



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Anna Marie Sifford Teacher shares world of experience to enrich students' lives

To travel in a circle usually means ending up right where you began. Anna Marie Sifford's journey, beginning as the daughter of a teacher and ending with the discovery of her own calling as a teacher, suggests she is on that path.

What is lost in that description is the myriad experiences that take place as that circle is drawn, which in Sifford's case are unmatched by many people twice her age. As a Government and Economics teacher at Garland High School, Ms. Sifford has the opportunity to apply her world of experience to her teaching. More importantly, her students, most of them seniors, have the opportunity to learn – beyond textbooks and lesson plans – about the world that awaits following graduation.

After graduating from Dallas's Booker T. Washington School for the Performing and Visual Arts with a concentration in dance, Sifford headed off to New York University with a scholarship to study biochemistry.

Upon realizing that a future filled with petri dishes and microscopes was not for her, Sifford detoured to SMU where she earned a bachelor's degree in journalism. She then traveled back to the northeast to Seton Hall in New Jersey where she earned her master's degree in diplomacy and international relations, specializing in political economy in the Middle East.

For many who receive such a master's degree, a career in the State Department or the CIA might seem logical, but not for Sifford. She instead got a job working at the Wall Street Journal, then managed the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, one of the country's premier modern dance groups.

Still, wanderlust kept Sifford on the move, and she returned to Dallas in 2006 to work for the AT&T Performing Arts Center while it was in its nascent stages.

"My mom mentioned that it was possible to become a teacher through the Region 10 program. I had always said I'd never be a teacher – I never thought I'd be good at it. But I completed the Region 10 program, interviewed with Garland on a Tuesday, and started working on Friday. I fell in love with teaching right away, and I now realize that this is what I should be doing," says Sifford.

No doubt, her students feel lucky she found her way to the classroom. Sifford's innovative and

creative teaching methods make her economics and government classes as relevant as today's headlines.

"In class, we watch clips of The Daily Show, and the kids use their iPhones to share breaking news. I realized that the best way to engage the students is not to keep anything the same from day to day, and to stay totally current," she says.

Sifford's pursuit of experience continues unabated. Over winter break, she traveled to Saudi Arabia through a program sponsored by the Bilateral US-Arab Chamber of Commerce based in Houston. The program functions as a cultural exchange, she says, and Sifford spoke with students there to learn about their concerns and challenges. She was then able to relate those conversations to her own students, in effect bringing the other side of the world into her classroom.

Her background in and love of government and world economics prepared Sifford for her roles outside the classroom as well. She is faculty sponsor of Garland High School's student council, and also leads the Junior World Affairs Council, an affiliate of the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth.

"The group of kids who participate in this council is really remarkable," she says. "Fourteen kids will be in the group next school year, and they are so dedicated. They are interested in this for their futures."

With Sifford as their teacher and organization leader, why wouldn't they be?

Sifford was the recipient of Garland High School's "Teacher of the Year" award in 2009, an award she says has special meaning to her because the selection is made by faculty, staff, and administration.

Garland High School Principal John Morris sums up Sifford's contributions to the school in this way: "Ms. Sifford is the most dedicated and innovative teacher I have known in my many years at Garland High School. Ms. Sifford's dedication to her students goes well above and beyond anything imaginable. On the rare occasions she is not on campus, you can be assured that she has students with her at a lecture, film premier or discussing global politics with world leaders. She is truly a teacher of the global village."

Congratulations to Sifford, who can add Garland ISD Teacher of the Month to her list of accolades and accomplishments.



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