

First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 3

Episode Transcript: Batha Wagoner on “Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference”

[Intro music]

Host:

Welcome back to “This I Believe.” Today we have on our show Batha Wagoner, a second-year elementary education major at Cottey College in Nevada, Missouri. She is here today to share what she believes is the most important dimension of global awareness. Take it away, Batha.

Batha:

Thank you so much for having me! When I first read about the four dimensions of global awareness in my First-Year Writing Seminar, one stood out to me right away. That was “Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference.” [Pause] It reminded me of the instances I’d seen or experienced in which people weren’t truly empathetic or respectful of the differences of those around them. For the idea of global awareness, this is *even more true*: you can’t acknowledge and respect the complexity of the world and its many different cultures if you don’t respect differences. Therefore, I believe “Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference” is *the most important* dimension of global awareness.

This dimension brought back a specific behavior I’ve seen directed toward me in the past. I am what is called a Torah Observant Christian also known as Hebrew Roots. All of my life I’ve been looked at like I have a third eye whenever I mention my religion. In my faith, we follow the biblical dietary laws and keep biblical feasts.

This behavior started in eighth grade. In my gifted class, I decided to share my religion and the necklace my mother got me for one of the Holy days (I can’t remember which one at the moment). For the next four and a half years or so the boys in the class would tease me relentlessly making jokes about how I was a Jew *even though I wasn’t*. [Pause] One time, I saw a coin on the ground and went to pick it up to put in my piggy bank since my family was barely scraping by and one of the boys said, *of course, I would be a penny pincher since I am a greedy Jew*. I felt torn: Should I pick up the coin to save money for milk or leave it so I don’t get made fun of? [Pause] Now, I could tell that most of their torment was due to their lack of understanding, but that didn’t help me to speak up. That class, I think, is the main reason I have such terrible social anxiety. I was always afraid to share my thoughts and beliefs because I would be made to feel inferior. So I’d just always keep to myself. I am still struggling to break free from my anxiety in social situations. If they’d only been a little more compassionate and actually listened to what my religion was without acting like they were always better than me, they might have actually learned to respect my differences.

There was always one person, however, who would support me no matter my choices or my religion. That was my high school gifted education teacher. She was always standing up for me whenever she noticed anything. She was even there for me when my grandmother died and I was crying in the back of her class. I remember this one time when one of the boys made an anti-Jew joke and the whole class erupted. She then told the boy who made this joke to write an apology letter to me after she explained to the boys in my class that I was not in fact Jewish and it would be rude to make jokes like that even if I was one. The boy who made the joke asked me if he could buy me dinner instead of writing a letter. Not in a romantic way, he just didn't like writing. So he, his girlfriend, and I had Chinese food in his car and we overcame our differences through talking. He learned more about me and then we became great friends. All because of my teacher's empathy toward me and her respect for my differences. I still talk to that teacher too and sometimes we have dinner together. She is one of the best teachers I've ever had. She was also very respectful about the many career choices I cycled through, always helping me to do more research about the pros and cons of each trying to find the one that fits me.

Anyways, these experiences and many others have led me to my conclusion that "Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference[s]" is the most important of all of the dimensions of global awareness when it comes to making a better world. If my teacher hadn't demonstrated this dimension I would have likely never gotten along with the people in my class. I strive to be like her in everyday life and in my future classroom of diverse learners from diverse backgrounds.

Host:

Thank you so much for coming on to "This I Believe," Batha. And thank you, listeners, for tuning in. We'll see you next time with another special guest sharing their thoughts on "This I Believe."

[Outro Music]

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