

Dear Lex,

Jennifer Regruth

4th Grade Teacher, Seymour, Indiana

I'm Jennifer Regruth, 4th grade teacher, and I have had the absolute pleasure to be paired with Lex Gillette as our athlete mentor through Classroom Champions 3 times. He has inspired, guided, and supported me and my students with his magnetic personality, and his accomplishments and trials as an elite athlete. He is truly an amazing mentor- sharing his experiences to pay it forward and encouraging students to take control of their lives and do what they dream.

When I think of Lex, or his name is mentioned in class, a few things immediately come to mind: his smile, his warmth, and his honesty. Through his videos and chats, we got to know him well and called him friend. When students were stuck on a task or problem, we would ask, "How would Lex handle it?" The discussion included elements Lex had taught and we worked together to solve the problem. The video chats were interactive and honest and solidified the friendship.

Not only did Lex interact with us through the lessons, and teach us life skills like perseverance and community, but he had the unique opportunity of helping us learn about being blind. The first year I was paired with Lex, I did a "Before and After Thoughts on 'Blind' People" activity in 2015 when Lex was headed to Rio. At the beginning of the year, before my students knew anything about our mentor, I asked students to write what they thought it was like to be blind and how they thought blind people feel.

Students answered with words like sad, hard, lonely, and helpless. Fast forward to May, after a year with Lex- I again asked them to write their thoughts on people who are blind. The papers returned with phrases like amazing, they can do anything, talented, happy, funny, independent, strong! They had heard Lex's story and saw how he was a world class athlete



and incredible person that doesn't let anything get in his way. Their minds had been completely changed about how they viewed blind people after working with Lex!

In the spring of 2015, we were part of the Beacon Project. The goal was to place sensors throughout the Chula Vista campus, where Lex trains. This way he could wear technology that would interact with the beacons, and guide him around the training site. We did video calls with other classrooms, printed maps, and measured distances. We needed to keep the beacons close enough together so Lex could navigate the paths.

The teamwork and community we felt while working together for something positive was unforgettable. The students loved helping Lex for a change.

At the end of that year, we won a contest and Lex was able to come to our town so we could meet in person. I can't describe a more incredible day! He showed up all smiles and met everyone in the school-leaving behind a wake of fans. The kids took him to PE, shot baskets at recess, and Lex read aloud the book we had written and transcribed to Braille. We all smiled the whole time he was reading it. I am sure he still has that book. When I see kids from that class, they still talk about our adventure and how awesome Lex is! We are forever connected.

Lex touches so many lives through Classroom Champions, social media, live chats and anyone he meets. He has inspired not only my students, but has inspired me as well. For that I am very thankful. His positivity and determination are something we can all strive for. I can't think of a better person to join the Classroom Champions Board of Directors. No doubt he will continue to help change the world.