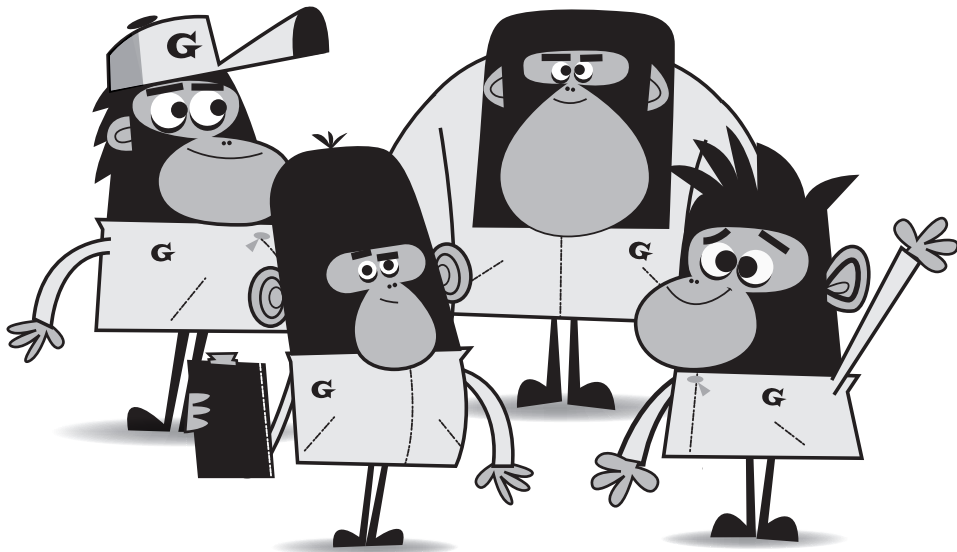


**Jonathan Lear**

# GUERRILLA TEACHING

Revolutionary tactics for teachers on the ground, in real classrooms,  
working with real children, trying to make a real difference



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For my incredible (and tolerant) wife Emma and my beautiful daughters  
Eve and Imogen. I couldn't have done any of this without your love,  
support and inspiration. Thank you for everything.

xxx

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# INTRODUCTION

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‘Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.’

**Dr Seuss**

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I didn’t mean to write a book. I always thought that writing was something that real teachers didn’t have time for.

Real teachers, the ones who teach real children in actual schools, are always up to their eyeballs in a whole host of important things that they know they need to do, and probably a number of unimportant things that they feel they have to do.

I am very much in this boat.

I can’t quite pinpoint the moment I knew something had to change. Up until recently, I’d happily left it to those on high to make the big decisions on education, while I got on with the business of teaching children. But then the interfering started. It took different forms – from ever-changing Ofsted frameworks, to the new primary curriculum, until all of a sudden, the things that I held dear about education were under threat.

Part of me wished that I’d become a head teacher, because head teachers are important, and they can change things. I know this because my wife is a head teacher, and she’s very important. Maybe, if I were a head teacher, I could do something about it. Head teachers have a vision. They have to; it’s compulsory. And if you’ve got a vision, then you’ve got a chance.

It didn’t take long before I developed some vision-envy. I started to think that if I had a vision of my own, then I wouldn’t have to wait around for things to change; I could get on with it myself.

Then I remembered that I did have a vision; I’d just forgotten it.

In fact, we all have one.

## **GUERRILLA TEACHING**

If teaching is something you chose, and you've stuck at it for a while, then it's more than likely that you're in it for the right reasons.

As a young teacher, I wanted to make a difference to the lives of children; I wanted them to leave school as great people ready to tackle any of the challenges that life threw at them. It sounds idealistic, but I suppose that's the point of a vision.

The problem is that it's easy to get worn down; it's easy to lose sight of the vision. A child is not 3 per cent: a child is a child, and at the moment, they really, really need us to stand up for them.

