his speech. In his speech, Tony reminds the graduates that time is finite and to spend it well. He thanks the students, teachers and families for his year at Northeast. He thanked his colleagues for the support and advice they gave him throughout the year. He concludes his remarks with a recitation of the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling. His last words to them are, "Make your lives count!"

Back in his classroom, the camera crew follows for a final shoot. The kids present him with an album of photographs and goodbye notes from his students. Tony is very moved by the thoughtful gesture that will always mean very much to him. Everyone helps clean up the room, removing a year's worth of their work from the walls. The guys help him carry his things to his car, hug him and then they're gone and Tony's alone. He starts to ponder what his purpose would be now but he quickly dismisses the thought. He beeps his horn and waves and drives off as the camera crew catches the final image.

Teachers' Lounge - Saving Starfish

The actual final day of school was for teachers only. Mr. Carr who had turned in his retirement papers announces that he changed his mind. He'll be back next year. A couple of the female teachers give Tony little going away gifts. He has to hurry and catch the train for New York. On the train, he opens the box from Miss Dixon. It is a scroll with a poem about a man who walked on the beach after a storm and spotted thousands of stranded starfish that had washed ashore. The man picked up one starfish and threw it back in. Another man saw him and said he wasn't making much of a difference with all the other starfish still stranded. The man responded that it "Made a difference to that one!" (252)

Epilogue

"Teach" premiered on A&E on October 1, 2010 and ran for six weeks. Tony heard from some teachers who identified with his struggles. A sense of disappointment and opportunity lost lingered with Tony. One thing that Tony learned was that the blame game does nothing for improving education. The increase in the number of low-income and immigrant children, uninvolved parents and the culture in general makes the job of teaching increasingly difficult. Teachers need help not blame and pay cuts. Everyone has a stake in education. A good education system is important for the economy and the future of the country. Every person who made life harder for their teachers, and Tony was one of them, needs to do one thing and Tony started it off: "I would like to apologize to every teacher I ever had."



Characters

Tony Danza

Tony Danza was born and raised in New York City. It was a rough neighborhood where he lived and he earned his street smarts at a young age. Tony attended college and had plans to be a teacher. But his life went in unexpected ways. He got into boxing and then into acting. He had great successes on the hit TV series "Taxi" and "Who's the Boss?" Most recently, Tony was the host of a local New York City TV talk show but the show was eventually canceled and Tony found himself without a job and without a plan. On top of that, his marriage of twenty years was faltering. At nearly sixty-years-old, how could he start over?

Tony's thoughts returned to his old dream and he decided to pursue a teaching position. When A&E executives found out about his plans, they met with him about making his teaching venture into a TV reality show. Tony wasn't interested initially but the TV executives persisted. Tony would only agree to a deal if he could be assured that his students would always come first, that the students or school wouldn't be exploited and that there would be no scripting, even soft scripting, of the show. The executives agreed and "Teach" was on the A&E development schedule.

Northeast High, in Philadelphia's rugged inner-city, agreed to taking on Tony as a teacher and to allow the reality show to be shot on its campus. At first Tony suffered from "stage fright" but he persevered. He had to prove himself to his students, his fellow teachers and most of all to himself. Tony had some rough times and challenges that he never expected but he refused to give up and made it through his year of teaching. Even though the studio pulled the plug on the show mid-year and Tony would no longer be paid, Tony stayed true to his commitment and completed the year. He told his students that he loved them, would miss them and that they had changed his life forever.

David Cohn

Northeast High Teacher David Cohn was assigned by the principal to monitor Tony Danza's classroom. The monitoring was required since Tony had never taught before and because the class would be video-taped for the reality show that was being shot. Tony came to rely on David who was helpful and supportive but always honest in his assessments of Tony's teaching abilities. On the very first day, Tony was naturally nervous and seemed to ramble through the entire class, talking non-stop. After class, David gently reminded him that he had to stay on his lesson plan. Tony and David had met before his first class and David forced Tony to create a lesson plan. As much as Tony resisted, David wouldn't give him a pass and made him create the lesson plan. Now all he had to do was follow it. On his first day, David told him, he abandoned it after the first ten minutes.



