



Books with student's notes marking the pages have sat untouched since mid-March when classes moved online due to the COVID pandemic closures. Caption and photo: Kasey Schoch

Teacher Faces Sad Reality Packing Up AE/MS Classroom

This year, annual routine is anything but

Kasey Schoch, AE/MS teacher

While I knew it was coming, the e-mail hit me right in the heart. Teachers were given assigned days on a calendar to return to their classrooms and clean out for the end of the year.

It happens every year. Teachers pack things safely away until fall, take down their bulletin boards to make room for fresh ideas next year, and make sure that all surfaces are clear for cleaning. Of course I expected it, but this year it's different.

My room, and I assume all of the other rooms too, is a sort of time capsule. Everything is as it was on March 13, our last day at school.

The date is still on the board, and so are the lesson agendas. What were they doing that day? I know eighth grade was working on *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, and my seventh grade class was on an adventure with *The Hobbit*. What else had they been assigned?

The thought of heading to school when it was "my turn" delivered immediate sadness. I knew I was going to cry when I walked in. It's the finality of it, really. The idea that it is really over. That

those kids in that group will never be in my room together again, eagerly waiting to find out what we would be doing that day.

Their laughter would not be there anymore. The ongoing jokes and distracting conversations ... gone. The lockers outside my door would not be slamming. I wouldn't be trying to pack things up between lessons. It would be

quiet and unbearable.

During this entire pandemic, the keycards that unlocked the door to the school had been shut down. Something so ordinary and everyday as unlocking a door became a momentous moment.

A brief trek down the hall and I



Students left messages and artwork on teachers' white boards before leaving classrooms on March 13. At the time, they had no idea that they would not be returning to the building this school year. Caption and photos: Kasey Schoch

would be at my door. Entering felt just as I had imagined it would, sort of. Placing my coffee on my desk as always, I looked around to prepare for my day, and that is where the familiarity ended.

I set up my laptop and turned on my Google Meet in the event that a student needed immediate help while I was there; and with that began the task of making the year in my room final.

On the plus side, I was able to see a few colleagues from a distance. As we stood in doorways to chat, it felt

like things were normal for a moment. There were no tears after all; there were smiles to see each other without a computer screen.

As I packed it up and tucked it all away, I said my goodbyes to the year. I couldn't allow myself to think what the new year would bring. Packed up or not, I don't think any of us are ready to let it go.



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