

The Education of Mr. Whittenhall

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - DAY

MR. WHITTENHALL takes one last look at the blueprints he drew, tracking the exact spot ROGER is predicted to be. He stands up from his desk and tightens his tie.

WHITTENHALL

Okay, you got this. Release your negativity. Maintain your focus. Anticipate his movements. Wait! What was the very first one? She said it was the most important one! Ugh! I don't have time!

Whittenhall runs out into the hallway.

2. INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

Whittenhall is presenting to the class on how to write a research paper.

Meanwhile, Roger is being a nuisance at the back of the room, throwing papers, snoring, talking, etc.

WHITTENHALL

So for your conclusion paragraph, focus on the overall relevance of the topic that you've explored. Roger, what are you doing?

ROGER

Oh, sorry, C. Whit. I guess I'm just so excited about writing this paper.

WHITTENHALL

Hmm. You sure about that? You don't really seem it.

ROGER

Of course I am!

Students look back at Roger, who responds with a confident look and wink.

WHITTENHALL

So, as I was saying. The conclusion paragraph...

Whittenhall returns to his lecture, while Roger returns to not paying attention.

HANNAH

Roger, why aren't you paying attention? This is the only time he's going over this.

ROGER

Paying attention is for losers. There is no need, I have literally never handed in a paper in my life and I am still here. Why would I start now?

HANNAH

Never?! Why not?

ROGER

Because the man wants me to. I mean, I could write a decent paper. It's just more fun to make them chase me. The man's not bringing me down!

HANNAH

Is that why you pretended to have the swine flu last year in English? And you got "bitten" by a poisonous spider that crawled in your bed?

ROGER

You betcha! I still can't believe Cashman fell for that one.

Junior A rolls his eyes. The bell rings.

On the way out, Junior A approaches Whittenhall.

HANNAH

Mr. Whittenhall, just so you know, I don't think Roger is going to turn in his paper. He was bragging about never having turned in a paper in his life.

WHITTENHALL

What?! How could anyone not want to write a paper about The Great Depression or the Cold War?

HANNAH

Maybe because we are normal.
Anyways, I just wanted to let you
know!

WHITTENHALL

Thanks for the heads up!

INT. MEDIA CENTER

SUPERSCRIPT: One week later.

Mr. Whittenhall is working with students on their research.
He pulls Roger aside.

WHITTENHALL

Roger, do you understand all of
the requirements of this paper?
Do you need any help with your
topic?

ROGER

Oh no, I am goood. Thanks
brotha!

WHITTENHALL

Okay, well that's good, brotha.
Part of the reason I'm asking
is... well, word on the street is
that you're planning to avoid
doing this assignment altogether.
That you never do papers. Is this
true?

ROGER

Oh no...I would never do that.

WHITTENHALL

You sure? Because you're kind of
doing that thing they do in
movies that the other character
doesn't pick up on but everyone
in the audience does. That thing
where you're being sarcastic in a
foreshadowing kind of way...

ROGER

Whatever do you mean?

WHITTENHALL

See, there it is again!

ROGER

Mr. Whittenhall -- homey-- I fully intend on handing my paper in on time and well done. In fact, you know how I chose Teddy Roosevelt for my topic? I think I'd like to talk about his impact on not only the Executive Branch, but on the Legislative and Judicial Branches as well. People focus far too much on the Executive branch, but I think that's really shallow and shortsighted.

WHITTENHALL

Wow. That's...actually a really good argument. Sorry I underestimated you.

ROGER

Perfectly understandable. Admittedly, I kind of look like a troublemaker.

WHITTENHALL

Yeah, now that you say that, you kinda do.

ROGER

See? Anyway, nice chatting with you, kind sir.

WHITTENHALL

See! You're doing it again!

Roger points at Whittenhall.

ROGER

Ahh! See? Gotcha again!

WHITTENHALL

Hmmmm.

Whittenhall is impressed and seems to buy into the idea that Roger will be turning in the paper on time.

Roger walks away and sits back down near some students who overheard his conversation with Whittenhall.

ROGER

Yeah, I'm totally not turning in that paper.

SERGIO

Really? That whole thing was a lie?

ROGER

Yup! Oooh, yeah that's the good stuff...

SERGIO

You do realize that Whittenhall's not giving us this assignment because he loves grading papers right? That whole class he devoted to "how to write a term paper"?

Roger has a blank expression.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Remember how he told us he's trying to help us become better writers than he was going into college?

Roger now looks a little surprised and enlightened.

ROGER

So you're saying I should just go against my very nature, break my streak, actually work hard on this paper, and turn it in on time?

SERGIO

Yes.

Bell rings.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Maybe you should focus more on actually writing the paper and less on finding ways to get around it.

Sergio gets up and walks away, along with the other students in the media.

