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Viewing and Reading *Tales from a Teacher's Heart*

This study guide is a tool to accompany viewing and reading *Tales from a Teacher's Heart*. It is a practical resource for teachers, principals, professional developers, and other educators who seek to reflect and learn more about themselves and the impact on students and the larger community. Teaching is a complex series of tasks that involves reaching students, communicating with parents, and interacting with the larger community, to name only a few.

This study guide can help teachers, principals, professional developers, and small- and large-group facilitators explore what really matters in education—great teachers and how these teachers make a difference in the lives of students, parents, fellow teachers, and community members. The content of *Tales from a Teacher's Heart* spans many topics and can be used to open site- and district-level workshops; delve into issues under investigation in book studies; spark discussion during faculty, team, and department meetings; and start out the monthly principal's meeting with faculty and staff. The content of *Tales from a Teacher's Heart* and the tools offered in this study guide can make learning more meaningful for adults. Figure 2.1 highlights some of the topical areas covered in *Tales from a Teacher's Heart*.

This study guide is filled with many practical tools. To provide structure for reading and viewing *Tales from a Teacher's Heart*, each chapter is laid out in identical fashion. The following sections appear in each chapter:

- **BEFORE YOU BEGIN:** Provocative questions are offered on topics addressed in the tales.
- **TALES FROM A TEACHER'S HEART:** The text of the tale is provided. In addition to these tales, other heartwarming stories about students, teachers, and schools can be viewed at <http://www.talesfromateachersheart.com/>
- **TIME TO REFLECT:** Focused, reflective prompts are offered that afford readers and viewers the opportunity to step back and consider the message(s) and content of the tale.
- **SO WHAT—NOW WHAT?** Broad-based questions for discussion, reflection, or journaling are suggested. These questions are intended to allow teachers to consider how each tale may inform their own practice.

FIGURE 2.1. TOPICAL AREAS COVERED IN TALES FROM A TEACHER’S HEART

Topic/Issue	Recommended Tale(s)
Alienated students	Just Doing My Job; Alex’s Story
At-risk students	Alex’s Story; You Like Me; You Never Gave Up on Me
Building relationships with students	All tales
Care and concern for students	All tales
Connecting with students	You Like Me
Differentiated instruction	You Never Gave Up on Me; You Like Me
First year of teaching	You’ve Got A Friend; You Like Me; Thank You, Teacher
Giving thanks	Sister Naoma; Three Gifts in One; Thank You, Teacher
Inspiring students	All tales
Invisible students	Alex’s Story; You Like Me; Just Doing My Job
Parental involvement	Family Reading Night
Perseverance	All tales
Power of decisions	Alex’s Story
Principals who make a difference	Alex’s Story; Three Gifts in One
Reaching out to parents	Family Reading Night; Just Doing My Job; You Never Gave Up on Me
Reading nights	Family Reading Night
Reluctant learners	You Like Me; You Never Gave Up on Me
School-community relations	Family Reading Night
School improvement and standardized testing	Their Best Hope
Teacher morale	You’ve Got a Friend; Their Best Hope
Teachers supporting teachers	You’ve Got a Friend; Their Best Hope

- **HIT THE GROUND RUNNING: TRY THIS TOMORROW—**: Strategies for implementing the substance of the tales are offered. With some creativity, these strategies can be adapted across grade levels and the varying contexts in which you work.
- **MUSINGS**: Perspectives about the tale and its deeper meanings are offered.
- **IN A NUTSHELL**: Like a playbook, this section amplifies the major themes of the tale. The ideas presented here are the “ahas” gleaned from the tales.
- **QUOTES FROM THE HEART**: Each one of the authors provides inspirational thoughts that are captured in this section.

There are a variety of applications for this study guide. The study guide is intended for teachers, teams of teachers, principals, and professional developers.

Teachers can use this study guide as a way to self-reflect about teaching. After each tale, there are many strategies in the section **HIT THE GROUND RUNNING: TRY THIS TOMORROW—** that teachers (and other school personnel) can implement in their classrooms.

Teams of teachers can read and view the tales and then use the probes in **TIME TO REFLECT**, and **SO WHAT—NOW WHAT?** to promote discussion and reflection. Time at the end of grade level meetings and department meetings can be set aside to view a tale and then engage in discussion. Book and study groups can use this text as a source to extend the conversations about teaching and learning.

Mentors and their protégés can read, view, and then discuss the contents of the tales. The tales lend themselves as discussion starters. The open-ended nature of the sections **TIME TO REFLECT**, and **SO WHAT—NOW WHAT?** open windows of opportunity for mentors and protégés to start discussions across a variety of topics—how to reach reluctant learners, how to work with parents, how to communicate with fellow colleagues, and so on. For instance, “Thank You, Teacher” (Sandra Harris) is a great tale to examine the struggles of the first-year of teaching. It gives an uplifting glimpse of how a first-year teacher survived and grew. Mentors can pick up a few strategies from the tales as well, as in “You’ve Got a Friend” (Deborah Blaz), where we see how an experienced teacher can make a difference in the work life of beginning teachers.

The *Tales from a Teacher’s Heart* can be used as professional development strategy. The tales can serve as ice breaking activities. *Professional developers* can also tease out several themes—team building, dealing with the stress of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements, working with difficult students, reaching the invisible student, the importance of differentiated learning strategies, developing large-scale efforts such as reading nights. There are myriad uses for these tales.

Principals can use these tales in several ways. Because the tales run from 4 to 5 minutes, they can be viewed at the beginning of faculty meetings. Thematically, the tales deal with a variety of issues that schools and their staff encounter. For example, in the tale “Their Best Hope” (Barbara Blackburn), teacher morale related to high stakes environments are examined. Principals are really “teachers of teachers” and,