Tony began to call his after-class meetings with David his daily "postmortems." In one of Tony's early lessons, he looked up a word in the dictionary for a student. The students are supposed to learn to use the resources, David told Tony. Tony was still talking too much in the early weeks of the first semester. David heard Tony's voice more than all the students combined. He also noticed that Tony had the habit of asking a question and then panicking when no one offered an answer and answered the question himself. They were all rookie mistakes but things that Tony had to fix.

There was only one incident in which there was friction between the two men. When the videographer wanted them to have their discussion as they walked down the hallway, David put his foot down. He reminded Tony that they weren't actors in a drama. They were teachers in a school. Near the end of the second semester, David told Tony that he was doing great and that he didn't need him any longer.

Al G

Al G was a student who had a lot of personal problems and was always disrupting the class. He confided in Tony that he faced violence and danger in his neighborhood on a daily basis.

Paige

Paige was a cranky student who hated school. Tony worked to convince her that learning and having fun were not exclusive of one another.

Matt

Matt was a student who had an anger problem. Tony arranged for a punching bag to be installed in the school gym so Matt could get his frustrations out there.

Ms. Carroll

Ms. Carroll was the school principal. She decided to change the dress code of the school and required the kids to wear uniforms. There was a lot of dissension over the new policy.

Ms. DeNaples

Ms. DeNaples was an assistant principal who reprimanded Tony for not signing in on his first day. She told him that he would be treated like all the other teachers.



Monte

Monte was one of the brightest kids in the class. He was honest with Tony when he first became his teacher. He wanted to go to college and he wasn't confident that Tony was qualified to be a teacher.

Chris Riley

Chris Riley was the head coach of the Vikings, the school's football team. He asked Tony to become an assistant coach for the team.

Howard

Howard was a gifted kid who had a hard time understanding "Of Mice and Men." Tony realized that Howard's problem was that he didn't have enough practice reading.



Objects/Places

New York City

Tony Danza was born and raised in New York City. He was the host of a local TV talk show in New York, and he took his high school class on a field trip to the city.

The Palace Theater

Tony Danza took his class to New York City for a field trip. While there they saw "West Side Story" at the Palace Theater. They were studying Shakespeare at the time and Tony explained that the musical was an adaptation of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet."

Patsy's

While in New York City, Tony took his class to dine at the famous restaurant, Patsy's. There is a statue of Frank Sinatra at Patsy's bar because he was such a frequent diner there.

Philadelphia, PA

Tony rented an apartment for a year in Philadelphia after he accepted a teaching position at Northeast High.

Northeast High

Tony took a position as a teacher at Northeast High School in Philadelphia. The high school was the largest in the city and was in the heart of the rough inner-city.

Malibu

Tony had homes in New York and in Malibu where his family lived. One day he mentioned living in Malibu to his class and was afraid that the kids would think he was boasting.

Washington, D.C.

The first field trip that Tony took his class on was to Washington, D.C. Many of the kids had only seen the famous buildings and structures of the nation's capitol on TV and in books.



Folger Shakespeare Library

While on the field trip to Washington, D.C., Tony and his class visited the Folger Shakespeare Library where they saw an acting troupe do scenes from several Shakespearean plays.

Joe Hand's Gym

Tony arranged for one of his students, Matt, to work out with professional trainers at Joe Hand's Gym. Matt was having anger issues and Tony figured it would be better if the kid punched a bag rather than another kid.

A&E

Tony made a deal with A&E to do a realty TV show called "Teach" based on his year of teaching school at Northeast High. "Teach" was canceled after six episodes and Tony worked the rest of the school year with no pay.



