

IN MY OPINION**Caroline Porter****Being a "sub" not best background for presidential campaign rhetoric**

It's a hoot when presidential candidate Governor George W. Bush says he knows all about education because he was once a substitute teacher. When I lived in Warren County, a three county school district asked for people with BA degrees to sign up as substitute teachers and I did. I had some memorable moments in high school English classes and nearly a week as a junior and senior high general science teacher.

I had never taught school before nor have I since. If anyone thinks teaching Sunday school for 25 years is any kind of preparation for that experience, forget it. I've always had a healthy respect for teachers and have never been much involved in school or educational issues, mainly because I don't know enough. I can easily discuss school finance and tax issues but not curriculum or teaching procedures. That certainly takes special education, training and experience.

In my first English class of the morning, I faced a classroom of students I knew. They were reading *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Even though I majored in English literature in college, I'm ashamed to say I had never read the book. The very first words out of my mouth were:

"Good morning, I understand you are reading the Rapes of Grath." While the class exploded in laughter and my dignity collapsed, I was heard to mutter under my breath, "Poor Grath." It was awful.

In the next class was my son, who had quickly heard about my performance and wanted me to know that my reputation as a clown was being upheld even in the classroom. It was not his proudest moment.

I was called back to fill in for a science teacher. The principal was amazed at the books I took home at night because I guess "subs" are not known to do that, but I was about one paragraph ahead of these kids. We were studying various kinds of conifer trees, and junior high students brought various cones, etc. to class. In a high school class I was trying to teach genetics, and I hope those poor students eventually got the right information. I was so confused about the brown eyes dominating the blues and other information they may never recover. In fact, before we were through, I think the students were explaining the whole thing to me.

It was a hairy week but we had a lot of

laughs about conifers. On Friday at the end of the day both the junior high students and I were exhausted from the whole experience and I decided my favorite joke would be most appropriate. Many of these children lived on farms or are connected with agriculture so I thought they would really like it. Here it is:

As you know, the fences in Ireland are usually made of the many rocks imbedded in the soil, removed to make the fences. An Irish farmer had a prize ram (a male sheep, I know that much) and he (the farmer) had to go away for a few days. He asked his friend down the road if he would watch the ram while he was away. He said, "Once in a while he gets agitated and I just put some music on my little record player and he calms down."

So the farmer left his ram with the neighbor, along with the record player and some records. (For the younger set, those were replaced by cassettes and CD's.) The ram was quiet for the first day or two, but one day started tearing around in circles and pawing the ground. The farmer quickly found the record player but couldn't find his friend's records so he slapped on one of his own. At the start of the music, instead of the ram quieting down, he really got upset and in fact ran full speed into the rock fence and dropped dead. The farmer just felt terrible.

When his friend returned he had to tell him what happened. The owner of the ram finally said, "Well, what record did you play?"

His friend answered, "It was Bing Crosby singing, 'There'll never be another you.'" Ewe - get it?

Well, see, we'd been talking about yews, too - trees and shrubs, conifers, you know. And I thought the whole connection was hilarious.

But the class? Dead silence. They just looked at me. I tried to explain the joke but that never works, of course. Class dismissed.

Anyway, I don't mean to insult real substitute teachers, because I was not exactly the cream of the crop, but my point is — that experience does not make a candidate for president of the United States or anyone else an expert on education.

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