



Honoring a Mentor That Matters: January 2013

TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS (AND TEACHERS)

BACKGROUND

Several years ago, WKCD asked students in four cities to honor adults in their community who were changing young lives. We learned about MacArthur "Genius" grant winner and violinist Sebastian Ruth, who surrounds kids on Providence's west side with string music, building confidence and wonder with every note. We met school bus driver Georgia Dunbar, who doesn't just transport students to and from school in one of Chicago's most hard-scrabble neighborhoods—she coaxes and coaches them to *stay* in school.

As we kick off 2013—and National Mentoring Month—we are eager to replenish our stock of adult heroes who reach out every day to youth in their community. They deserve a standing ovation.

Can you help us by carving some time in your classroom or program for kids to think about a mentor that matters and to create a tribute?

We will be accepting tributes all month and posting as many as we can. We are looking for submissions in any form: prose, poetry, digital, drawings . . .

To help structure the assignment, we offer these tips for students (and teachers).

Identifying mentors

When we ask students to describe an adult who has been a mentor to them or other students, the first thing they often say is "I can't think of any." As we talk and dig deeper, we are amazed at what we find. Here are our suggestions.

Look outside your immediate family.

We hope to honor mentors that reach out to people other than those who are related to them. So we suggest that you only nominate a family member if that person also connects in a significant way to other teenagers.

Look outside your school.

We want to honor mentors whose job may not require them to work with youth, but who reach out to teenagers anyway. Please nominate a teacher or coach only if that person goes above and beyond the expectations of their job, reaching out to youth in other ways.

Look for people who share their interests with young people. Artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers may be on your list of people who matter to teenagers in your community. Look too for people who connect through sports or outdoor adventures, through church, or through volunteer activities.

Look for people who introduce teenagers to the world of work. You may know someone who takes on one or more young people as interns in the workplace, helping them learn things they would not otherwise know. Hospital workers, trades people, or professionals all might be on your list. Whether or not the job is paid, these adults can open important doors to teenagers.

Look for people who help kids who are having trouble.

You might know someone who keeps an eye out for young people who are struggling – either in their schoolwork or in their personal lives. In a group or one by one, adults like this often step in just in time to turn a teenager’s life around.

Note: Approach this any way you wish: individually, in teams, as a class.

Learning more

Perhaps you know all you need to create a simple but strong tribute for the mentor you’ve chosen. If you have time, though, we encourage you to interview the person you want to honor. Be sure to take good notes or, better yet, tape record your interview.

Here are some possible questions (more than you need!):

- What were you like when you were my age?
- What do you do now? When you were my age, would you have imagined that?
- Can you tell me more about the interactions you have with teenagers? What do you do with them?
- When did you start making this kind of connection with youth? How did it happen, and why?
- How do you make time for this kind of connection in your life?
- Are there things you’ve learned in your life that you feel are important to pass on to my generation? (Work skills, knowledge, ideas, values, things that have happened in your times . . .)
- Tell me about your “best moment” as a mentor – a time when you felt like you were really helping someone.
- Tell me about a time when you really learned something about mentoring.
- Tell me about a time when you really learned something from someone you were mentoring.
- Does anything surprise you about the young people you spend time with now?
- Do you ever stay in touch with the young people you’ve connected with, after they move on?
- Can you say anything more about what is satisfying for you about the time you spend with people my age?

Creating your tribute

Your tribute can take many forms—as long as it’s something you can transmit electronically and we can post clearly. It could be a short essay, a poem, a 1-2 minute video of the mentor in action, a drawing that captures the mentor’s spirit, a photograph. (Take a look at the photos that appear in the short

video at http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2013/01_mentors_that_matter/index.html. These were all taken by young people like you.)

Note: If you are submitting photographs that you, yourself, have taken, be sure to shoot the photos at the highest resolution you can and under the best lighting conditions you can manage. And remember that close-ups work better than shots taken from a distance. We want to see the mentor's face—but please avoid mug shots!

Submitting your tribute

Whatever form you choose for your tribute, be sure to include the following with your submission:

- **Your name, age, and the city/town and state where you live.**
- **The mentor's name, their title (if they have one), what they do for a living, where they work, and the name of the city/town and state where they live.**
- **What makes the mentor stand out for you.**

Please make sure that you have the person's written permission to share their story and image with WKCD.

Send your tribute to: mentors@whatkidscando.org. Remember to attach everything you want to include.

The last day for submitting tributes is January 31, 2013.