Themes

Commitment

Perhaps the rigors of college, the physical demands of boxing and the drive for perfection in acting all combined to teach Tony what it meant to commit to something - even when that something is new and unexpectedly challenging. Tony had made many commitments in life - in his education, his careers and personal relationships and in his roles as a husband and father. But despite his strength, ambition, talent and best intentions, the road wasn't always smooth riding.

Just when Tony's world was falling apart - he lost his TV talk show and his marriage at the same time - Tony questioned what his purpose in life was. At nearly sixty years old, how do you start over?! But Tony drew strength from his past experiences and successes and knew that he would survive and could open a new door to his future.

Tony had always been interested in education and turned his attention back to teaching when he found himself unemployed and without a plan. But he knew that one thing he had to do if he were to become a teacher would be to totally commit himself to it. He knew it would be a challenge and would not be an easy transition for him. But if he ventured into teaching without a strong commitment, he knew he would fail and another failure was the last thing he needed at that point in his life.

Tony made the commitment to himself and to the school to teach for one full year. It was a bigger challenge than he even imagined and at times he questioned his sanity for taking it on; but he would never break his word and leave the school and abandon the students. Though example, Tony taught his kids - all inner-city kids with their own baggage - what commitment and learning meant and how important it was for their futures. The real test of Tony's commitment was when the reality show that was being taped of his year of teaching was canceled mid-year. He could have left the school because he was no longer receiving pay from the studio or from the school. But he had made a commitment and he went on to finish his year without pay. But he had no regrets. He told the kids that they had changed in life - in a positive way - forever. Commitment has its own rewards.

Public Education

Education, of course, is one of the main themes about an older man becoming a first-time teacher. Tony Danza had dreamed of being a teacher since his college days. Things turned out differently for him and not at all in a bad way. However, the dream of teaching lingered in his mind and when he was nearing sixty years of age and he found himself unemployed with with no Plan B, Tony's mind kind of naturally drifted back to his first career love. After reading about Tony's challenges and struggles in becoming a teacher in today's public school system, one can only admire his courage. He



discovered the many inadequacies that exist in today's public school education. It takes more than book-learning to be a good teacher. His students, many of whom were inner-city kids with adult-sized problems, and needed support in more ways than in just getting an education.

Tony learns first hand about the shortcomings of today's public school. Everyone talks about it - the pundits on TV, the teachers, the politicians and even the President of the United States. It's not a secret that there are huge problems and that the victims of education's failures and inefficiencies are the kids. But Tony just didn't talk about it, he became part of it and in a very personal and meaningful way.

Some like to point the finger of blame at the teachers. But Tony found out some very interesting things about teachers in today's public school system. In the Philadelphia school system where he worked for a year, the teachers only get \$100 for supplies for the entire year. That pittance would barely cover the basics a teacher with five classes of 25 to 30 kids in each class needs. From all the sociopolitical rhetoric that is spewed about, Tony also learned that parents are predisposed to blame the teacher. In one case, Tony called a parent and began to tell her about a problem her son was having with his Latin teacher. She cut him off immediately. She knew the teacher. Her son had complained about him before. The woman didn't even want to hear about it. She knew the teacher was in the wrong.

Tony learned that teachers, especially those assigned in the inner-cities, have more than just uncooperative students and tough curricula to deal with. Most of their students are from broken homes, many of the kids are abused and neglected and exposed to a side of life that can only lead them down a very dark path. As the teacher for these troubled kids, Tony opened his heart and listened to the kids and tried to help them. At various times, he was teacher, counselor, disciplinarian, friend and even father. Tony ends his book with some good advice. Teachers don't need blame or pay cuts; the need the support of the parents and the community.

Challenge

A trying time and challenge for anyone is that of losing a job. A double whammy is to lose a job and an important relationship at the same time. That is exactly what happened to Tony Danza and what compelled him to take on challenges that he never would have imagined doing. Just when Tony Danza's TV talk show was canceled, his twenty-year marriage seemed to be coming to an end. He felt he had no purpose until his mind wandered back to an old dream - that of teaching. He had planned to be a teacher many years before when he was in college but his life took some detours. Then, suddenly with no other obvious options available to him, at age sixty he decided to take on the challenge of teaching high school kids.

