



Issaquah High Teacher Profile

Jen Cerasoli

Issaquah High English Teacher

What is your education background?

I have a BA in English Literature from the University of Utah, an MFA in creative writing from UW, and a National Board Certification.

Did you grow up around Issaquah? If not, where did you grow up and did that help shape the person you are today?

I grew up in Salt Lake City, UT and moved to Seattle to do my master's degree after teaching in Salt Lake for a few years. My siblings, cousins, and I grew up hiking around in the Wasatch and Uintah ranges around Salt Lake and driving down to the red rock desert a little further south, and that's probably what shaped me the most. I can't imagine living anywhere where you can't get out away from cities and traffic and explore. It's also shown me that we will all absolutely become our parents, because as much as I appreciate all those childhood hikes now, my dad and uncle definitely dragged us on more than one. I do the same thing to my kids now, except I deliver on the milkshakes that I promise them for finishing the hike.



What was your job/career before coming to teach at Issaquah? If you had a prior job/career, how did that job/career make you become a better teacher?



I started teaching right out of college, but I worked at a lot of jobs through high school and college including: Hardees (hamburgers), Toys R Us, and the Bon Marche. I also lifeguarded, taught a lot of swimming lessons, and coached swimming. I'd say the retail and fast-food jobs taught me to have patience with people who are behaving badly, because, man, sometimes people behave really badly when they're in places like Toys R Us or Hardees. I loved teaching swimming lessons and coaching, and I think those experiences helped shape how I interact with students today. Even if students aren't super invested in English class, they're still really invested in something, and I hope that I can at least give them the idea that what they want to do matters. Kids have such great senses of humor and such passion and hope. It's really cool to be able to spend time trying to help launch people out into whatever kind of future they want to have.

How many years have you been teaching at Issaquah?

I've been teaching in Issaquah School District since 2005; I started teaching at PCMS when it was still the freshman campus. I moved to Issaquah High School in 2010

What classes at Issaquah do you teach, and why do you love teaching that subject?

I currently teach American Lit., Contemporary Lit., and AP Lit. I love teaching these classes because there's some amount of leeway to introduce new texts, and I just think it's so cool to talk through interesting books with people who are experiencing them for the first time, especially when they're excited about them. I also really love working with people on their writing, and in some ways, helping people with their college essays is one of the most powerful experiences. That's really the first time a lot of people have written something for an audience larger than their teacher, and something for which the stakes are so high. I've had so many students come in for help saying they have no ideas of what to write about and getting to watch them work through drafts to finally arrive at these beautiful, original pieces of writing is an awesome experience.

Any favorite teaching memories?

This is a hard question to answer. I don't know if I can pin down any specific favorite memories because I really do just like the kids so much every year. Sometimes there is a class that really develops a strong kind of organic camaraderie and that's always really fun. I think, right now, I'm specifically thinking of this year online, which is probably not anybody's cup of tea. There have just been moments when I'm asking questions or asking for someone to read something out loud, and no one is answering, the Zoom boxes are all blank, and some sweet kid always pipes up and volunteers something—there are a lot of them who do that, and they know who they are. It's just a cool thing because, while I think most of them do it because they're just feeling sorry for me and can't stand to watch me suffer any more, it really does make the class more interesting and more worth going to for everyone. It also really highlights why I like teaching so much: everyone goes through school and no one has much of a choice about it, yet year after year, students continue to show up and put their best selves forward and be there for each other and it's just great to see that kind of thing year after year at work. Seeing times when kids step up for each other or are impressed at work others are doing.

Is (was) volunteering part of your life? If so, tell us about your volunteering experiences and what you love about them?

I volunteer a lot for things that my own kids are involved in. I've coached my daughter's soccer team and I'm on the board of my kids' after school care program. I've really liked doing this stuff because I've gotten to know people in the community I otherwise wouldn't have. While the people are great, I've also learned that I should not ever be the treasurer of anything because it is a nightmare. (Cheers to you, PTSA treasurer!)

What do you like to do outside of school?

I love going to the beaches on the Sound and on the coast at low tide to find sea creatures. Best sea creature in a tide pool so far—baby octopus on Whidbey Island! I've also taken up kayaking to better find the sea creatures. Best sea creature from a kayak—minke whale near the Rosario Strait! I also love baking and try to make elaborate things from scratch as often as possible, usually while pretending I'm on the Great British Baking Show. I also like pretending that Duolingo really is helping me learn French. I'm not so sure, but there's no one here to correct me if it isn't. Of course I also love reading, and watching scary movies, Doctor Who, and British costume dramas with my two daughters who are 8 and 10.