This book is about a revolution. Not a flag-waving, drum-beating revolution, but an underground revolution, a classroom revolution. It's not about changing policy or influencing government; it's about doing what we know to be right, regardless of what we're told. It's a book for people on the ground: people in real classrooms, working with real children, trying to make a real difference.

This book is about regaining our vision.

And as the saying goes, 'If you can't beat them, go underground and beat them anyway.'

**PART I**  
**Starting a Revolution**

# REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS

Starting a revolution could be seen as a big step, and it would definitely be a risky thing to do without first doing some serious groundwork. To save time, I've drawn together (from literally minutes of research) what seem to be the qualities that are common to all good guerrillas.

In terms of recruitment, education has traditionally always been about qualifications. While some people might argue that we should be employing the most academically gifted and highly qualified people to teach our young people, others might recall the chemistry teacher they had at secondary school who, despite having a PhD, intensely disliked children, and couldn't teach his way out of a paper bag.

I think it's about time we cut out all of the uncertainty tied up with qualifications and instead, went for a much more robust system of personality cross-matching to see whether or not potential recruits have what it takes.

For starters, it seems that effective guerrillas fall into one of four types.



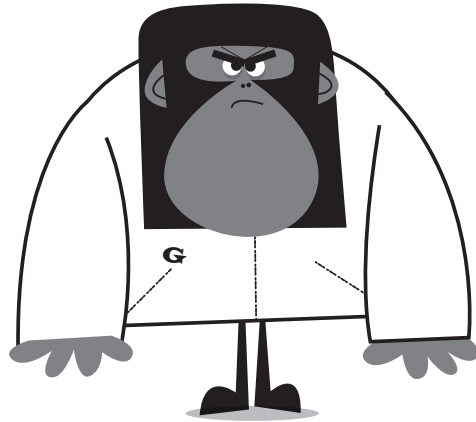
## **Thinkers, schemers and leaders**

You like to plan ahead, and pride yourself on being prepared for any eventuality. Your organisational skills make you the go-to person in a crisis, and you've got a natty spreadsheet that's got the whole staff's tea and coffee requirements mapped out for ease of reference.



## **Militants, rabble-rousers and rule-breakers**

You don't suffer fools and you're passionate about what you do. You're a committed, all-action, no-nonsense teaching machine, and – though no one would say it to your face – there's probably some borderline anger management issues bubbling under the surface there too.



## **Oddballs, mavericks and crackpots**

You live life on the edge and love nothing better than flying by the seat of your (novelty) pants. Anything could happen in your classroom – and it frequently does. You continue to believe in unicorns, no matter what the scientists say.

## **Charmers, chancers and dreamers**

You're unflappable, resourceful and optimistic. You can expertly wriggle out of even the tightest of situations with your charm, ingenuity and unfathomably great hair.



## REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS

If you don't associate yourself with any of the guerrilla gorilla types (did you see what I did there?), then guerrilla teaching is clearly not for you. Put the book down, step away, and go back to doing what you've always done with your pile of pre-prepared worksheets, run-of-the-mill pants and lacklustre hair.

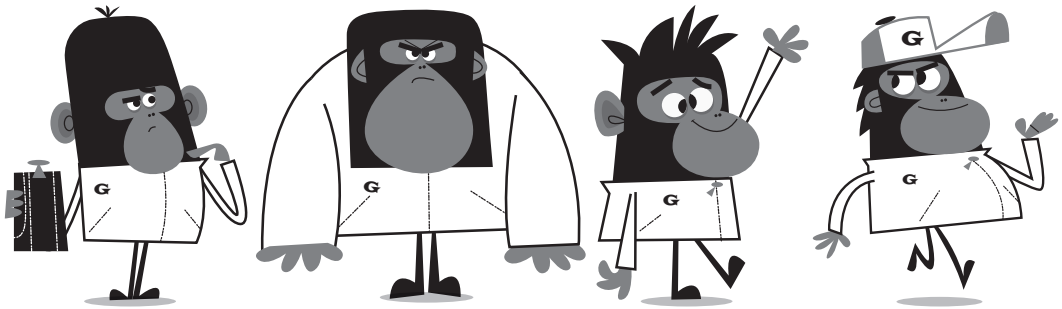
If, on the other hand, you felt the warm glow of familiarity on reading these descriptions, then you could be just the kind of individual to make a difference.