Had Tony known what a challenge it was really going to be, he may have had second thoughts about it. He had been born and raised in a rough neighborhood in New York City but it seemed like the land of milk and honey compared to the modern inner-city



environment where he would be teaching. The kids in Tony's class were teens with adult-sized problems. They were belligerent, disengaged, defeated before their time. Some were even dangerous.

Tony's woes over being unemployed quickly vanished when faced with the challenge of reaching these kids, helping them on both a professional and personal level and offering them some hope for a better future. He was not a trained teacher and often went on instincts. But his instincts were good. He had street smarts, he'd competed on a physical level in the boxing ring and on an intellectual and artistic level in the field of acting. He had learned to cope, to assess people and situations and was always able to survive. He put some of those learned skills into motion and became teacher, counselor, friend, disciplinarian and even father to these kids who came to mean so much to him.

And by example, he taught his kids about facing up to obstacles in the road and to meet challenges head on. He told one female student who hated school that school wasn't all work and no fun - it could be both with the right attitude. And what proved positive about taking that approach was that it could get a person through a situation successfully when the odds seemed stacked up against you.

Style

Perspective

"I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had," by Tony Danza is an autobiographical account of Danza's foray into teaching after losing his job as a TV talk show host. The story is told by Tony Danza in the first person. Danza provides great detail about the challenges of being a high school teacher in Philadelphia's inner city and shares his doubts and uncertainty about his decision to become a teacher for the first time at age fifty-nine. No one else could have told his story better.

In his narrative, he shares the passion and emotion that working with his troubled students evoked in him. He related to the kids because, as the title suggests, he was a handful and a disciplinary problem himself at Long Island's Malverne High School. After being in the shoes of a teacher, he felt he owed his former teachers an apology because he learned up close what he had put them through.

Tony Danza had great successes in his career as an actor. He starred in such hit TV series as "Taxi" and "Who's the Boss?" He also acted on the big screen and on Broadway. He was also the host of a local New York City talk show. During his year at Northeast High as a teacher, he and his class were being videotaped and for a reality TV series on A&E entitled, "Teach."

Tone

"I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had," by Tony Danza is written in an informative, detailed and frequently a very passionate manner. The story starts out on an emotional and very personal level. Danza tells the readers that his show was canceled and that he was unemployed and that his marriage was failing. But a spirit of survival comes through his words when he describes his decision to make the unusual move of becoming a teacher for the first time when he is almost sixty-years old.

Tony was approached by TV executives to make his venture into education into a reality TV program. Of course, he'd been on many TV shows with great success and being on another would feel like a old shoe. However, Tony responded in a principled way. He would not exploit the kids or the school and he would not allow any scripting. The show had got to be more on the lines of a documentary - not a contrived story with phony drama. By sharing this element of the television industry, Tony showed his intention to write a serious book without any hype.

When Tony describes his first few times in class, the reader can envision how nervous he was and how difficult it must have been. Facing a whole group of kids who are suspicious about a TV star wanting to be their teacher had to be intimidating in and of itself. Add to it that the kids were all tough street-smart kids with huge personal problems, one can only imagine how Tony had to be sweating more than a few bullets.



Another teacher told him he was trying too hard. He reminded him not to be concerned with making the kids like him. His job was to stay on his lesson plan and teach them. Tony settled down after a while but it is obvious that he took the problems of the kids to heart.

If only one word could be used to describe the tone of the book, it would hands-down be "passion." Tony cried with the kids when they had problems and he cried with them when they were happy. He saw a lot of himself in them. When he left after a year it was with all sincerity when he told them that he loved them, would miss them and that they had changed his life forever.

