

I'm sitting at my desk eating lunch at school one day, when I notice a lengthy figure at my door. He has platinum blond hair, pale skin, and a shirt that says *
HARDCORE CHRISTIAN * in block letters. We'll call him Jonathan. I'd seen Jonathan around school, and I know that he certainly has no qualms about wearing his religion on his sleeve. I knew it was only a matter of time before he ended up in my doorway. He had a friend next to him who happens to be one of my students. As she walks away, I hear her say "That's her."

As Jonathan walks in, my heart begins to race. He is a 'hardcore Christian' according to his shirt; I'm a Heartland Atheist. He speaks:

"Uh. Your Mrs. McKerracher, right?"

"Right. Can I help you."

"Well, I wanted to let you know that my name is Jonathan; and I'll probably be in your class next year. I know that you're an Atheist and Atheists hate God, but I hope that if I have you..." I stop him.

"Oh, you've been misinformed! Atheists don't hate God, they just don't believe he exists." I say this in a cherry tone, non-confrontational? The next moments were critical; I needed Jonathan to realize that I was not his enemy, even though I was certain this was his perception. "I would be happy to have you in my class next year."

"Well, I want you to know that I DO believe in God, and I am steadfast in my faith." Jonathan was aware of the new Atheist revolt spreading in school; once I came out as an Atheist, quite a few students have shown their open skepticism of faith.

"Excellent!" I told him. "I'm glad you believe. I don't believe in God at all. But it's ok, all people and all faiths are welcome in my class."

I don't know what he was expecting, but interpreting his disposition was difficult. I got the sense that he had wanted to stand his ground--and he did. But I don't know what he was expecting from me, and after I finished talking, his "ok, bye," was much too general for me to read.

Why is Jonathan important?---->why should it matter if a 'hardcore Christian' kid gets a good impression of me?

At the core of every extreme belief, there is misunderstanding; false-truths. My hope was that I had caused Jonathan's mind to stir; he certainly did that to my brain. At first, I found myself dreading the thought of Jonathan in my class for a whole school year--would I be in meeting after meeting with fundamentalist parents? My liberal attitude would be completely offensive to them. Would Jonathan make class unbearable, with his constant religious references?

Since all voices and all perspectives are welcome in my classroom, and should be in any publicly-funded class, I found myself agreeing with my sister's attitude after I explained the situation to her: "you will teach him the truth about Atheists. He will learn who they are through you, and that's a good thing."

I hope she's right. I want Jonathan to be successful in life; I also want him to see people for who they really are, not who others claim them to be. For me to do that however, I'd have to drop the labels: Jonathan is not his *HARDCORE CHRISTIAN* shirt. Jonathan is an American teenager trying to figure out how to maneuver through this thing called life.