

For Review

577WORDS RTO -4-min /RA -6-min

“What are we celebrating today?”

I asked the above question at the beginning of every one of my classes. Sometimes I asked it a little differently, as in, “Who has good news?” or “Who has something good to say?” However I put
5 it, it always meant the same thing. It was a call for celebrating life, for focusing on what’s right and what’s good. And it was always fun! It was part of a life-affirming ritual that started by accident in the 1970-71 school year and continued until I stopped classroom teaching in 2001 — thirty years of celebrating!

10 Believe it or not, this little ritual started as the result of two things that usually have a negative nuance, especially with students: current events and homework. At the high school level I often taught courses in United States history and in American government. Whenever I taught either of these two subjects, there
15 was a nightly homework assignment in current events. The average high school kid is sadly uninformed about anything unrelated to music, sports, and other forms of entertainment, so reading the actual news section of a newspaper was a completely new experience for most of them.

20 Within a few weeks they got the hang of it and were actually surprised at their newly developed ability to carry on an intelligent conversation about what was going on in a world they hardly knew existed just a short time before. Just as we were settling into our routine, a student’s innocent comment jolted me. He said, “You
25 know, for being such a positive teacher, you sure give a negative

homework assignment.” Somewhat startled, I replied with, “What do you mean?” He simply stated that most of the news was bad news.

30 We had a long class discussion about this, and agreed on one thing: We needed to receive more good news. This is something I thought over for quite some time. By requiring my students to read all this bad news I was jeopardizing my reputation with many of them as “Mr. Positive.”

I was now more determined than ever to prove to my students
35 that there was something to celebrate every day and to work a daily dose of good news into our learning environment. So the next day at the beginning of class I asked, “What are we celebrating today?” They thought I meant that it was some day of historical significance, and they should know it. So, I said, “Let me ask it a
40 different way: Who has good news? Who has something good to say?” Since this was the first time I’d started class that way, they were a bit puzzled. I said, “Since you’re having such a hard time finding good news in the newspaper, let’s see if we can find some in our own lives.”

45 Over the years of doing this, we heard just about every bit of good news possible. Some were small things, some were huge things. But most important was that my students learned to look for the good in everyday life and then to share it with others. This simple little ritual also had a build-up effect. Each day we added
50 to the good news of the previous day, and so on. And each day my students increased their awareness of all the good news going on

around them all the time. They looked for it, they found it, and they celebrated it by sharing it with others.