Roger is now sitting alone and clearly contemplating what Sergio told him. He then flicks his hand dismissively.

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

Superscript: Class Work

Months later, in class paper day has arrived. Still not thoroughly confident in Roger, Whittenhall makes sure to select Roger first to come down and go over his thesis and outline.

WHITTENHALL

Alrighty, so be working independently and I will work with those who would like the help. Roger, why don't you come on down? Do you have an outline that I can take a look at?

ROGER

Mine's more a... mental outline.

WHITTENHALL

Interesting. Most of the time I've found that students who actually write their outlines down have an easier time organizing their thoughts and writing their papers.

ROGER

Yes, sir. But most students aren't me. First, I'm going to discuss TR's impact on the Presidency in his own time and for all time. And then I'm going to look at his dealings with Congress and his willingness to bypass them with executive orders. And then I'm going to examine his use of the Supreme Court in the Northern Securities case to further consolidate his own power.

WHITTENHALL

Wow. Once again, I think I've underestimated you. You clearly know what you're doing. Now, you know when this paper is due, correct?

ROGER

August 20!

WHITTENHALL

Good one. It is due May 7. May seventh! Whether you are in school or not.

ROGER

May 7, I knew that all along! I was actually thinking of getting it tattooed backwards on my forehead so I can see it every time I look in the mirror.

WHITTENHALL

You busting my chops again?

ROGER

Of course not...

WHITTENHALL

Alright, well good luck.

ROGER

And good skill?

WHITTENHALL

Absolutely. Nice talking with you, glad to see you're on track.

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

Weeks later, the Friday before the Monday due date.

WHITTENHALL

Alright class, so you know what this weekend is about right?

MARY JANE

Turnnn uppppp!!!!

Class laughs.

WHITTENHALL

Nice touch, Mary Jane. You're close. It's about putting the final touches on your award-winning term papers.

Bell rings.

WHITTENHALL (CONT'D)

See you all Monday morning with your term papers all double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, printed and on my Desk!

Students groan and exit the room.

6. INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

It's the due date. Roger is not in school and has not shared his paper with Whittenhall.

WHITTENHALL

Alright, time to hand in your research papers. Pass them to the front of your row.

Whittenhall walks in front of Mary Jane, who slouches on her desk, clearly hungover with her hood up, sunglasses on, and a jumbo coffee on her desk. She holds up her paper.

WHITTENHALL

Wow! Even you got yours in on time, Mary Jane?

MARY JANE

Yeahhhh.

Whittenhall searches the room.

WHITTENHALL

Hey, has anyone seen Roger? He's my only absence today.

HANNAH

He wasn't in homeroom. I don't think he's here today.

WHITTENHALL

Is anyone passing in his paper for him?

Class silence.

WHITTENHALL (CONT'D)

Okay... let's hope he turns it in
by the end of the day.

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

After school on the due date. Every other student has submitted their papers, but Roger's is conspicuously missing. Whittenhall starts to show his disappointment. Whittenhall sends an e-mail to Roger's parents. Cut scene showing Whittenhall typing...

INT. ROGER'S HOUSE

Roger is living it up. He is home alone, having clearly been celebrating, with the house phone nearby and his parents' e-mail account open on his/her laptop.

ROGER

Oooo...lookee what we have here.
An e-mail from Whittenhall comma
Christopher: *Dear Mr. and Mrs.
Payne, today was the due date for
Roger's research paper that we
have been working on for several
months. Unfortunately, Roger did
not submit his paper on time.
Please speak with him about this
and encourage him to submit it as
soon as possible. He has already
earned an hour for late
submission and will receive an
additional hour for every day it
is late. Please respond to this
e-mail so that I know you
received it. Best wishes,
Christopher Whittenhall.*

Roger begins to respond to the e-mail pretending to be his parent.

ROGER

Dear Mr. Whittenhall. We are sorry that Roger did not submit his term paper today. We will speak with him and ensure that he turns it in as quickly as possible. By the way, Roger tells us that you have quite the impressive tie collection. (Cut scene to Whittenhall, smiling confidently and adjusting his tie.) Thank you for your concern. We will address this immediately. Sincerely, Mr. and Mrs. Payne...There we go, sent!

While visually indicating how impressed he is with himself for this deception, Roger remembers Junior B's words of advice. Roger then visibly starts feeling guilty about disappointing Whittenhall.

ROGER

(Whispering) Why am I doing this? This guy's not trying to bust my chops. He wants to help me learn how to write a good paper. Maybe I should just actually write it and turn it in. Ughh. I really don't want to do this. Why am I whispering to myself?

Roger opens the laptop back up, cracks his knuckles, and begins typing. Fade out.

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

Whittenhall receives the e-mail and looks very pleased.

