



FROM THE HEART

Powerful Stories from Passionate Educators

Chris Layton, Jefferson Middle School in Oak Ridge, Tennessee

*Chris Layton
had hit the wall.
After seven years
of teaching, the
long hours, late
nights, and stress
had caught
up to him.*

He was ready to do something else, so he left the school system and took a job as a director of marketing for a firm. "The money was better and the hours were better so, for a year, everything really seemed to be a lot better," he said. Until that day in the airport.

Chris was waiting for a flight and reading *The Iliad*. A woman who was cleaning the terminal struck up a conversation with him and mentioned that she read the book in school, but never really understood it. Chris took a few minutes to explain it to her.

"Oh, that makes a lot of sense," she said. "You should be a teacher!"

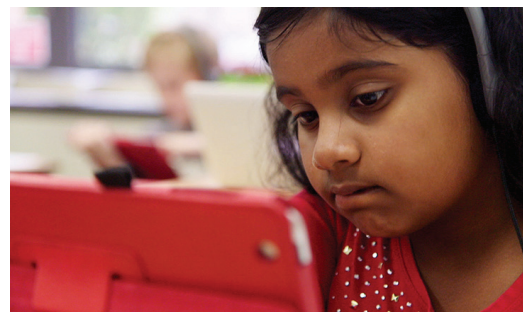
Chris laughed at first, but as he got on the plane, the words kept echoed in his head and, then, found their way to his heart. He liked his marketing job, but it wasn't his passion.

"It just wasn't the same as the thrill of being able to teach kids," he said.

Soon, Chris found his way back to the job he loved—being a middle school teacher.

Today, he works as a social studies teacher at Jefferson Middle School in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He believes it is crucial that students understand how the American system of government and personal rights developed and how that affects their lives every single day. But social studies is more than just historic facts and context.

"I think the two most important questions for a social studies class are 'what do you think?' and 'why do you think that?' I want my students to leave with the ability to think," he said. "I'm very big into the idea of the four Cs—collaboration, critical thinking, creative thinking and the ability for students to communicate with each other. And Social Studies Techbook is filled with resources and activities that require these life skills."



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Chris loves working in a middle school. Sure, it can be chaotic at this, but it's that energy and randomness that keep it interesting.

"You can have the best plans of all time. It's laid out the way you want it to be," he said. But, "if your students come in and there's something else going on in the world, sometimes, as a social studies teacher, you've got to dive right into that."

As a marketing director, his successes were measured in more concrete terms: whether he met his goals or made his bonus. In teaching, it's much different.

"I think the day-to-day answer of how I feel successful would be if students don't want to leave the room. The lesson ends because the bell rings," he said. "They're so engaged in what we're doing, it's like 'oh man, the bell rang. We got to leave?'"

So how will Chris make sure he doesn't hit another wall in teaching? Well, he has more motivation than ever to get home

on time--a beautiful daughter who was born on Christmas Eve in 2014.

"There's no better feeling in the world than when I walk in the house and see my daughter smile," he said. "I want to be a great teacher, but I want that time with her. And one of the best ways I've found to get that smile is not always to work longer, but to work smarter."

What Chris loves most about Techbook is the text-to-speech feature in Spanish that is helping his ELL students not just learn history, but be excited about it.

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