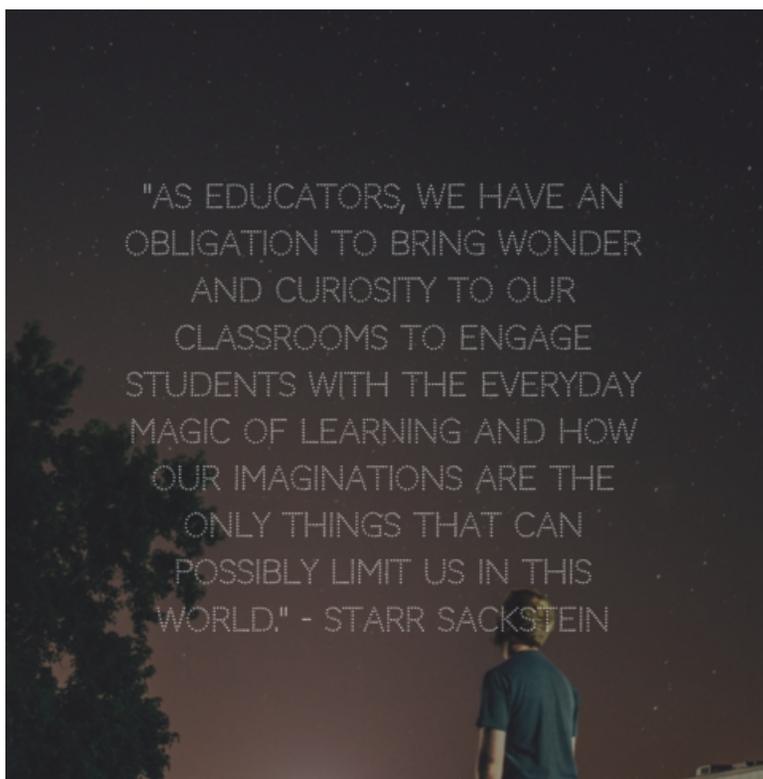


Always Remember to Ignite Imagination When Creating Learning Experiences

By [Starr Sackstein](#) on [January 3, 2019 4:32 AM](#)



Mary Poppins was a staple of my childhood movies repertoire, and when my son was old enough, I was certain that we would wear out the DVD as he insisted we watch it over and over and over again.

Graduating from the movie to the book series, Logan and I explored **Mary Poppins deeply**, gravitating toward the magic and wonder she brought to the Banks children.

Which is why I was reluctant and curious about the new Mary Poppins sequel, "Mary Poppins Returns." Obviously, a movie like this can hardly be redone in any manner when it is practically perfect in every way. Other such movies like "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," although not faithful to the **Roald Dahl classic**, was better in the original form, and it was bold of Tim Burton to try to remake a childhood classic, even though more aligned with the literary text.

"Mary Poppins" was better than I was expecting but

still not the original. What was really salient to me though in the movie was the message about how adults lose their wonder when they grow up, quickly forgetting the magic in the world. This is true of education and learning in general.

As educators, we have an obligation to bring wonder and curiosity to our classrooms to engage students with the everyday magic of learning and how our imaginations are the only things that can possibly limit us in this world.

Texts like Mary Poppins and **the Harry Potter series**, have always sparked a light that leads me to ask "what if" as a reader. That interest in growing from the possibilities is what I strived to make possible in my classroom.

Why not humor the crazy impossibilities where kids can stretch and imagine what has yet to be created or discovered. This doesn't only have to be so in science or math but in every content area.

Now, as more days have passed since I watched the movie, the lingering question is how can we make learning more imaginative even especially through the secondary years?

Early education teachers do this really well. School is fun to attend, and they love working with students. It isn't about content, per se, yet, but it is about helping students really connect with the learning in a way that is exciting and inspiring.

In secondary classrooms, here are some ways we can bring that awe back into what we do:

- **Make it about the inquiry.** Allow students to ask questions they don't have an answer to (and maybe the teachers don't either) and create the space to try to answer those questions in a way that builds skills and also keeps students engaged. For example, perhaps a student wants to know the causes of a historical event that traditionally doesn't get covered in the class. Rather than teaching social studies in a chronological manner, trying to fit it all in, why not arrange the learning thematically, allowing students to make choices about where they dig deep and then as a whole class connect themes based on those deeper understandings.
- **Promote choice.** In secondary English classrooms, there is no rule that says the teacher must choose what the students read. Although it might make sense to have mentor texts to teach particular pieces of an author's craft,

why not offer opportunities for independent reading and/or literary-circle books that align with the topics? Students can then sell the concept of the books by creating short commercials, persuasively sharing with their classmates why they should invest time in the reading they are suggesting. This will enrich classroom discussion and deepen student questioning of an author's craft that can then become an opportunity for writing in more creative ways.

- **Experiment.** Although there are content requirements in most states for science, that doesn't mean that students can't design the labs they are doing around the science content they are learning. The world is full of questions waiting to be answered, and based on the topics being studied, students can engage in real-world experiments that can help them connect with the learning more deeply. This can also go for math problems when they are learning more complicated, theoretical math that needs to be concrete on some level so that they can see the application while they learn it.
- **Be silly.** There is no rule that says a high school teacher can't be silly sometimes. We take ourselves way too seriously. Kids really enjoy a teacher who is real with them and shares the many facets of her personality, not just the authoritative ones. So catch your students off guard by behaving out of the ordinary to help things stick. Once while I was teaching "A Christmas Carol", I did a dramatic reading of Ebenezer Scrooge. The students didn't expect it, that's why it worked.
- **Vary the kinds of activities and assignments.** Variety is really important. Students spend all day going from one class to another, and often, it's the same thing with different content, listening to teachers lecture instead of getting their own hands dirty. Allowing students to be in charge of the learning by creating project experiences that let them create a variety of different products will get them more engaged in classes.

Our imaginations are very powerful tools, and there is no reason why we can't allow students, even encourage them, to explore those places of themselves in the learning they do, straight up through college. The bigger we can dream, the better we can make this world. At some point, someone had to believe that the impossible was probable and then make it so. Why can't that happen in our learning environments every day?

How do you make use of the elaborate imaginations of your students every day? How can you connect that with learning? Please share.