

I Will Not Talk in Class

An Artist's Commentary

By Sharon Himes

When I was in the seventh grade I had a teacher who had us write "I will not be late for class" or other appropriate sentences for punishment. Often the lines were to be written 50, 100 or even 500 times in hopes that we would learn from the tedium of the work. I cannot remember being a particularly trying student in class, but there was one occasion where I remember the punishment and its aftermath quite clearly.

A group of us were gossiping after the start of class and the teacher told us we would have to complete 500 lines of "I will never again talk in class" by the next day. There were the usual groans of despair from the group as we anticipated the boredom and aching hand that usually came with the chore. I did not groan so loudly as the rest. I had an idea.

There are usually 25 lines on each side of a sheet of loose-leaf paper. To write 100 lines requires covering 10 pages, front and back with writing. It had to be legible or it would be rejected. I knew that my friends would do the job, hating every minute, scrawling the words across the page just well enough to be accepted. I had another idea. I sharpened my pencil and began to write the sentences carefully, using each line as a challenge to make the lettering different. One page was elegant cursive writing, with ornate loops and curls to the words. One page was printed in an approximation of Old English and another in an oriental style. I experimented with forward and backward slants, making elegant capitals and printed Italics.

By the time I had come to the end of the assigned pages, I was sorry to see the exercise end. I had enjoyed the process more than I expected. I had learned a lesson, but it was not a punishment. I had explored a variety of new ways to create what I later learned was called 'calligraphy'. The results were interesting and even pretty.

When I submitted my pages to the teacher the next morning, he was astounded. No one had ever handed in punishment pages anything like them. He said the last sentences, usually the most unintelligible, were the most elegant he had ever seen. He must have realized that I would not dread this particular form of punishment because he never again was to ask me to write 'I will not talk in class', even when I did.

If the assignment taught me anything, it was to always look for a creative way to enjoy the process. A bit of imagination can turn a boring chore into a challenging exploration. Creativity makes all the difference!

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