

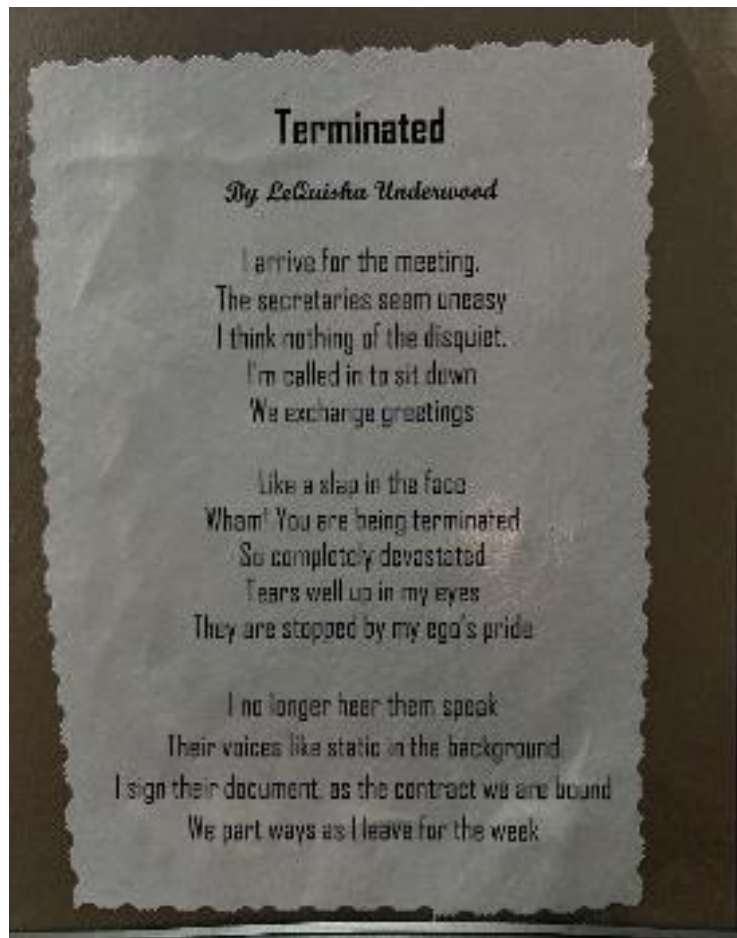
## Terminated: My Career as a Teacher

By: LeQuisha Underwood

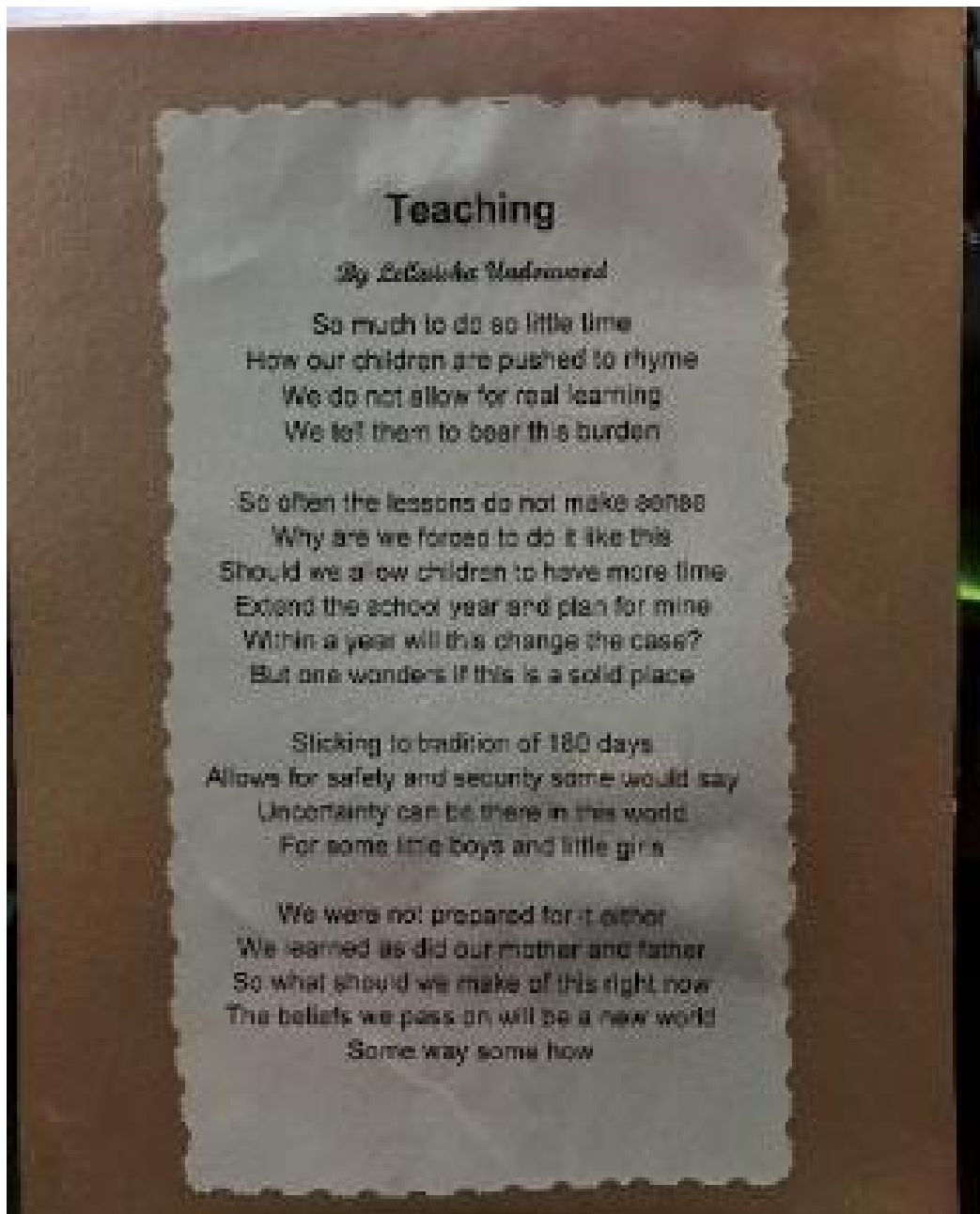
"Wham! You are being terminated, so completely devastated" Words I wrote in my first year of teaching. I worked at one of the toughest middle schools, at that time, Van Buren Middle (2013). The admin wanted robots that would stick to the script. My thinking, 'but the script isn't working. They can't read.' This is a story of a career that was almost TERMINATED before it started. All because I keep the interest of teaching children how to become literate above all else.

