I Learned from Watching You: An Exploration of the Importance of Parental Education

Education is the driving force behind many people’s childhood; it is the time where they learn about their world, themselves, and other people. While most formal education occurs in a school environment, it is not the only nor most effective avenue, and parents are a necessary factor in their children’s growing up and learning. This is clearly seen in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee through Atticus Finch and his parenting of his children, Jem and Scout. Atticus, a moral man, takes the time to routinely explain to his young children how the world works, and focuses on teaching them moral lessons so they can grow into strong moral adults and overcome the usual disease of racism that plagues so many of their neighbors. Likewise, Mufasa in the film *The Lion King* is another positive father figure who works to teach his son and heir, Simba, of not only his responsibilities, but of what being a true king is; by taking time to have critical conversations with his son, Mufasa gives Simba his true education in not only morality, but kingship. However, parents are not always successful with education their children, as seen in the musical *Spring Awakening*; Wendla, a young girl whose sister has recently given birth, is curious about this process, however her mother is too uncomfortable with the subject and is unable to give her a truthful answer, thereby depriving her daughter of essential life wisdom and knowledge. As a result, these three sets of parents and children illustrate both the positive elements of parental education, as well as the dangers when that education is not provided. In order to grow and develop into competent, strong adults, as seen in *To Kill a Mockingbird, The Lion King,* and *Spring Awakening,* parents must impart moral wisdom directly to their children, thereby proving children learn the most and best when a loving parent takes their education personally and sincerely and will suffer when their parents do not educate them.

Atticus’s and Mufasa’s advice to their sons, in both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Lion King,* demonstrate the positive power a father’s advice can have on their children. In *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Jem and Scout are forced to spend time with Mrs. Dubose and read to her; unbeknownst to the kids at the time, she is using them as a distraction while she tries to end her morphine addiction before she dies. After her death, Atticus explains this to his children, and Jem in particular, struggles to
understand why his dad would foist such a horrid old woman on him. Atticus though is adamant that she was not truly horrid, but was brave for trying to kick her addiction, and states, “I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do” (Lee 149). Atticus gives his children both explicit advice, and a practical learning moment. Atticus has his children learn first-hand by spending time with Mrs. Dubose, but he then goes further and doubles down on it, explicitly telling his children “I wanted you to see what real courage is”; Atticus understands that his children, Jem in particular, are developing a skewed idea of courage (a man with a gun), and instead he is trying to guide them towards understanding what genuine courage is. Atticus views determination in the face of struggle as true courage and wants to instill these values in his children early. Likewise, Mufasa also struggles to educate his son, Simba, who is developing skewed ideas regarding courage and bravery. Simba wants to be brave like his father, and foolishly goes to an elephant graveyard with his best friend and puts them both at risk of dying before Mufasa saves them. Mufasa chides his son for his action, to which Simba explains he only did it because he wanted to be brave like his father. Mufasa, rather than becoming angry, takes this as an opportunity to teach him and explain what true bravery is: “I’m only brave when I have to be. Simba, being brave doesn’t mean you go looking for trouble” (The Lion King). Mufasa is adamant that bravery is not brash but is instead responding to situations one finds oneself in with courage and determination. Simba’s false idea of bravery, that it is about seeking danger in order to prove something, is false, and he works to instill in his son that a brave person responds with bravery, rather than tries to prove their bravery. Atticus and Mufasa take their children’s personal experience and turn them into learning experiences, but they do not solely rely on the experience, but they give their children explicit instructions and lessons to further guide that learning. Both fathers realize that teaching their children is a multi-faceted approach that requires experience, attention, personal modeling, and most importantly, explicitly told lessons. Mufasa and Atticus advocate for these values and live them themselves, thereby providing their children with explicit moral lessons and an example they should then live by. As a result, Atticus’s and Mufasa’s actions prove that true education occurs when loving parents explicitly instruct their children in a loving, caring, and sincere manner in order to help them grow into strong adults.

