



# For Real, For Real: The Entirely True Story of a First-Time Teacher and an Inner-City School

*Nathan Frederick*

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"You tryin' to change us?" A few seconds into my first class ever, a student asked a question that had no answer. Then, he walked out. It was a fitting introduction to City High, inner-city education, and what would soon become the most challenging experience of my entire life. I was a white, middle-class, Midwestern man thrown into a Philadelphia school that had performed so poorly it was surrendered to state control. My next two years as a teacher at City High were hectic, heartbreaking, and at times, hilarious. I met students whose own lives seemed more dramatic than anything you might find in the movies. There was Manny, an oversized class clown with Ivy League dreams and a million-dollar smile, a city kid who liked NASCAR and got kicked out of Catholic school for carrying nun chucks. There was Romeo, a kid who got arrested for making his own adult films and Randy, a kid whose father was serving life in prison for shooting a police officer. And there were others too, every one of them struggling to survive in a city that would witness more than 400 homicides in a single year. I taught them all. I taught through the whirlwinds of overworked teachers, underfunded classrooms, and educational policies that often seemed more puzzling than practical. I taught kids who seemed to provoke every emotion possible, laughter and love and rage, often all of them in a single period. Maybe I made an impact, maybe they changed. I know I did. My story is different than all those feel-good, happy-ending Freedom Writer type films that seem to appear in theaters every few years. It is real. For real, for real. Nathan Frederick is a former sports reporter with more than 1,000 published bylines. His writing has won awards from the Keystone Press Association, the Pennsylvania Society of Professional Journalists, and the Associated Press Sports Editors. He currently lives and teaches in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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