

Find Your Marigold

Adapted from “Find Your Marigold: The One Essential Rule for New Teachers” by Jennifer Gonzalez, *Cult of Pedagogy*.

Welcome to this year of school. This year, like most years, will test you more intensely than just about anything you’ve done up to now. It will sometimes deplete all your energy and sometimes bring you to tears. But all these difficulties, if you approach them the right way, will leave you better and stronger than you are today.

Advice is available everywhere you look, and some of it is very good. Still, with everything you have to do right now, it’s easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of it all. And the fact is a lot of those tips won’t work very well if you fail to follow this **one essential rule**:

Surround yourself with good people.

By finding the positive, supportive, energetic people in your school and sticking close to them, you can improve your satisfaction more than with any other strategy. And your chances of excelling will skyrocket. Just like a young seedling growing in a garden, thriving in your year at school depends largely on who you plan yourself next to.

The Marigold Effect

Many experienced gardeners follow a concept called *companion planting*: placing certain vegetables and plant near each other to improve growth for one or both plants. For example, rose growers plant garlic near their roses because it repels bugs and prevents fungal diseases. Among companion plants, the marigold is one of the best: It protects a wide variety of plants from pests and harmful weeds. If you plant a marigold beside most any garden vegetable, that vegetable will grow big and strong and healthy, protected and encouraged by its marigold.

Marigolds exist in our lives as well – encouraging, supporting and nurturing growing students on their way to maturity. If you can find at least one marigold in your school and stay close to them, you will grow. Find more than one and you will positively thrive.

Few people will be lucky enough to be planted close to a marigold. You will have to seek them out. You can identify them by the way they congratulate you on your achievements, or by the way their offers of help sound sincere. Or just by the way you feel when you’re with them—are you calmer, more hopeful? Excited to get started on a tough task? Comfortable asking questions? If you feel good around this person, chances are they have some marigold qualities.

Once you’ve identified your marigolds, make an effort to spend time with them. Having a hard day? Go to your marigolds. Not understanding your homework? Go to your marigolds. They may be on the other side of the building or in a different grade level but make the effort—it’s worth the trouble.

Beware the Walnut Trees

While seeking out your marigolds, you'll need to take note of the walnut trees. Successful gardeners avoid planting vegetables anywhere near walnut trees, which give off a toxic substance that can inhibit growth, wilt, and ultimately kill nearby vegetable plants. And sadly, if your school is like most, walnut trees will be abundant. They may not seem dangerous at first. In fact, some may appear to be good people—happy, social, well-organized. But here are some signs you should keep your distance: Their take on people is negative. Being around them makes you feel insecure, discouraged, overwhelmed, or embarrassed.

WALNUT TREES ARE POISON. Avoid them whenever you can. If you don't, they will start to infect you, and soon you'll hate people and learning as much as they do.

Doing this may be a challenge: Your parent or teacher might be a walnut tree. You may be working on a project with one, spending hours with them every week. Touching base with your marigolds will help flush out the toxins that build up from contact with the walnut trees.

Get What You Can, Where You Can

Your search for marigold will yield imperfect results: Not everyone is all-marigold or all-walnut tree. There will be some in your school who just make you happy—go to them for a mood boost. Others may encourage you to rest, slack off a little, not beat yourself up. And some who are intensely into the craft, who always have a great strategy on hand and keep up on everything. Learn who has marigold qualities and get what you can from each of them.

Finally, try to find some compassion for the walnut trees. Their toxicity comes from a place of real pain, and they themselves probably fell under the influence of the walnut trees who came before them.