



"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. Now he lives in a small village there. He teaches part-time. And he still helps students find *ganas*.

Adapted from *American Lives: Readings and Language Activities*, Book 1 © 2005 New Readers Press, a Publishing Division of ProLiteracy. Used with permission.

Jaime Escalante Notes and References

Notes

1. Jaime Escalante, quoted in "Excellence: Do It Right the First Time."
2. Ann Plato, quoted in Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life*, part 2, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

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