

Jaime Escalante

"Many people think computers are going to do everything for you. They don't realize . . . the best computer is your brain."

—Jaime Escalante¹

Pre-Reading Questions

Who were your best teachers? What made them good?

Reading Preview

Jaime Escalante was one of the best teachers in the United States. He found ways to make students want to learn. And he helped them succeed. He became known across the country.

Jaime Escalante

Jaime Escalante is a great teacher. He motivates his students to learn and succeed.

Born in Bolivia

Jaime Escalante's parents lived in Bolivia. Escalante was born there. His parents broke up when he was 9. His mother took the children to the city of La Paz.

Teacher

Both of Escalante's parents were teachers. And one of his grandparents was a teacher. In 1952, he became a teacher too. He taught mathematics in Bolivia until 1963.

In 1964, Escalante came to the United States. He wanted to teach here, too. But he didn't have a teaching certificate. And he couldn't speak English. So Escalante went to college. In 1972, he earned a degree in mathematics. In 1974, he got his teaching certificate.

Garfield High School

Escalante started teaching at Garfield High School in 1976. It is in East Los Angeles. Most of his students were from low-income Hispanic neighborhoods. These were tough neighborhoods. Drugs, gangs, and violence were common. No one expected much from these students.

But Escalante was a great teacher. He taught a special class in calculus. He used activities and games to get students interested. He made jokes and scolded them. He used examples that they understood. He challenged them and made them work. He proved to them that they could succeed.

The AP Test

In 1982, Escalante's students took the Advanced Placement (AP) test in calculus. If they passed, it would help them in college. Every student passed. This was unusual. It was especially unusual for students in schools like Garfield.

Did you know?

In 1999, Jaime Escalante was elected to the National Teachers Hall of Fame. It honors the best teachers in the United States.

People from the testing service couldn't believe the results. They asked, "Did the students cheat?"

The students took the test again. This time, the testing service gave the test. And the students passed again. They proved that Escalante was a great teacher. He became famous across the United States.

Ganas

People listened to Escalante speak about education. And each year, he built a stronger mathematics program at Garfield. More and more students passed the AP calculus test.

Escalante says that all students can succeed. A banner in his classroom said, "Ganas." *Ganas* means "desire." Students need *ganas*, says Escalante. A teacher must help students find *ganas*.

Stand and Deliver

In 1988, a movie called *Stand and Deliver* was released. It was about Escalante. It showed how he motivated his students. It showed the students' neighborhoods. It showed how a good teacher can change students' lives.

Futures with Jaime Escalante

In 1990, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) did a TV show with Escalante. It was called *Futures with Jaime Escalante*. It told students about jobs in math and science. *Futures* was the most popular classroom show in the history of PBS. It won more than 50 awards.

New Challenges

At age 60, Escalante left Garfield High School. He began teaching in the Sacramento school system. He chose the hardest school in the system. As before, he helped his students succeed.

Escalante retired in 1998. Then he went back to Bolivia. He lived in a small village there. He taught part-time. He died in 2010, at age 79.

Comprehension

Check the answer that completes each sentence correctly.

1. Jaime Escalante was born in
____ a. Bolivia.
____ b. California.
2. Escalante couldn't teach in the United States because he
____ a. didn't know how to teach.
____ b. didn't have a teaching certificate.
3. Escalante's students at Garfield were mainly
____ a. from low-income Hispanic neighborhoods.
____ b. from rich families.
4. When Escalante's students took the AP calculus test, they all
____ a. cheated.
____ b. passed.
5. Escalante said that all students need
____ a. mathematics.
____ b. *ganas*.
6. *Stand and Deliver* is
____ a. a movie about Escalante.
____ b. a book written by Escalante.
7. After Escalante retired, he
____ a. made a TV show on PBS.
____ b. went back to Bolivia to live.

Making Inferences

Read each statement or question. What do you think that Jaime Escalante would say? Check your answer.

- All children can succeed in school.
___ a. Yes. Poor children can learn as well as rich children.
___ b. No. Rich children will usually do better.
- Teachers can't help students who don't want to learn.
___ a. I agree. Some students just don't want to learn.
___ b. I disagree. Teachers must find ways to motivate them.
- Why is teaching a good job?
___ a. Teachers are paid well.
___ b. Teachers build the future through their students.
- Why should we study math? Only a few jobs use it.
___ a. You should study math only if you like it.
___ b. Learning math can help you learn to succeed.

Vocabulary

Look at these words from the reading. Put a check next to words that you know. Underline words that you don't know yet. Find the words in the reading. Try to guess their meanings.

certificate
challenged

education
mathematics

motivate

Fill in each blank. Use words from the box.

- The _____ showed that Escalante was trained to teach.
- Escalante _____ his students and made them work.
- When you study _____, you learn how to use numbers.
- You can get a good _____ at many colleges.
- Escalante wanted to _____ his students.

Reading a Chart

Charts show information in rows and columns. This chart lists information about teachers in the National Teachers Hall of Fame. It tells about the five who were chosen in 1999.

National Teachers Hall of Fame for 1999

Teacher	Subjects Taught	Home	Years Teaching
Jaime Escalante	mathematics	Granite Bay, California	33 years
Dorothy Kittaka	music	Fort Wayne, Indiana	28 years
Debra Peppers	English, speech, debate, theater	St. Louis, Missouri	25 years
Ronald Poplau	sociology and community service	Shawnee Mission, Kansas	36 years
Vicki Roscoe	curriculum resource teacher	Orlando, Florida	20 years

Choose the answer that completes each sentence correctly. Write it in the blank. Use information from the chart.

1. _____ taught the longest.
Jaime Escalante/Ronald Poplau
2. Dorothy Kittaka taught _____.
mathematics/music
3. Vicki Roscoe taught for _____.
20 years/25 years
4. _____ taught English.
Vicki Roscoe/Debra Peppers
5. Ronald Poplau lived in _____.
Florida/Kansas

Ann Plato was a teacher in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1841, she said, "A good education is another name for happiness."²

**What did she mean?
Do you agree with her? Why or why not?**

Connecting Today and Yesterday

Escalante chose to teach in the toughest neighborhoods. He helped his students succeed. Do you think that Escalante would still succeed in tough schools today? Why or why not?

Group Activity

Think about your best teachers. List your answers to these questions:

- Why did you like them?
- How did they help you learn?
- How did they keep you interested?
- Why were they so good?

Talk about your answers in your group.

Class Discussion

1. Escalante taught mathematics. Do you think that his way of teaching is useful for other subjects? Explain.
2. Escalante used different ways to motivate students. Sometimes he scolded. He made jokes and played games. He challenged students. Are these good ways of teaching? Explain.

Reflections

1. Can you use anything from Jaime Escalante's story in your own life? Explain.
2. How can you learn more about Jaime Escalante?