

# Stand and Deliver

## WHY?

The real Jaime Escalante left a high-paying job at an electronics corporation and became a teacher. We never learn directly from the film why he changed jobs or what drove him to work so hard in the face of opposition from both his pupils and his colleagues.

- Write Escalante's letter of resignation in which he explains his reasons for leaving his job and his reasons for becoming a teacher.
- Write setting out your piece like a play the discussion between Jaime and Fabiola Escalante which follows Jaime's announcement that he intends to leave his job at the electronics corporation and become a high school teacher. Will Fabiola be surprised by her husband's decision, or will it be something which she and Jaime have previously discussed? Remember, this is a very important decision; as you've seen, it will drastically affect the future of the Escalante family.

## FIRST DAY

Writing as if you are Escalante, give an account of your first day at school. Remember, you've arrived expecting to teach computer science and the first thing you learn once you've managed to get someone to notice you is that the school has no computers!

You are then sent to teach a class who show no interest in you as a teacher. Will you look upon these setbacks as a challenge or will you be depressed by the seeming impossibility of the task which faces you?

## NEW & OLD

What happened to the class' previous maths teacher? Why did he/she resign? Imagine that, a few months after he has been at Garfield High, Escalante meets with his class's former maths teacher.

This teacher explains why he/she left: the pupils' apathy, threats from 'tough' pupils, lack of support from other teachers. Escalante disagrees: sure, the pupils act tough but he feels he's making progress.

- Write the conversation between the two teachers, each of them putting forward their own ideas about how the class should - or shouldn't-be taught and arguing about the problems at Garfield High School.
- Set it out as a conversation between two characters; like a play script. Begin with the two teachers meeting (Where? An educational conference, a bar, a supermarket?) Remember, we know something about how Escalante has gained his students' interest and respect. Obviously, their previous teacher failed to do this. Why? Try to bring this out in the conversation.

## **NEW TEACHER**

Imagine that you are a pupil in one of Escalante's lessons. You are still unsure of him. What does he do to gain your interest?

Think about a lesson which you've had - any subject; it doesn't have to be maths when a teacher has surprised/amazed/alarmed you but gained your interest, made you think differently about the subject, or at least caught your attention. You could use this incident as the basis for what happens in your version of one of Escalante's lessons.

## **ANGEL**

The 'tough-guy' Angel, a cholo (gang member) is devoted to his sick grandmother and secretly wants to learn but he also wants to be 'one of the boys'. Eventually Angel chooses to 'better himself' but finds himself rejected by his friend, Chuco, who drives off and leaves Angel sprawling in the dirt.

It's difficult for an individual to ignore 'peer group pressure', whether the people you rebel against are members of a street gang, a group of friends, or your fellow workers.

- Write a story in which an individual finds him/herself disagreeing with a group of friends/associates. It would be easy for your main character to simply accept the group's ideas but your character thinks the group is wrong and refuses to conform, even though the price may be rejection by the group, loss of friendship and - as in the 'split' between Angel and Chuco - the possibility of violent confrontation

## **CHUCO**

Not only does Chuco reject Angel, he also turns his back on everything Escalante is trying to do for the class. The education system seems to have nothing to offer Chuco.

- Writing as if you are Chuco describe your dreams, hopes and aspirations.
- You could write this piece as a continuous story, beginning with the arrival of Escalante and ending with your rejection of Angel.
- OR simply put your (Chuco's) random thoughts down on paper.
- OR record a conversation between a fellow cholo and Chuco in which he explains what has happened between him and Angel and his (cholo's) reasons for 'dropping-out' of school.

## CLAUDIA

Claudia is told by her mother "Boys don't like you if you are too smart". Do you think this is true? Does this view affect girls' opinions of their education? Do you think Claudia is right to continue with her education?

## PANCHO

Pancho thinks of himself as being the least able pupil in the class. Escalante believes that "Pupils will rise to the level of expectation". Do you agree? Certainly, because of Escalante's expectations, Pancho eventually succeeds. Write a story in which one person's belief in another helps that person to finally succeed.

## TEACHERS & PUPILS

The film raises a lot of issues about what happens in the classroom. Using the following hints write a 'think-piece' about teachers and pupils.

- Escalante involves himself completely in his students - even at risk to his health. Would you like to be taught by a teacher who demanded so much of you? Are you prepared to miss your holidays, arrive early and stay late at school in order to succeed at school?
- Is Escalante 'right' to interfere in the private lives of his students in order to get the results he wants? Would you like a teacher to call at your home and tell your parents what to do about your education? -
- Claudia is deeply upset by Escalante: "I don't appreciate you using my personal life to entertain the class." Is Escalante wrong to do this? How would you feel about a teacher using your personal life to make a 'point' in the classroom?
- Escalante gives his students various nick-names. They call him "Kimo", short for "Kimo Sabe" ("the man who knows"). Are nicknames for pupils and teachers just fun, or can they be malicious or hurtful?



## HOSPITAL

As a result of his commitment to teaching, Escalante has a heart attack. Write two letters to Escalante in hospital:

- one from Fabiola Escalante, who will be very anxious about her husband whom, she feels, is 'driving' himself too hard.
- one from students in Escalante's class; the students will be concerned about their teacher's health but they'll also be extremely worried about the coming calculus exams.

## RACISM

At the centre of "Stand and Deliver" are serious questions about race and class. Escalante believes that his students have been "singled out because of their racial origins". If his students had been at one of the 'posh' middle-class schools, their high marks would never have been questioned. Write four articles for the local newspaper, "The East L.A. Commentator" (or make up a name for the paper)

- a brief news item dealing with the success of Garfield High School students in the Advanced Placement calculus exam, an examination so demanding that less than 2% of all high school students nationwide attempt it! Mention this fact in your news story - calculus is not normally newsworthy. Also mention that all of Escalante's students passed - 6 with perfect scores!.
- a follow-up story which reveals that the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey (they set the exam) have concluded that because of the similarity between the incorrect answers among Garfield students, their scores have been invalidated, in other words, Escalante's students have been found guilty of cheating.
- write a letter to the newspaper from Escalante in which he defends his students and accuses the E.T.S. of racism. Escalante claimed that the answers were the same because of the way he taught the subject. Furthermore, contrary to the basic tenets (beliefs) of the United States judicial system, Escalante's students had been found guilty until proven innocent.
- write the news story in which the Garfield High students, having agreed to "stand and deliver" by re-testing, are completely vindicated, along with their teacher, their school and their community.