

Classroom Activities for the College Book 2010
The Last Lecture / Randy Pausch with Jeffrey Zaslow

Note: *The Last Lecture* is available for viewing on YouTube, Google Video, or at www.TheLastLecture.com

For foreign languages, use any of the suggestions below.

Administration of Justice

p. 88 re Randy's pregnant wife "Within an instant, she was bleeding so profusely that I realized that there was no time to call an ambulance. Pittsburgh's Magee-Women's Hospital was four minutes away if I ignored red lights, which is what I did." Do you agree or disagree with Randy's chosen course of action? Why?

African-American Studies

p. 139 Research Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play Major League Baseball. He "endured racism that many young people today couldn't even fathom . . ." What forms did the racism take? How did he react? Find primary source documents to support your answers (ask a librarian how to find primary source documents).

Astronomy

pp. 132-133 "When you use money to fight poverty, it can be of great value, but too often, you're working at the margins. When you're putting people on the moon, you're inspiring all of us to achieve the maximum of human potential, which is how our greatest problems will eventually be solved." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Athletics

p. 37 Of his football coach, Randy says, "He knew there was really only one way to teach kids how to develop [self-esteem]. You give them something they can't do, they work hard until they find they can do it, and you just keep repeating the process." Is this applicable to adult athletes as well?

Biology

Discuss the function of the pancreas.

Business

p. 86 “. . . automobiles are there to get you from point A to point B. they are utilitarian devices, not expressions of social status.” How does advertising for cars express social status? Find some examples.

p. 127 “Walt Disney’s dream for Disney World was that it would never be finished.” Research future plans for any or all of the Disney Parks.

Chemistry

Find the chemical formula for a drug used in chemotherapy.

Child Development

How can we encourage children to follow their dreams?

How would you tell a child that a loved one is dying or has died? How does the age of the child make a difference?

What details from Randy’s childhood led to his successes in later life? Do you believe that most parents do the best they can at the time? What advice would you give someone who didn’t “win the parent lottery”?

Randy says parents don’t realize the power of their words: “Depending on a child’s age and sense of self, an offhand comment from Mom or Dad can feel like a shove from a bulldozer.” Did you ever feel that way as a child?

If you are a parent, how do you encourage creativity in your child(ren)?

In Chapter 28 Randy describes missing the moonwalk because the camp counselors made the children go to bed. If you had been a counselor, what would you have done?

Communication

Chapter 5 describes Randy’s bedroom. Speak about your own room and the special things that are in it.

Research Carnegie Mellon University and prepare a five-minute speech about its history, offerings, etc.

Speak for three minutes about a celebrity who has had pancreatic cancer (for example, Patrick Swayze and Michael Landon).

Who was the best lecturer among your college instructors? Why?

p. 135 Randy hated his first name, Randolph. What does your first name mean? How did your parents select it for you? How do you feel about it? Does it suit you?

p. 51 Have you ever been to Disneyland or Disney World? What are your favorite memories of that time?

p. 48 What was your favorite stuffed animal as a child and why?

p. 120 Randy says, "I was incredibly appreciative that Tommy felt I helped enable his dreams." Who has enabled your dreams? How? Can you say that you have ever enabled someone else's dreams?

Imagine yourself giving a "last lecture". What are the lessons of your own life that might help others?

Why do you think The Last Lecture has appealed to so many people?

Has there been someone in your life who has fought terminal illness? How did he/she approach the disease? What did you learn from it?

CIS

Research Carnegie Mellon University and why it is such a leader among universities for computer science.

Dental Hygiene

When a patient is terminally ill, is dental hygiene important? Why or why not?

EMT

p. 88 re Randy's pregnant wife "Within an instant, she was bleeding so profusely that I realized that there was no time to call an ambulance. Pittsburgh's Magee-Women's Hospital was four minutes away if I ignored red lights, which is what I did." Do you agree or disagree with Randy's chosen course of action? Why or why not?

pp. 160-161 Pick a task or journey and tell how you would prepare.

English

p. 181 Randy describes what he wants on his tombstone. What would you choose for yours?

p. 79 "Brick walls are there for a reason, they give us a chance to show how badly we want something." Discuss a "brick wall" that you have encountered and how you overcame it.

p. 148 "Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted." Tell about a time in your life when you did not get what you wanted and how it affected the rest of your life.

p. 23 Randy's father "liked humorous anecdotes that turned into morality tales."
Do you have one to share?

p. 185 Read what Randy suggests you say to a friend who is going to die. What would you say?

p. 42 Randy says, "I now believe that Wikipedia is a perfectly fine source for your information because I know what the quality control is for real encyclopedias." Many professors and librarians cringe at that statement. Research how articles are added/edited in Wikipedia and come to your own conclusion.

pp. 9-10 What makes you unique? What do you alone have to offer others? How would you define yourself?

p. 11 What were your childhood dreams and have you fulfilled them?