**2011-2012** You only get one first class. This school is the one I attended as a child, Robles Elementary School. They were a pilot for gender related learning which left my class with only three girls and 15 boys. I'll never forget the child that would turn over his chair and pretend to shoot at others like he was in the movie Star Wars. Classroom management could be taught more effectively in teacher preparation courses. I had to learn on the job and fast.

**2012-2013** I taught 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade to create a full teaching unit at Van Buren Middle school. At the time it was considered the toughest middle school in our district. This board is notes for students during teacher appreciation week. They say things like "I just wanna say you are my favorite teacher and that even though I get out of focus you always put me back on track." "You are an amazing reading teacher. You make everything fun in some awkward way. So thanks for just being you." Deemed Effective but I was moved out of the school. Took the bright eyed, naivety right from under me. Years later, I wrote this poem about my experience. Little did I know I would have the experience again in 2015.



**2013-2014** the one time I taught kindergarten. I was able to teach some of these students again in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This was an awakening. The social, emotional, physical, and cognitive, development kinder teachers are responsible for cannot be described in words. I am friends with the teachers I met this year of my classroom teaching career. They told me I would never be “normal” again. As in I would always have kinder teacher logic. I must admit they were correct. Deemed progressing according to the teacher evaluations system.

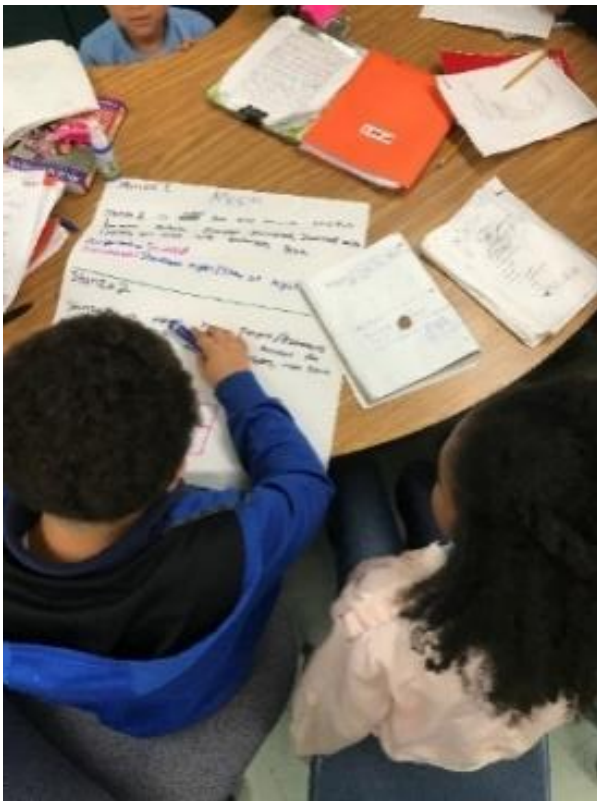


**2014-2015** My first-year teaching 4th grade. A welcome change from being in kindergarten the previous year. Bless the teachers who absolutely love being there for years. This group needed phonics instruction according to their assessment data. When I proceeded with phonics instruction district personnel said “that’s a second grade skill, not for fourth graders.” I kept teaching phonics the best I knew how despite their comments. One student improved by two grade levels in one semester, which encouraged me to keep going. To help with my frustrations, I paid to attend an online college course about teaching writing. The professor had me write 3 poems, Teaching, Terminated and Halloween came out of the experience. Deemed effective by the evaluation system, but I was moved out because of the phonics instruction.

