

School Event: The Drama Contest

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School: Hamchang High School

I was asked by one of my co-teachers to help choose four first-year high school students to act in an English drama contest. This was not long after I had just started. I didn't know any of the students yet; I barely even knew my co-teachers. But I dutifully wrote the script (a comedy about the end of the world) and selected a quartet of students with good English pronunciation. Little was I to know how close I would become to those students.

I work with more than 600 middle and high school boys. After three months, I can recognize most of them in the hall between classes but there are still times when a student bows to me and says hello and I have no idea who they are. Some students have graduated to the level of chit-chat. Their English is good enough that I'll joke with them before class. But do I consider it a personal relationship? Let's put it this way: they all know my name but I don't know any of theirs. It's a sad byproduct of a system in which I see many students but don't ever grade them. But with these four, who named their characters after themselves, I was very soon able to put name to face.

After a month of not very regular practice, interrupted by midterms and vacation time, the students managed to send in an audition video with literally minutes to spare. And then they were accepted to perform at the national finals in Gyeonggi-do. We were all ecstatic.

The night before the contest, we all piled into my co-teacher's Santa Fe SUV and made the four-hour drive north to Paju English Village, where the contest was taking place. I was forced to become better acquainted with my students on that trip, jammed into the back seat with them, their snacks and video games and cell phones piled high. We all shared a dorm room as well and I had the opportunity to get to know them even more, their personalities and quirks and dreams now separated from the rest of the horde of 600.

They didn't win that day, and I felt so bad for them, their disappointment so keen. But as we drove the long trip home, stacked on top of each other like broken Pepero sticks, I knew that I had won something that day, even if they had not.