Imagine yourself giving a "last lecture". What are the lessons of your own life that might help others?

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Fire Science

Imagine that you are called to a fire in a home where someone is terminally ill and bedridden. What steps do you need to take to get the person out safely?

Geography

Columbia, Maryland, where Randy grew up, was one of the original planned communities. Research it and find some primary sources, too. Was Columbia successful in terms of its original purpose?

History

Research Andrew Carnegie, who began what is now Carnegie Mellon University. Why did he choose to do that? Why in Pittsburgh? Where did the name Mellon come from and when?

Leadership

p. 23 "Just because you're in the driver's seat doesn't mean you have to run people over." Find examples of leaders who do and do not run others over and give specifics from their behavior.

pp. 44-45 Read the paragraphs in which Randy discusses leadership qualities (p. 44 starting "I learned so much . . ." and p. 45 "But I was hugely impressed . . .").

Pick a leader whom you know personally and evaluate him/her according to these criteria. What do you think of Randy's criteria about being in charge of morale?

Mathematics

p. 36 "You've got to get the fundamentals down, because otherwise the fancy stuff is not going to work." How is this true in mathematics as well as in life?

Medical Office Professional

Imagine that you are working in a doctor's office, that a patient with cancer has been forced to wait due to an emergency elsewhere, and that he/she has become irritated and loud and complaining. How would you handle him/her?

Music

Research the use of music for seriously ill people. Can it help to control pain? What kinds of music would be most successful?

Nursing

p. 71-72 Randy said, "I signed up for the hardest treatments that could be thrown at me because I wanted to be around for as long as possible . . ." How does one balance this desire to be around as long as possible with feeling terrible because of the treatment and not being able to enjoy the life he has left? If a member of your family had to make this choice and asked for your input, what would you say?

Was it unusual that Randy kept his hair during chemotherapy?

p. 61 Palliative chemo is treatment not intended to be curative but to ease symptoms and to possibly buy the patient a few more months. Do any insurance companies limit this type of treatment? Should they?

Discuss the effects of chemotherapy on the body, including physical, emotional, etc.

37,000 people a year are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and it has one of the most dismal prognoses (p. 45 "only 4 percent of pancreatic cancer patients live five years", p. 57 "half die within six months") Why is that?

p. 185 Read what Randy suggests you say to a friend who is going to die. What would you say to a patient who is dying?

Research Norman Cousins and his role in promoting a positive attitude among seriously ill patients.

Philosophy

p. 163 Find the University of Virginia honor code. Do you think it is overly strict?

p. 79 “Brick walls are there for a reason, they give us a chance to show how badly we want something.” Discuss a brick wall that you have encountered and how you overcame it.

p. 119 and 147 Seneca, a Roman philosopher born in 5 B.C., said “Luck is indeed where preparation meets opportunity.” Do you agree or disagree? Can you give an example from your past to support your opinion?

Psychology

p. 71 Randy’s pancakes looked like an “unintentional Rorschach test”. Research the Rorschach test, including when it was devised and by whom.

p. 141 “. . . a substantial fraction of many people’s days is spent worrying about what others think of them. If nobody ever worried about what was in other people’s heads, we’d all be 33 percent more effective in our lives and on our jobs.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

p. 23 Randy’s mother described him as a kid as “alert, but not terribly precocious.” Randy says, “We now live in an age when parents praise every child as a genius. And here’s my mother, figuring *alert* ought to suffice as a compliment.” Compare this with the book Generation Me.

Years ago some families didn’t tell a loved one that he/she was dying. What do you think about that? Do you think some patients would rather not be told the truth? Is honesty always the best policy?

p. 37 Of his football coach, Randy says, “He knew there was really only one way to teach kids how to develop [self-esteem]. You give them something they can’t do, they work hard until they find they can do it, and you just keep repeating the process.” Is this applicable to adult athletes as well?

p. 147 “Whether you think you can or can’t, you’re right.” Do you agree or disagree and why?

pp. 36-37 “When you’re screwing up and nobody says anything to you anymore, that means they’ve given up on you. . . your critics are often the ones telling you they still love you and care about you, and want to make you better.” Think of a time that you were criticized by someone whose opinion mattered to you. Did you realize at the time that the criticism indicated caring?

Has there been someone in your life who has fought terminal illness? How did he/she approach the disease? What did you learn from it?

Sociology

p. 139 Research Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play Major League Baseball. He “endured racism that many young people today couldn’t even fathom . . .” What forms did the racism take? How did he react? Find primary source documents to support your answers (ask a librarian how to find primary source documents).

p. 112 “. . . educators best serve students by helping them to be more self-reflective.” Have you had an instructor who did this for you?

Telemedia

View Randy’s Last Lecture and critique it from the point of view of a documentary.