WHITTENHALL

Good! Well, I guess that whole thing about not turning in papers was just a rumor.

Whittenhall gets up from desk and exits classroom into HALLWAY. He bumps into Helen, a nerd from his class last year.

HELEN

Hey, Mr. Whittenhall! How's your day going? Got those juniors working hard or hardly working?

Helen snorts/ laughs at her own joke.

WHITTENHALL

Yeah, today was the due date for their term papers. You remember that from last year right?

HELEN

How could I forget? It really helped me learn a lot about how to write.

WHITTENHALL

Did you find it challenging to get the paper in on time?

HELEN

Well of course not! I had my paper done weeks ahead of the due date. Like always. People call me a "hardo". Not exactly sure what that means, but I think it's a term of endearment.

WHITTENHALL

It's not.

HELEN

Hey -- I heard you have Roger Payne this year. Is it true that he doesn't turn in papers?

WHITTENHALL

That's the rumor, but I think I should have his soon.

HELEN

Mr. Whittenhall, I don't know how to break this to you, but Roger has NEVER turned in a term paper. Like literally never.

WHITTENHALL

But I just got an e-mail from his parents saying they would...

HELEN

Yeahhhhhh. Okay, just pretend I never said anything. Have a good day!

Whittenhall looks confused. Helen begins to walk away.

WHITTENHALL

Okayyyy...

Whittenhall's expression turns from confusion to disappointment as he stands still.

INT. WHITTENHALL HOUSE - FLASHBACK

Whittenhall is sitting at the dining room table, upset and trying to figure out what to do next. Jillian approaches and asks him what's wrong.

JILLIAN

Hi, papa. Are you okay? What's wrong?

WHITTENHALL

Hey, Jill. Yeah, I'm okay I guess. I'm just...disappointed. I gave my students some really important work to do a while ago and one of them just never did it. Any of it. And he lied to me the whole time. I just feel like a sucker.

JILLIAN

You want me to talk to him for you?

WHITTENHALL

No sweetheart. That's okay. I can probably handle it.

JILLIAN

You want me to beat him up for you?

WHITTENHALL

Yeah. I mean no. No, it's okay. I think he's a good kid, but he just made some bad choices. I just don't know how to handle this one. His methods are just more...sophisticated...than I'm used to.

JILLIAN

Daddy, you know what would cheer you up? Do Stewie.

WHITTENHALL

You want me to do my Stewie Griffin impression? How will that cheer me up?

JILLIAN

Do it!

Whittenhall does Stewie Griffin impression. Jillian laughs.

JILLIAN (CONT'D)

Do Griffin!

Whittenhall does Peter Griffin impression. Jillian laughs.

JILLIAN (CONT'D)

See, don't you feel better?

WHITTENHALL

Actually...yes I do.

JILLIAN

Papa, it's not the 90s anymore. Maybe you need to think like one of your students.

WHITTENHALL

Wow. You know what? You're totally right. Thanks, babe.

Whittenhall walks out of the room.

JILLIAN

Go get em, homeboy!

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

After school, Senior A walks into Whittenhall's classroom.

HELEN

I got your email. What's up?

WHITTENHALL

Well, you were right. I need to get that paper from Roger, but I just don't know how to make that happen. But I got some great advice: to think more like a modern high schooler. Can you help me?

HELEN

Mr. Whittenhall, I'm not even sure I think like a modern-day high schooler. But I think I know someone who can. Have you ever heard the legend of Sage?

WHITTENHALL

Sage? He just goes by one name? What is he: Madonna?

HELEN

Only the wisest and coolest student in Walpole High history. She's the one you should talk to. Supposedly, her skills at avoiding work would put Roger to shame.

Helen looks at her watch.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Oh, I gotta go. I heard you can find him somewhere in the school attic.

WHITTENHALL

Wait! Where in the attic?

HELEN

Not sure. Good luck!

INT. SCHOOL ATTIC - FLASHBACK

After navigating the twists and turns of the WHS hallways and attic, Whittenhall finds his way to Sage.

WHITTENHALL

Are you... Sage?

SAGE

Yes, my son. Please... come in.

Whittenhall looks around, confused.

WHITTENHALL

So who are you? How did you come to be in this place? How has no one ever found you in here? How do you even get food? What is your...

SAGE

Yes... What can I do for you,
young man?

WHITTENHALL

(under his breath)

Haven't been called that in a
while. (now audibly) My name is
Chris Whittenhall and I teach at
this school. The reason I'm here
is because I heard you might be
able to help me with a problem.
You see, I have this student who
absolutely refuses to turn in a
term paper that I assigned like
three months ago. He assured me
he would and really pulled a long
con on me. Can you help me?

SAGE

Ahhh. The old avoidance trick.
Now, this may be tricky for a
newbie like yourself. With some
intense training exercises,
including meditation...we can fix
your problem in no time.