Structure

"I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had," by Tony Danza is told in a generally chronological order and covers the span of the year that Tony was a teacher at Northeast High School in Philadelphia, PA. Interspersed throughout the account of his venture into education, are anecdotes and references to past events and experiences in Tony's life and career.

The book is separated into two main sections: the first semester and the second semester. The first section is comprised of six chapters of medium length and describes how a famous TV actor became a high school teacher in inner-city Philadelphia. Not only does Tony have to adjust to the classroom and the students he has to adjust to the teachers and staff who aren't exactly thrilled that a Hollywood actor has brought a camera crew on campus to film a new reality show. He starts out gung-ho but soon feels like a failure. But the support of understanding teachers who understood what he was going through helped to get him through.

In the second section, which also has six chapters of medium length, Tony stays on as a teacher even though his show was canceled. He decided that making a difference with kids without much hope was far superior than receiving a paycheck. Tony becomes much more confident in his second semester. While staying on curriculum, Tony manages to bring his own unique style of teaching based on his careers as a boxer and an actor.

After the main story in each chapter, most contain a section entitled, "Teachers' Lounge." In these sections Tony relates how he sought help and advice during his challenging tenure of teaching. The story is preceded by an "Author's Note" section and succeeded by an epilogue in which Tony discusses the sorry state of the nation's education system and his idea of what is needed to salvage it. There is also an "Acknowledgments" section.



Quotes

"This gig isn't acting, it's for real. Real kids, real lives, real educations at stake."
(Chapter One, page 3)

"Many of us think that inner-city kids are somebody else's problem. Your kinds and mine go to private schools and are doing just fine. But America's public school kids are our kids, too, and these kids are going to grow up to be the majority of America's adults."
(Chapter One, page 9)

"You're trying too hard to make them like you." (Chapter Three, page 45)

"Boxing has a special place in my heart because it was my ticket out of trouble and into a new life when I was young." (Chapter Four, page 69)

"The kids' knowledge of 'Julius Caesar' when quizzed by the acting troupe gives me a whole new sense of my students' involvement. The educators at the Folger who put together this program are no slouches, and even by their standards, the kids know the play. My students make me look good." (Chapter Six, page 112)

"When you do a good deed for others, it always ends up being good for you." (Chapter Seven, page 129)

"One of my jobs as a teacher is to open their eyes to the life lessons contained in the tenth-grade English curriculum. Lessons about friendship and heroism, treating people as you want to be treated, and walking in another man's shoes before you judge him."
(Chapter Seven, page 132)

"I've been teaching for eight months, and right now, I feel more incompetent than I did the day I started. How does anyone survive this job, let alone succeed in it?" (Chapter Nine, page 174)

"At my age, I'm not sure I want to care this much about anything." (Chapter Nine, page 190)

"I know I must not panic, but I have no backup plan. Zip. As an actor, I'd call this 'dead air.' As a teacher I call it 'death.'" (Chapter Ten, page 210)

"I sputter how much I love them, how much I'm going to miss them, how they've changed my life." (Chapter Twelve, page 242)

"I don't know, but in that classroom my life makes sense." (Chapter Twelve, page 243)



Topics for Discussion

What profession did Tony have before he became an actor? What did he plan to be when he was in college?

What TV shows did Tony Danza star on? What show was canceled just before he became a teacher?

What were some rookie mistakes made by Tony when he first started teaching? Which of the jobs that Tony had throughout his career did he consider the most difficult and why?

In the story, how did the home life of the kids factor into how well they did in school? How did it impact their behavior in school?

How was the play that the class saw on Broadway connected to the student curriculum? Why did the principal say that she and Tony could be fired after the New York City field trip and why?

What prompted Tony to be a teacher at Northeast High? How was he initially accepted by the other teachers? By the students? How did they feel about him when he left?

What steps can be taken to improve the nation's education system? How do outside factors impact the ability of teachers to teach and students to learn?