

They Called Me a Slow Learner But Now I Have Support to Move Forward

Tony F. Jones

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Read the title, subtitle, and headings in the article. What do you think the “arc” of this story will be?
2. Have you ever seen a young person get bullied? Or have you been bullied or been the bully yourself? What happened? What made it possible for the bullying to continue?

In School, I Felt Ashamed

When I was a young person in school, the teachers called me a slow learner. The kids called me other

names, like dummy, stupid, and *dumb as a box of rocks*. When the teacher asked me to come to the blackboard to solve problems, I was ashamed and embarrassed. I felt like a failure. I kept to myself. I was placed in special education classes. I felt more comfortable there.

Now, I Feel I Belong

Now, I am in a class in prison. My teacher supports me. The other men are like me. They have learning disabilities. We learn not to judge, criticize, or make fun of people with learning disabilities. Our teacher asks us to listen to each



other. We work together to reach our goals. This is my first time feeling like I belong in a classroom. I love it!

In this class, I do not have to lie, fake, or pretend to be something I am not. I do not feel ashamed. Why? Because to the left and to the right of me, there are teaching assistants who help me. They do not act like there is anything wrong with me. It is okay to be who I am. It is okay to need help.

My brothers in the class help me with depression and anxiety. They encourage me to face my challenges. They share their challenges with me. There is strength in unity. When I am in my class, it is like being with family and friends on the 4th of July. It's like being given a present on my birthday.

I am with Good Teachers and Supportive Classmates

People with learning disabilities need a way to reach their goals. For me, it helps to be in a room with good teachers and other people who are like me. It helps to feel unity instead of shame.



AFTER YOU READ:

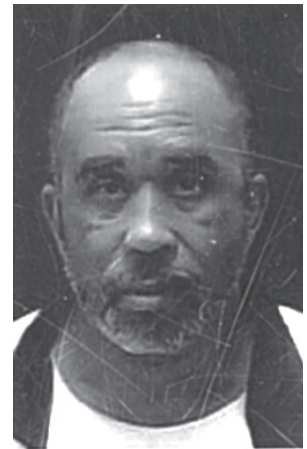
1. Now that you have read the article, say again what the “arc” of the story is. What details does the author share to show how he feels?

2. The author uses two similes to describe what it is like being in class with his brothers who encourage him. What are the two similes? Try using a simile to describe how class feels to you.

3. Learn more about similes and metaphors in the box below.

4. Read the stories on pp. 4-5 and 6-7. What do these stories have in common with this one? And how are they different?

Tony F. Jones has frequently written for The Change Agent. He is in prison in Jackson, Georgia. He is working towards his GED.



What Is a Simile and What Is a Metaphor?

Read the definitions and example of simile and metaphor below. Then try writing your own.

A simile compares two things, using the words “like” or “as.”

“When I am in class, it is like being with family and friends on the 4th of July.”

Kids in my school bullied me. They said I was “dumb as a box of rocks.”

A metaphor says that two things are the same; it does not use “like” or “as.”

My classmates are my brothers.

Being in class is a gift.