Whittenhall begins flashing back to the deceit (dubbed over Sage's advice). Whittenhall grows frustrated and takes it out on Sage.

WHITTENHALL

Really? That is supposed to help?
I've been doing this eighteen
years. I'm pretty sure I know how
students think.

SAGE

Then why are you here?

WHITTENHALL

I don't know. Forget I ever came
by this place.

Whittenhall storms out of Sage's quarters and Sage shakes his head.

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK

Whittenhall is trying to go about his daily teaching life and grows increasingly frustrated.

MONTAGE of days passing and Whittenhall looking for Roger, who doesn't show up, and Whittenhall frustrated.

INT. SAGE'S QUARTERS - FLASHBACK

Whittenhall returns to Sage, frustrated. He enters Sage's quarters.

WHITTENHALL

Sage, I am sorry that I was so rude to you when we first met. I've been racking my brain, trying to figure out how to get this paper from Roger. Whatever you're ready to share, I am ready to listen.

SAGE

Ah yes. "When student is ready, teacher will appear"

WHITTENHALL

Buddha?

SAGE

No, fortune cookie. Also, play numbers 9, 16, 32, 41, and 56.

WHITTENHALL

Got it, what else?

SAGE

Whittenhall, the most important words of wisdom I can give you is to *realize why you're doing this*. Exactly why do you care so much about this paper?

WHITTENHALL

Because it's a major class assignment. And I can't let Roger get away with not submitting it.

SAGE

Is it really about that? Is that why you teach -- to simply have your students do work that they don't want to do?

WHITTENHALL

Of course not. I want them to learn history, but I also want to help them think for themselves and learn skills that will help them later on, like in college.

SAGE

Then that must remain your focus as we go forward. Now, Whittenhall, you must unlearn all of the things you think you know about the modern teenager. A lot has happened since the Clinton Administration.

WHITTENHALL

Wait. How did you know...

SAGE

"Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens"

WHITTENHALL

Fortune cookie?

SAGE

Jim Hendrix. Whittenhall, you must learn to think like a teenager.

WHITTENHALL

Fair enough. I'm sure there's plenty I could learn. But this kid just drives me nuts!

SAGE

Ahh... Whittenhall, you must always remember to...

MONTAGE

During this 1980s-style training montage, scenes are played, which initially show the issues experienced by Whittenhall. Those scenes then fade into a voiceover of Sage speaking lines of wisdom, while she trains Whittenhall.

SAGE (CONT'D)

"Release your negativity."

Whittenhall is shown being frustrated, perhaps checking his mailbox and finding no term paper (or something else). Whittenhall is trained to control his emotions. This involves coloring in the Media Center.

SAGE (CONT'D)

"Maintain your focus."

Whittenhall is approached by Junior C in the hallway, who purposely obscures Roger, who stealthily sneaks past Whittenhall. In training, Sage gives Whittenhall a Rubik's cube, which frustrates him. He later passes a test that involves Whittenhall walking on a treadmill in the fitness center, while Sage bangs a wooden spatula against a steel pot, while Whittenhall solves the Rubik's cube.

SAGE (CONT'D)

"Anticipate his movements."

Whittenhall is shown looking at X2 and seeing Roger has started being absent, coming in late, and leaving early -- all to avoid Whittenhall's class. Sage trains Whittenhall to predict where Sage will pop up next. Whittenhall finishes his training by accurately predicting where Sage will be next.

INT. SAGE'S QUARTERS - FLASHBACK

Having mastered the requisite skills, Whittenhall has finally passed all of Sage's tests and is given the green light to finally use them and get the term paper from Roger.

SAGE

Whittenhall, you have learned a great deal in these past few days. By the way, who has been teaching your classes?

WHITTENHALL

(wide-eyed)

I should probably get going. Sage, thank you for everything. You're a lifesaver. Now I feel like I can do anything, like climb Mount Everest!

SAGE

Uhh sure! Goodbye, Whittenhall!

Whittenhall leaves the room, Sage shakes her head and speaks to herself.

SAGE

The master herself has conquered
the impossible yet again.
(disappears)

INT. WHITTENHALL CLASSROOM

Replay first scene again. Continue at when he exits in the hallway, determined to go to the gym, where he expects Roger to be. Surprisingly, he bumps right into Roger outside his classroom.

ROGER

Hello, Mr. Whittenhall!

Roger hands him the paper and Mr. Whittenhall gets wide-eyed (and potentially angry). Memories come flooding back and voiceover with the advice Sage gave. He remembers the first and most important piece of advice: Remember why you are doing this. (This is dubbed over the flashback).

BACK TO REALITY

Whittenhall smiles at Roger.

WHITTENHALL

Thanks!

END.