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AMAZING TEACHER



English teacher Dylan Emerick-Brown, and his class read William Shakespeare's "Macbeth," at Deltona High School last week.

DAVID TUCKER/NEWS-JOURNAL

Emerick-Brown pushes quality amid pandemic

By Abigail Mercer
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

At Deltona High School, between walls decorated with literature posters, African face masks and a portrait of a vampiric Mona Lisa, the words of Macbeth rang out.

When not reciting Macbeth's lines early Wednesday morning, English teacher Dylan Emerick-Brown looked on as his students read the end of the play aloud. He stopped the class when an important moment came up to analyze the lines in their context, to answer a question, and to elicit a round of laughter when pulling the fake severed head of the fictional Scottish General out of a drawer.

And while some students might not care about Shakespearean plot twists or the importance of foreshadowing in literature, the death of Lady Macbeth and the Cesarean section surprise was met with cries of 'Oh no!' and gasps from the seven-student audience.

It's only part of the reason why Emerick-Brown was nominated for The News-Journal's Amazing Teacher series. Known for inspiring students to start the high school's

Amazing Teachers: About this series

» As part of an effort to honor the work of teachers in Volusia and Flagler counties, The News-Journal and All Aboard Storage are sharing stories of educators who have made an impact on students' lives with a different story each month.

» Go to news-journalonline.com to see more stories about inspiring teachers in Volusia and Flagler counties.

» To nominate a teacher, visit news-journalonline.com/contests.

first literary magazine, Howl, as well as his riveting course section on Irish novelist James Joyce, he said he wants to provide his sophomore students with a unique experience.

"If I'm not interested in what I teach, then the students aren't interested, either. I try to switch things up because of that," he said. "Teaching them things they might not normally read outside of class gives them literature, perspectives they normally wouldn't get."

After eight years of teaching at Deltona High School, his passion for literature and the English language, as well as his dedication to his students, is considered infectious.

"He's just all good things in ed-

ucation and teaching English. He loves literature, but even more, he loves his kids. He sparks that creativity within them, and it's a great thing to see," said Christina Lapnow, assistant principal of Deltona High School. "He is so deserving. He's the most creative, inspired teacher that I've worked with over my years."

But the slowly mounting pressure to teach with quantity over quality, the pandemic's increased stresses and what Emerick-Brown believes to be poor handling of the coronavirus on the state and school district's part helped him decide to change careers. Emerick-Brown said it's the job of a teacher these days to wear multiple hats — educator, front line mental health

worker, and security official. But he believes their voices aren't being heard.

"I'm a great teacher, I hope, and I'm leaving," he said. "I will be leaving at the end of the year. Even if I didn't have a new career path in mind, I can't keep doing this in good conscience."

He said his plans are to transition to becoming an executive coach.

Students will no doubt miss him as a teacher.

Summer Knight, 15, said her writing and reading confidence has skyrocketed under Emerick-Brown's guidance. She used to be miserable reading plays aloud in Emerick-Brown's class, but after realizing how interesting it can be,

she said it's something she looks forward to.

Joseph Rossi, 16, said he's been able to maintain good grades on quizzes in his other classes, because Emerick-Brown makes sure to give them time to catch up on other coursework and "feel human" for a little while. Joseph said his teacher's sense of humor and willingness to help makes it easy to connect with him.

It's not only important to inspire students to become decent citizens, but necessary, Emerick-Brown said. But when educators are having a hard time keeping up with teaching both online and in-person classes, he said the most they can do is help them pass.

"We don't have to be part of a system that gives A grades on an assembly line like one does to cattle," Emerick-Brown said. "Instead, we can be a system that inspires creativity, analytical skills and individualism while teaching students not only what they need to know, but why, where to find it, what makes it valid and how to use it in the world they will soon inherit."

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