**2015-2016** Here are the first group of students I had at Dickenson Elementary School. This was my first experience where 90% or more of the population spoke another language at home. I learned so much about language development. One student said "teacher you prepare so much for us" such sweet children. Complete English as a second language training. Deemed an effective teacher.

**2016-2017** I found my groove with guided groups. That is, I didn't do it, but I made it look like I did. Instead, I chose to meet with half the class, while the other half worked on skills in "independent land" as I called it. Then we would switch. The result was more time in small groups with the entire class! So, most days they received 2 hours of effective reading instruction. I continue to do this process even now. Deemed effective according to the teacher evaluation system.

**2017-2018** This group received the best instruction of all my time in 4th grade. I had read so many instructional guides, attended multiple training courses, and started the reading endorsement journey. All to be highly effective as determined by the teacher evaluation system at the time.



On the left students are working in groups to comprehend the poem Moon. On the right, is one student's summary of what they learned. Students have a choice of writing, drawing, or both. Deemed Highly effective.

**2018-2019** This is my return to middle school. I taught 6th grade reading and writing (Language Arts) at a NASA Explorer school. This magnet school was by far my most treasured experience as a teacher. Dr. Wilson, pictured to the right of me, gave me just the right level of support. Deemed highly effective.



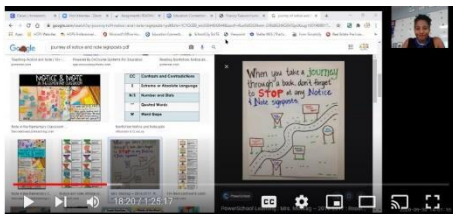
**2019-2020** The administration at Stewart asks me to teach three subjects: Reading, Writing (Lang, Arts), and World History. We had a blast teaching and learning this year. We were able to have four field trips this school year. I start to call us the STEAM/LIT Academy. That's Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics over Literacy because you need lit for all of it. As you might imagine, it is highly effective according to the teacher evaluation system.



An artist comes to show us the science of music. I get in on the fun by playing the instrument as well.

**2019-2020** The local news writes about our efforts to improve literacy.

<https://www.wtsp.com/article/news/education/tampa-bay-mentorship-program-helps-students-read/67-e5b77602-25b6-41ab-9ad1-17f6ba660f0a>



**2020-2021** The Covid-19 pandemic is in full force. I get to continue testing my skills online. Here we are in a library orientation. I invited the librarian to our zoom room. Even during this situation students were taught how to check out books from home. We are in a cycle of teaching and learning while in our zoom room. Students are learning how to navigate the new learning platform. I am told my classes continue to learn and excel. I also learned the reading problem is

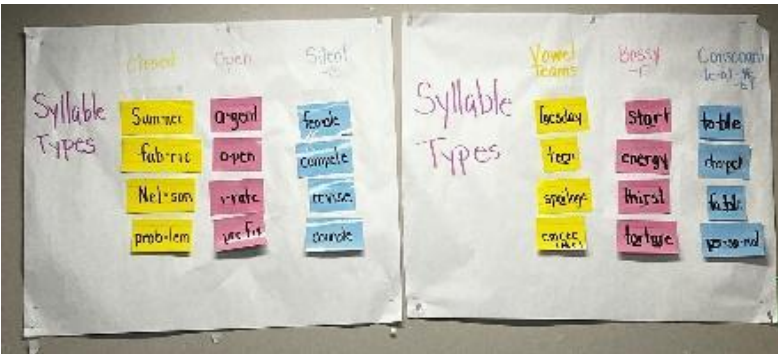
broader than I realized. To supplement my income, I tutor after school online as well. Students from all over the United States tell me about not getting any literacy instruction. Texas, California, Washington state, Maine, Georgia, Rhode Island. Etc.



**2021-2022** I take a position as a Reading Resource teacher. This is considered a literacy specialist. I'm so excited because I feel I can help more students if I can help their teachers. Sadly, they want me to use a reading program that is not shown to work well with striving readers. I take a leave of absence for the rest of the year.



Books I organized by grade level.



**2022-2023** I return to the classroom to take care of "loose ends." This school year I am with 8<sup>th</sup> graders at a magnet school that opened in 2020. Needless to say, students have had turmoil since entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The deficits are apparent in their knowledge of reading so I seek to close the gaps. Here is where I taught them syllable types- a spelling inventory shows they needed skills from 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In April 2023, I find out there is a feature about my approach to literacy in the podcast Sold A Story, Bonus Episode 1.

<https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>

**Presently** I help districts, novice teachers, student-teachers, and families implement effective literacy instruction.

<https://www.lequishatheteacher.com/>