

## Classroom Chronicles: First Year Teacher

By S.C. Mizzi

I've hypothesised that teachers return to school for some kind of redo; either to re-live or re-write their own school experience. When I'd committed to becoming a teacher, I was what they call a 'second-career' teacher. It's a funny thing when you start telling people that you're heading into teaching. They treat you in one of two ways. Their tone matches the pitch of speaking to a soldier heading to war; they use words like *admirable* and *brave*. You're gifted quasi-advice like *stay safe* and *look after yourself*. Or the slightly more concerning ones who warn you *not* to run toward the burning building.

School has changed a lot since I was there as a student, like the Gaga pit that every school seems to have now. For those playing along who aren't familiar, Gaga is a spartan-like game where twenty kids are corralled into a pit, and they aggressively try to hit each other with a dodgeball. It's the most dramatic thing I've ever seen. Before the teacher arrives on yard duty, they're all waiting with anticipation, one hand on the wall. It's like the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*. They're silent and shaking, one kid spews monster noodles over the edge, another locks eyes with their friend, gives a knowing nod, and says, "I'll see you in class."

I've also never been so manipulated in my life. I have kids who are Train-Spotting addicted to playing games on their school iPad. I will see the game on their screen. They will see me see the game on their screen. I'll tell them to stop, and they will look me dead in the eyes, the same eyes that saw the game on their iPad, and say, "I didn't do anything." I showed one kid their browser history, which revealed they'd been sneaking games all morning, and they got really offended, like me going into their history was an invasion of their privacy and so I had done the wrong thing.

But it's not all war games and gaslighting. Kids are smarter, more creative, and more worldly than any generation before them. Once I collected anonymous questions to kick off our unit of inquiry, one of my students asked, "Does life get harder or do we *make* it harder". And I thought of everyone who told me not to run toward the burning building.

But, for every challenge presented in the classroom, there is but an equal and opposite victory, akin to Newton's Law of Motion. For every child that tells me I'm 'the worst', there's one that tells me I'm 'the best', sometimes these are the same kid.

I don't regret choosing to be in the trenches of the classroom, it's no doubt the hardest thing I've ever done. But hard doesn't necessarily mean bad. Besides, in what other profession can you pelt your peers with a dodgeball in a pit?