Moreover, the importance of parental involvement is further reinforced by Scout’s positive outcome in To Kill a Mockingbird and Wendla’s ultimate death in Spring Awakening. In the novel, Atticus early on teaches Scout the importance of
putting herself in someone else’s shoes in order to understand their perspective. Scout struggles with this over the course of the novel, but ultimately can successfully follow Atticus’s lesson when she comes face to face with Arthur “Boo” Radley and walks him home after he saves her and Jem’s life. After Boo walks inside his house and closes the door, Scout looks out on her street from his porch and realizes how everything would have looked from his perspective, and understands, “Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough (Lee 374). Atticus directly teaches Scout a moral lesson, however it takes her several years to be able to fully put it into successful practice. Scout would have never been in a position to make this connection if Atticus had not taken the time to teach her, and trusted that she was capable of learning; through his sincere and loving teaching, Scout was able to grow as a character and fully appreciate everything Boo had done for her and her brother, and it only took her standing on his porch.

However, Wendla’s mother in *Spring Awakening* does not trust her daughter with information, and at the beginning of the musical when Wendla asks where babies come from, her mother hides her daughter’s face and makes up a false story as she cannot bear to describe the process of conceiving a baby. As a result, when Wendla later engages in sex and becomes pregnant, she is utterly shocked because she had no idea what the consequences of her actions would be. After her mother asks how this can happen, Wendla flounders: “I don’t know, truly I don’t… But that, how could that... My god! Why didn’t you tell me everything?!” (*Spring Awakening*). Wendla expresses anger and surprise at her predicament, and clearly blames her mother as a result of her mother not telling her the truth. Wendla’s mother does not fulfill her role as a mother when she fails to educate her daughter due to her own discomfort; by choosing to lie to her daughter, she forgoes sincerity in favor of the easy way out of a difficult conversation, only to have that come to fruition with an unplanned pregnancy, and her daughter’s ultimate death during a botched abortion. Wendla’s mother serves as a cautionary tale for what happens when parents insincerely address their children’s concerns, and the dangers that can come when their education is forfeited, while Atticus demonstrates that lessons learned as a child will allow them to more richly and fully understand their life and world. Each parent then further reinforces just how critical it is for a parent to address their children’s concerns and educate them in a loving, truthful, and sincere manner.

Ultimately, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Lion King*, and *Spring Awakening* depict how critical it is that parents educate their children in order to ensure they have healthy and positive outcomes and avoid unnecessary suffering as a result. This education can take on a myriad of forms, but it must come from a loving parent, like Atticus and Mufasa and not Wendla’s
repressive mother, so a child may grow. Scout and Simba both go on to live successful lives, and their father’s advice is critical to that success, while Wendla’s life is cut short. Children require guidance, and a parent’s loving, sincere guidance is critical during their development. While school provides an essential component in a child’s education, nothing beats home sweet home.

Works Cited


Have students put their name tags face down so you can’t see their names and see how long it takes for you to get them all correct. Your students will be surprisingly into it, and you will surprise yourself at how quickly you learn them all (it usually takes me less than five minutes if I’ve been using their names during class). If you have enough time, have your students time you to see how fast you can do it. Then open the floor to see if any students want to take a crack at the name game! At the Basically, the name belongs to the student. Generally this is the typical rule, even plural, for example: what are the students’ names? However in some instances, there are exceptions. One example I am thinking of is if I were referring to a name of a category, for example, a class register might have a section called: Students Names. This is simply because it is acting as a title, rather than directly referring to anyone. The students have names and we choose one of those names. (Also cross-posted with heypresto with whom I agree!) Last edited: Jan 19, 2013. Thank you. I can see the point why it should be ‘one of the students’ name’ - but I still don’t understand why the word name must have a plural - s. Indeed my text is about the Little Rock Nine. And the full context is as follows: The movie is called ‘The Ernest Green Story’ because one of the students’ name was Ernest Green. Your Students’ Names. by abepiusc 88,780 views. At the beginning of the year, there’s lots of information for students to keep straight. Put students’ names on the board or on signs around the room where everyone can see them and be reminded constantly. Also, you could have students make posters creatively using everyone’s name in the class and then display the posters so they’re always visible. 3. Name Circles/Chains. This one works like a charm every time. Generate name ideas, check availability, hold name contests. student students pupil scholar school campus academic college schools education learner grade learners. Start a Domain Name Contest. Get name suggestions from our community. Hold a contest to get 200+ available name ideas. 7997 contests held.