PAIN IS THE BEST TEACHER, SO TURN UP THE HEAT AND GIVE YOUR STUDENTS A GRILLING – AND IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IT, DAVID RISH WILL PERSONALLY COME AROUND TO YOUR PLACE AND MAKE YOU SEE HIS POINT, USING A COMPASS IF NEEDED BE.

SOME OF US CAN PROBABLY REMEMBER a teacher who, perhaps not suited to the job, had a temper less than sanguine. My particular nemesis was Mr Gallows. One morning I miscalculated a sum, $3 \times 3 = 6$, and, enraged by my stupidity, Mr G stabbed me with a handy pair of compasses; three times in the left arm, three in the right and three in the thigh for luck. ‘Three. Six. Nine. Rish!’ he thundered. ‘Nine. Like the way Germans say, “No!”

‘Now, if a body contains five litres of blood,’ he went on, ‘and is losing 250 millilitres per hour, how long before it is completely drained?’

‘Sorry, sir,’ I gasped before passing out from loss of blood.

So $3 \times 3 = 9$. I’ve never forgotten that answer, and I’ve never overcome my fear of sharp pointy objects. Mr Gallows was fired, by the way, not for stabbing me but because a pair of compasses has two points and, thus, the actual sum he tattooed on my body was $2 \times 3 \times 3$ and multiple multiplication wasn’t meant to be taught until the following year.

I remained, even so, ever grateful to him, especially the time I was held up by a German psychopath with an axe who asked me if I wanted my head removed from my neck. My mind was a blank, but in my sheer terror I was reminded of Mr Gallows and $3 \times 3$ and I was able to squeak, ‘Nein!’

I discovered, from all this, that pain works as a teacher. It’s natural and easy. When I began teaching we still had a blackboard and I found that scratching my nails down the board was a sure way to bring a rowdy bunch to attention. I left teaching to become a manicurist, but if I was still teaching I’d record the sound onto my computer and use it in moments of need.

Forget the namby-pamby spare-the-rod stuff – your students really benefit from a grilling. My friend Tony Fiammeggiare, in Year 11 Chemistry, heated up his tripod and gauze until it was glowing. As soon as the Bunsen burner flame was turned off, the gauze reverted from red to black and Tony picked it up. I can still smell his flesh sizzling. Tony learned a very valuable lesson: don’t touch hot things, although he failed Chemistry. Thanks to pain, though, he went on to pioneer the chargrill restaurant and has had a very successful subsequent career.

Pain beats mild sarcasm hands down. Once, when I turned in a poor piece of work, the mildly sarcastic Mrs Community-Service-Order asked, ‘Is that the best you can do?’ and I looked at it and thought, and looked and thought, and realised that, yes, it was the best I could do. I’ve operated on half-steam ever since. If only she’d given me a severe blow to the head, I’d have made more of my life, at least until my trip to Germany.

Dolores Umbridge teaches the misbehaving Harry Potter in *HP and the Order of the Phoenix* using her special quill. And good on her! The lines Harry has to write are etched painfully into the back of his hand until he remembers them, and it’s a lesson he never forgets. Okay, many might argue that Dolores Umbridge was tunnel visioned to the point of being evil, but she knew how to get her message across.

I accept that there might be a limit. I know, for example, that it’s possible to argue that capital punishment isn’t necessarily the best way to get a lesson to sink in – the before and after testing is the tricky bit, apparently – but it is a capital punishment and I don’t think it should be dismissed off-hand, no more than offering hands should be lightly dismissed.

The Bible commands that we shall not murder, neither shall we commit adultery, neither shall we steal, and there’s some other stuff about oxen, donkeys and neighbours, but where’s the no smooting rule? Off with the kid gloves, I say, and on with the knuckle dusters. ☠

*This month’s Last Word was written with hardly any bruising by David Rish, writer and occasional columnist for Teacher.*

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