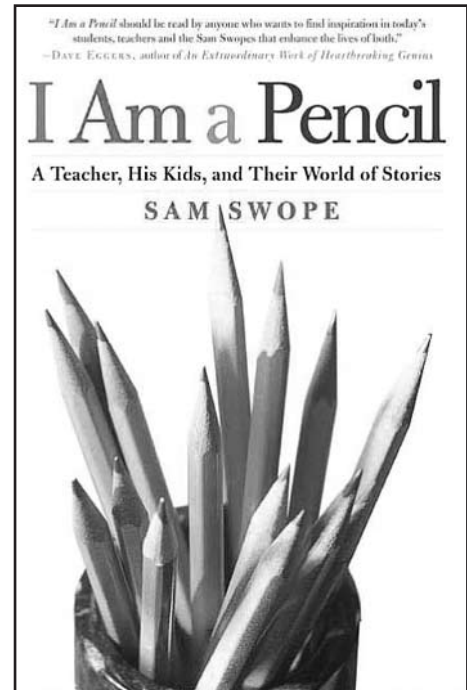


I Am A Pencil

Book Review by Jean Jacques Credi, Indiana

When we met in Indianapolis for the National Facilitator's meeting we talked about flying at 30,000 feet and our need to get to the ground level. *I Am a Pencil*, by Sam Swope, confronts this very challenge as an educator. Sam tells the fantastic tale of his experiences adapting and teaching writing to a group of third graders. He becomes so drawn in by the students that he continues his work through the their fourth and fifth grade years. Despite all the challenges a "guest" teacher faces in a public school, he attempts to inspire and amaze the kids as he works to unlock the gifted writer in all of them. His story is telling. He reveals all the idiosyncrasies of a school, a classroom and a child. He speaks favorably of his encounters with the staff and various teachers despite some barriers that exist. Swope's analysis uncovers something heartwarming and true about humanity, learning and children as he embraces his students, their families and their interests. He demonstrates the commitment it takes to reach all children, with all it's embedded failures. We can all relate to this story; the child he goes the extra mile for – the child he just doesn't seem to connect with despite all her amazing talents. Sure, he is a guest and not fully responsible for the children's learning, but he gets below the surface. He takes advantage of his situation to work intimately with the children and he embarks on a fruitless crusade to ensure that these children get in to better middle schools than those they are destined to attend. It's bittersweet. His intentions are noble and he does the research, makes the phone calls, encourages families and children and inspires hope. Sam reminds us about the importance of our commitment. He reminds us about what it takes to reach into the hearts of our children from our teacher lens. He shows compassion. He demonstrates rigor with various projects (The Box Project, The Tree Project and The Island Project), all focused on achievement in literacy, and most of all, he reminds us that teaching and learning is about the kids. What impressed me the most was Sam's devotion to understanding schools, learning and children. Sam's creativity was definitely inspired. He was amazed with the children's passion for life. He was also amazed with the powerful influence a school holds for its students..



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