

Incident of Humiliation

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A Teacher's Words

I was in seventh or eighth grade at the time, sitting in math class just as I did every other day of the week. The room was made to feel cozy with the clutter of student work and posters hanging on the walls. There were rows of desks and a chalkboard on the front wall. I sat in one of the middle aisles, closer to the front of the room. I always did my work and kept quiet, especially since I considered myself “separate” from my peers.

This particular day, I was not quite myself. While I usually followed the very “proper” behavior of raising my hand if I wanted to speak, this time I opened my mouth without the teacher’s acknowledgement. It was not too big of a deal; the class continued. Some minutes later I did it again. I do not recall whether my comment was related to math or not, but the second time that I spoke without being called on, it did not go unnoticed.

The teacher paused to let the whole class know that this was the second time I spoke out loud. Although she was directing her comments to me, her voice was loud enough that the whole class was informed. In response to a student, she also let everyone know that **I was acting out in order to get attention**. You see, there were other people in the room who regularly spoke without being called on, and they were never admonished. The teacher’s words incited a little giggling in the room.

It used to be the teacher, the students, and me. Now it was all of them against me. I could not – and did not want to – see the faces, as they were mostly sitting around and behind me. I just froze in my seat, shocked at what the teacher had said. My upbringing kept me from shouting at the teacher or yelling at my peers. Instead I just sat there and shrunk, fighting back tears, wishing I could just disappear.

I felt humiliated because my peers were laughing at me, but the greatest hurt came from the humiliation that my teacher bestowed upon me. Why would my teacher say such a thing, when the only thing I was trying to do was forget the troubles in my home?

Connecting Experience to Literature:

- This story recalls humiliation on an interpersonal level
- My reaction strategy was to disconnect by “moving away”
- Teacher was “powerful” and did not realize the injustice she brought to me (“underling”)
- I would have been fine with feeling shame, if she had made me realize that I was acting inappropriately – shame is used in my culture, a high-context community
- The only reaction I could think of at the time was a humble one...in my mind it would have been wrong to disrespect the teacher.
- This situation created an inside/outside dichotomy in which I was the lone outsider
- Revenge - part of me wanted to yell out to her that I was not trying to get attention, to make her realize that so she would feel humiliated, but I did not act on these thoughts