

# The Teacher's Task: Understanding and Helping

International Education Day on 24 January: Albert Camus' Letter to his Teacher

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Theme: [History](#)

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## Introduction

*On 24 January is: "International Day of Education / UN International Day of Education / World Day of Education". This day of action, first observed in 2019, aims to recognise the role of education in peace and development and as a public good.*

As an educator and psychologist, I would like to quote on this day the letter of the Nobel Prize winner **Albert Camus** to his teacher **Monsieur Germain** on 19 November 1957 and an extract from his teacher's reply on 30 April 1959. Both letters were published in the appendix of Albert Camus' novel "The First Man" (1).



## Camus' letter to his teacher

19 November 1957

Dear Monsieur Germain,

I have allowed the noise that has been around me these days to subside somewhat before addressing you most sincerely. I have been paid far too great an honour which I neither sought nor asked for. But when I received the news, my first thought, after my mother, was of you. Without you, without your loving hand extended to the poor little child that I was, without your instruction and example, none of this would have happened. I don't make much fuss about this kind of tribute. But this is at least an opportunity to tell you what you were and still are to me, and to assure you that your efforts, the work and the generosity you put in are always alive in one of your little pupils who, despite his age, has not ceased to be your grateful disciple. I embrace you with all my heart.

Albert Camus

### Teacher's reply (extract)

Algiers, 30 April 1959

My dear little one,

(...).

I cannot find an expression for the joy you gave me with your lovely gesture and the way you thanked me. If it were possible, I would hug tightly the big boy you have become and who will always remain for me "my little Camus".

(...).

The teacher who wants to do his job conscientiously never misses an opportunity to get to know his pupils, his children, and it is constantly offered. A response, a gesture, an attitude are extremely revealing. So I think I know well the nice little fellow you were, and the child often contains in its germ the man it will become. Your joy at school was palpable everywhere. Your face betrayed optimism. And when I watched you, I never suspected anything about the real situation of your family.

(...).

\*

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### Note

(1) Camus, Albert (1995). The first man. Reinbek bei Hamburg, p. 376ff.

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