Rather than strongly identifying with any one group (which, to be honest, would be a bit of a cause for concern), it's more likely that you've got a little bit of everything in there – a potent combination of the best bits.

Perhaps you're an optimistic planner and doer who's open to moments of creative madness? Or maybe you're a no-nonsense organiser with great hair who likes a bit of dressing up?

Regardless of your individual profile, if you're in some way channelling the spirit of a guerrilla, then you're well on the way to becoming just the kind of revolutionary our children need.

Welcome to the gang.



## There ain't no 'I' in team

As formidable as any individual guerrilla teacher would be, there's no doubt that the business of starting a revolution is a group activity. There is no 'I' in team, and while, disappointingly, there's also no 'we', we'll definitely be stronger together than apart. Imagine a network of guerrilla teachers working subversively towards a common goal – a shared vision. We'd be unstoppable.

Now, before we get too carried away, we need to tighten a few things up. The beauty of guerrilla tactics lies in the ability to work with whatever resources we've got, no matter how ramshackle, shoddy or sparse they may be.

We can wait for as long as we want for things to change for the better, but while we're doing that, we may as well get on with taking what we've got, however rubbish we might think it is, and turning it into something that's amazing.

The best definition that I've come across for the word guerrilla goes like this:

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To be a member of an unofficial group of combatants using the element of surprise to harass a larger less mobile target.<sup>1</sup>

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There aren't many things I can think of that are as large and immobile as our education system, and if there was ever something that was long overdue a spot of harassment, then this is it.

Like some strange kind of military duck, our job is to appear normal and calm on the surface, while underneath, we'll be furiously causing all manner of nuisance to make sure that our children get the education they deserve.

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<sup>1</sup> I can't find the dictionary that has this definition (it was online and quite a while ago). The closest I could get to a source is from here: <http://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/origin-of-guerrilla-warfare-history-essay.php>. All the elements of the phrase are there but it's not a direct quote.

**Guerrilla:** to be a member of an unofficial group of combatants using the element of surprise to harass a larger less mobile target.

# GUERRILLA TEACHING:

**To put children, and their learning, at the heart of lessons**  
**To embrace problem-solving and risk-taking in the classroom**  
**To be adaptable and creative**  
**To think about the skills and knowledge children will need in the future**  
**To stand up and make sure children get the education they deserve**  
**(even if it means subverting the system!)**

*Guerrilla Teaching* is a revolution. Not a flag-waving, drum-beating revolution, but an underground revolution, a classroom revolution. It's not about changing policy or influencing government; it's about doing what you know to be right, regardless of what you're told. It's a book its author never meant to write, but it was just too important not to.

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Anyone who engages with this book will find it goes under the barbed wire of current orthodoxies, throws a few grenades at the mythologies of teaching and comes up in the middle of the great learning debate.

**Mick Waters, Professor of Education, Wolverhampton University**

Jonathan Lear is the voice of the true expert – the excellent classroom teacher who, through experience and experimentation, knows what works for his pupils and is not prepared to let outside interference get in the way of doing what he knows is right for their education and wellbeing.

**Joe Carter, Editor, Teach Primary**

Full of great ideas to take immediately into the classroom and a philosophy that is refreshing and forward thinking. A great read for the next generation of teachers!

**Dr Jonathan Doherty, Head of Primary Education, Leeds Trinity University**

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Described as having a breathtaking understanding of how to engage children, **Jonathan Lear** is an award-winning teacher and education consultant. He has worked for many years on a compelling mix of inspirational teaching strategies, and has shared his passion for learning as an AST, as a deputy head and as an Associate of Independent Thinking.

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