

December Teacher Feature: Michelle DeVries, High School English

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." ~Maya Angelou



Michelle DeVries is in her fifth year of teaching at Clearbrook-Gonvick School. Michelle grew up in Madison, MN. It is a small town located on the prairie near the “bump” on the western side of Minnesota. She graduated from Lac qui Parle Valley High School. Michelle earned her teaching degree from Bemidji State University and her Master of Arts in Education from Saint Mary’s University. It was during her time at Bemidji State that she fell in love with the area and knew that one day she would move back!

She lives in the area with her husband, John; her son, John, who is an eighth grader; and her daughter, Hadley, who is in third grade.

Why did you choose to work at this school? Early in our marriage, my husband and I decided we would like to live in northern Minnesota. John also graduated from Bemidji State University and has family in the area. It only took us eleven years, but there was finally an opening at Clearbrook-Gonvick School in the spring of 2013. Though I admit that I did not know much about the area of Clearbrook-Gonvick at the time of my interview and when I accepted the position, it allowed us to achieve our dream of moving to the area. So we both quit our jobs, sold our house, packed up the kids, and headed north!

What did you do before coming to Clearbrook-Gonvick? I started my teaching career in Minnesota, MN, where I taught students grade 7-9 for four years. I then taught at grades 9-12 at Cathedral High School in Saint Cloud for twelve years.

What is the best part of your job at Clearbrook-Gonvick? Even though people think that I spend my days imparting knowledge on the students at Clearbrook-Gonvick School, I find that many days I am the one who learns the most. The best part of being a teacher is learning from my students and colleagues. From my students, I have learned many interesting lessons. I have learned what a gooseneck trailer is! I have learned how to make sweater mittens! I have learned about new authors and exciting books to read! I have learned to step back into my teenage years and put myself in their

shoes. I have learned to be flexible--sometimes what I think may be the most engaging piece of literature has to wait, because for some students there are bigger issues that need a listening ear or pile of Kleenex. From my colleagues, I have learned how to navigate the challenges of teaching. I have learned that everyone needs a break, and that I don't have to work through my lunch. I have learned that I have a family here at school who cares and will go the extra mile for me. I have learned that my own children become their children, as they help guide them through their years of learning and activities.

What is the biggest challenge of your job? Well, I know that many teachers have replied, "Time." I think the biggest challenge for me is to find that perfect balance between work and family. I find that if I give one hundred percent at home, I fall behind at school. If I correct and lesson plan all weekend, then laundry piles up, the house is a mess, there is no food in the refrigerator, and I regret not spending time with my family. Finding that delicate balance is important and something for which I continue to strive.

If you could have any job in the world - what would it be? Why? This is a tough question. I have many interests that I think would make fun and exciting careers. I love to create anything! I would love to be an artist-- maybe a metal jewelry artist or a nature photographer. Another career I think would be fascinating is to be a botanist and work with plants in a botanical garden or an arboretum.

What do you do when you are not working at the school? When I am not in school, I spend much of my time outdoors. You can find me in the woods hiking, snowshoeing, and taking pictures of all things nature; in the summer we like to spend a lot of time at the lake swimming or fishing, at the beach collecting rocks, or at one of our many state parks camping and exploring trails. (My bucket list includes a visit to every state park in Minnesota--25 down, 41 to go!) I also love to cook, bake, read, play cards or board games with my family, and make "stuff"...I'll try any craft or project at least once!

Who is your favorite character from a book and why? I think one of my all-time favorite characters is Captain Augustus "Gus" McCrae from *Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry. If you want to know why, you have to read the book! A close second favorite character is Scout Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. I love her feisty behavior, her analysis of the world around her, her acceptance of those different than she is, and her relationship with her older brother.

What are your favorite aspects of the Clearbrook-Gonvick community? After four years at the school, I am finally getting to know more families. People are very friendly, and employees at the area businesses go out of their way to help. I enjoy being away from the rush of the big city. I grew up in a small town where everyone knows everyone, and my kids are in awe when I go home and people know my name, greet me, and are genuinely concerned about how I am doing and what I am up to. I hope that they can one day know that feeling of coming home to a small town that opens her arms to embrace them and welcome them home.

And now a word or two about Mrs. DeVries from her students...

What do you think Mrs. DeVries was like when she was in high school? “She was a rebel.” “A rebel.” “She was the outgoing type.” “My guess is she was the rebel.” “Certainly not a bookworm! Ha!” “She was a very outgoing person in her class that signed up for almost every activity.” “Rebellion when she could get away with it, otherwise very well-behaved.” “Borderline rebellious”

What do you think Mrs. DeVries does when she is not here at school? “Corrects papers and goes to BookClub.” “Disciplines her kids.” “She listens to classic jazz, also known as ‘old people music’” “Finds plants and the like around her property to eat, cook, or can.” “She is either playing board games or going out to do things in Bemidji with her family.” “Takes care of her children until they go to bed then eats ice cream and watches TV.” “Sneaks her cats inside when no one is looking especially when they look cold.”

What job do you think Mrs. DeVries would have if she was not a teacher? “College Professor.” “A world traveler and writer.” “Photographer.” “I can’t see her being anything other than a teacher, except maybe the homeschool teacher of her own children.” “Big city book store owner.” “A Zumba instructor.” “Arts and crafts director.”

What is one of the best things about Mrs. DeVries? “Her spunky personality and her hippy vibe.” “Her style, her outfits. She is cool.” “She has great stories.” “She is always so kind and always shares a simple thank you which can mean so much.” “She goes the extra mile to help kids and treat people well.” “She is always giving second chances.” “Her stories.”

What do you think is Mrs. DeVries’ favorite thing to do? “Takes long walks in the woods.” “Read.” “Spending time with her family.” “Teach.” “Be with family.” “Read.” “Makes little crafts.”

What character from a book, story reminds you of Mrs. DeVries? Why that character? “Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* Because she stands up for what she believes in.” “Grendel from *Beowulf*...she knows why!” “The little German boy from *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* because he does what he thinks is right even if it is judged at bad or wrong in his society.” “Mrs. Trelawney from the *Harry Potter* series because some students disrespect her despite her being a great teacher and person.” “The Cat-in-the-Hat because she is creative and she secretly has a spunkiness that we get to see every now and then. She is still able to surprise us with her personality!”

What is one thing Mrs. DeVries ALWAYS says? “Okay, be quiet!” “I’m still correcting those. (giggle, giggle)” “No plastic cups, please.” “I’ll correct it later.” “Read more.” “She always says ‘Good Morning’ when we walk in her room.”