

I have had the absolute pleasure of getting to know Jason for the first half of this school year as a student in my Honors Biology course. Through my experiences with him I have come to know Jason as an exceptionally bright, self-motivated, responsible student who has a passion for science and animation. As a student, Jason's intelligence is extremely impressive – he consistently earns one of the highest grades in my course due to his work-ethic and understanding of life science concepts, and he often contributes interesting questions and points to classroom discussion. At a school that is highly competitive, I am often most impressed with Jason's desire to “get it right” in terms of understanding – he is not as grade-focused as other students but instead really seems to enjoy grasping the underlying concepts of biology. Jason has often come up to me before or after class to ask me if I have read about some scientific development (that often I am unaware of) and the implications of the development in the field. He is the type of student all teachers want because his thought provoking questions energize my lectures – he makes me better at my craft.

One of my favorite experiences with Jason involved a lesson that was centered on the movie “The Martian”. As part of a grant, a colleague and I developed a NGSS-based lesson plan that was based around the students determining the problems they would face if they were stranded on Mars (similarly to Mark Watney in the book “The Martian”), and how they would overcome the obstacles they faced in order to survive. The lesson was meant to be an exercise in engineering in which students would problem solve given limited materials and constraints. My colleague and I were to be observed by district personnel as we taught and so to make sure we were prepared we tried to anticipate any issues we might face. One of these issues included the likelihood that some of the students would have read the book or seen the movie “The Martian” - we expected that these students would quickly be able to identify and solve the problems they would face based on what had happened in the book. Jason's group was one of these groups – as I listened to their discussion I realized that they had quickly determined that they would often need to clean the solar panels that provided their space habitat with energy due to the frequent dust storms that occur on Mars. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that neither Jason nor any of his fellow group members had read or seen “The Martian” – they were just so knowledgeable about the Mars environment that they quickly identified and solved this key problem. Not only was I delighted, but also Jason made quite the impression on my colleagues and the district personnel we had invited to observe. From that moment on I began thinking of Jason and his group as my “NASA boys” because of their intelligence and critical thinking skills.

Jason has exemplified his love for science and animation through the effort he has expended on other projects in my class. As part of a project that encourages reading for pleasure, I asked the students to read a science fiction or non-fiction text and present the material to their classmates, in a similar fashion to book reports they may have completed at an earlier age (but in a more sophisticated manner). Jason decided to create an animated video to show the class, which took far more time and effort than what his classmates created. I was so impressed (as were his classmates), that I encouraged him to submit it for awards and for college applications in the future.

I am currently out of the classroom on maternity leave. Although I am happy to be home with my newborn, I sincerely regret the fact that I will not be finishing out the school year as Jason's teacher. I am glad to know him and I eagerly anticipate the wonderful things he will accomplish in the future.

Sincerely,

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