

WHAT I LEARNT AT SCHOOL

Rock and roll taught musician, campaigner and entrepreneur Sir Bob Geldof everything he needed to know – but the times they are a-changin'...

All I got in terms of education – not what was given to me, but what I took in – was poetry. That was the only thing I liked, and I was very lucky, in that I had three teachers in a row that could actually read the stuff. I wasn't the kind of kid to do homework, but the first time I heard *Paradise Lost*, I went away and wrote 11 pages about it; this was the mid-60s, remember, and so for me there was a direct connection between what Milton was doing, and the lyrics of songwriters like Bob Dylan. I didn't need either form dissected and explained, because what hit me with massive intensity was the sense of the words. That's stayed with me to the present, without question. My subconscious still reaches back for a language that isn't usually available in everyday conversation – heightened language – and finds it.

Other than the poetry, though, I didn't like school at all. I left without any qualifications whatsoever; I never passed an exam, of any sort, in my life. Boredom was one reason, but also I now understand (because I've had to talk about this endlessly over the years) just how profoundly what was happening in my life outside school affected everything else. Parents are the absolute centre of a child's world, by definition and both of mine abandoned ship; my mum died (not her fault, but you don't think like that when you're seven) and my dad had to go out as a travelling salesman all week, leaving my two sisters and me on our own. He had no choice; I know this as an adult, but as a child, I just thought it was shit. My big sister got out at 17 – she got married – and my middle sister was the family swot, the first and only Geldof to go to university. She'd stay at school till eight or nine, so I'd come home, light the fire and make some food for myself in an empty house. We didn't have a telly, so I'd read and listen to the radio. I didn't do any schoolwork. Why would I?

As a child, if central authority is not to be trusted, and abandons you; if the parameters of your world are undefined; if boundaries are eminently flexible *and you*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SIR BOB GELDOF

IS A FOUNDING PARTNER OF GROUPELL, INITIALLY CREATED TO IMPROVE GENERAL AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN A SCHOOL AND ITS PARENTS AND NOW ONE OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR'S MARKET LEADERS. ITS PARENTAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, GROUPELL MESSENGER, IS CURRENTLY USED IN MORE THAN 2,500 SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE UK AND WON THE ICT LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS AWARD AT BETT THIS YEAR. SEE GROUPELL.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR PAGE 20.

decide where they are, then of course if a replacement, lesser authority figure, be it a priest or a policeman, tries to challenge what you're doing, you're going to stare them out. You're going to think, 'f**k you'. The chaos in my personal life meant that I was a major pain in the arse at school. I deliberately delivered a constant stream of low-intensity irritation. For example, it was the rule that we had to wear a tie. So I did. I wore a different tie every day. I'd buy a ludicrous piece of fabric and run up something lurid to wear round my neck and to make things worse, I'd flip it rather than knot it, like the Kinks did. When I was sent home, I'd make myself another.

I still have to wrestle with this need perpetually to challenge and annoy. When I go into meetings – sometimes with very big people – my instant response mechanism is a childish 'Yeah? Big deal'. And I can hear the inner voice telling me to grow up; that these are important people, perhaps elected into authority and obviously cleverer than me. But still, the 'f**k you' is louder.

That's why school was never going to do anything for me. I got lucky, though and I have to say this to my children. I did all kinds of crap jobs, because they were *there* back then and eventually, like many of my generation, rock and roll quite literally saved me. The chances of that happening now are incredibly rare. We don't fully understand the age we're going through. But it is an age that will be talked about in history lessons, if we

still have them, 300 years from now – as a time of massive technological, political, economic and social change. The people who get whacked with the fall-out from all of this are the teachers. They have to handle the detritus of who we are, as families shift shape and school increasingly becomes the place where we attempt to establish equilibrium in society.

That's the reality – that's the future and we owe those people a profound respect. It would help, of course, if they weren't such arses a lot of the time. Nonetheless, what a shite, exhausting job; and what a brilliant thing they do.