

Prompt A

As a candidate focused on English Language Arts, I believe my coursework has prepared me well to teach language and literature to middle and high school students. My undergraduate work at UW was heavily focused on English and Comparative Literature. Because my official major was International Studies, many of my classes included international and post-colonial texts. This breadth of reading in my foundational work helped me to investigate and challenge the concept of *canon*. My reading lists, both for pleasure and for teaching, encompass writers that both reflect the diversity of our world, and challenge ideas and notions of who is allowed to create art and tell stories.

In 2014 I moved to Texas to attend a nationally ranked program where I earned an MFA in fiction writing. While in graduate school I took advantage of the opportunity to also study film, poetry, narrative nonfiction, and to teach undergraduate composition. The Texas State University English Department provides graduate teaching assistants with a practicum in English Studies, which prepared me to craft a syllabus, build lesson plans, and develop a grading rubric.

My time in Texas forced me to confront and challenge many of my own ideas about the structural violence and inequality inherent to education, and to meditate on my own role in that space. In January of this year I attended TAT LAB's class: Anti-Racist Practices in Arts Education. Although the class only required an evening of my time, it solidified my understanding of the work required to be the kind of teacher I want to be—this is not to say that I am that teacher, only that I am reaching into the space of unknowing and discomfort. The confidence to teach can coexist with vulnerability, openness, and questioning.

My traditional coursework has prepared me with a knowledge of literature, language, fundamentals of grammar, composition, writing, and structure. However my nontraditional background and independent work have prepared me for my next steps—inquiry into the values, strengths, and weaknesses of traditional education.

Prompt B

My early education departed from the expected when I was ten—after two weeks in the fifth grade my parents allowed me to leave the public elementary and embark on a self-schooling experiment. One year turned into five and then, at the age of fifteen, I began my college career. Usually, when I tell this story, it sounds romantic and I am the brilliant protagonist. The scenes untold are the ones of floundering and failing, struggling to navigate a system for which I was unprepared. The day I walked into Mount Tahoma High School as a substitute teacher was the first time I'd entered a high school classroom. Some days I wonder if the fact that I've never been a high school student is a weakness, but usually I believe it is a unique strength. Because I do not have embodied expectations of what a high school classroom should be, I am able to challenge the established order of tradition.

During graduate school I was lucky to have my introduction to the craft of teaching from a thoughtful faculty that embraced inquiry and questioning. Before moving into the classroom as a teacher, I spent a year working in the university's Writing Center, where I focused on supporting students for whom English was a second or third language. I believe that language is intuitive, innate, and built into the very fabric of our humanity. Academic English is a skill, but expression and voice are soul. I loved working with my students, but I was frustrated with the way that instruction was, at times, clinical and hierarchical. I had already decided that the culture of Evergreen made it the ideal school for me, but discovering that this cohort will have an EL

focus is what helped me to decide on the timing. I love English, but not at the exclusion or denigration of a student's own relationship with language.

I am an artist, a writer, and within the scope of education I will always consider myself a teaching artist. My classroom is a space in which all learners are supported in knowing that language, storytelling, and voice belong to them as both heritage and future. Language lives within all cultures and communities. So often writing is encapsulated in a singular *right way*, that is bound by race, class, culture, and power. The calculus of value has no place in language and learning and I want my students to see themselves—their culture, family, heritage, and own images—reflected inside a new tradition of education. To better prepare myself, I need to learn foundational skills, including how to navigate the systems already in place. In order to teach my students how to navigate the gatekeepers and guideposts of the world—and language is a tool well suited to that task—I have to first understand the very structures that bind them.

Prompt C

Education is violent, racist, and built by structures that are inherently unequal. It is required to succeed within the framework of capitalism—a brutal philosophy that defines our culture. I'm not sure that education *is* a social good; I think it upholds so much of what is foul and cruel. The contradiction of education is perhaps unsolvable, but *learning* might be the key to an uneasy peace. If we shift our framework away from educating students, and instead build towards creating spaces and opportunities for learning, with the understanding that each student arrives with their own unique foundational strength, perhaps we can confront the injustice that is the educational system.

I believe that my students arrive already brilliantly knowing. My purpose as a teacher is to support them in finding the tools that *they* require to know that their voices are essential and worthy of space. As a teacher and an artist my duty is to hold space and make space, to amplify stories and voices, and to invite the uncomfortable and the unknowing. Graduate school prepared me to teach writing and literature, but I've used the time since to work on teaching with an approach that de-centralizes hegemonic structures while recognizing that they build and maintain the very buildings we teach in.

Specifically, as an English teacher, I want my students to know the sweep of possibilities available through writing and language, that they can be art and creative expression, not just a task and a ladder to the next skill. Delight in the page, the pleasure of story and image, reveling in voice—these small powers have weighty, and subversive, implications.

Teaching about language is a tightrope wherein one must navigate a student's culture, history, family, and relationship with value and the world. To write, to learn, is perilous. Every day that I teach, I am terrified, but I know that my students are the ones at greatest risk—and yet the world violates them every day. By openly acknowledging the power imbalances and dangers of education, I can support my students in navigating a system that is designed to hurt them. When you know there is an outside hand playing with the fuel, the flickering of the gaslights becomes not a threat, but a call to action.