

## Teaching to Persuade

*by Kenita Gibbins*

Teaching English in Beja, Portugal challenges, excites. I recommend the adventure to you who live in Windsor Gardens. The link is [globalvolunteers.org](http://globalvolunteers.org).

Some of the high school students simply do not believe the effort to learn English is worth it. They choose the Spanish class instead. We learned from our English students the logic is they can get better grades in Spanish and therefore get into University. We know many books will be written in English. They will have to hire expensive translators. There were many excellent students to persuade learning English is the way to a better future.

We taught in the prison three times. I liked having a captive audience. When a man enters the prison, he is given a counselor. Together they choose a rehabilitation plan for getting out of prison earlier. When an inmate signs up for English, they are very serious about learning. We told our students they could ask us any questions they wanted. The main question from all of our classes from teens to professional adults did not surprise us. Everyone wants to know how we feel about our President Trump. I told them our economy is good and our job rate is high. But, no I do not admire our president. He scares me.

We had two classes with professional adults. We split the group and then flipped after an hour. My favorite adult was a security guard at the prison. She would listen to our conversations with the prisoners when she was on duty.

Pablo, age 14, was the student I tutored. I did not want to leave him.

I felt my friendly persuasion job was to give him confidence in himself. Pablo had flunked 7th grade two times and was struggling with his third year. I ruminated to myself, what is that going to do for this kid? I think the teachers are ignoring him when they should know the best and brightest student is going to make it on his/her own no matter what. Pablo could communicate with me in English. I looked at his workbook and noticed only one mistake to capitalize the first letter of a sentence. I could compliment him. I was told he was failing in all of his classes. I didn't get it. The last day he brought a book about his family. He gave me a presentation. This is not a dumb young person. He probably has no confidence. He probably has no friends. I know he needs a counselor or psychologist to find out what is missing in his learning abilities. I said good-bye and cried on my way back to our hotel. I repeated to myself he is a percussionist in a band. He loves the animals on his grandfather's farm. He has good things in his life.

Our last night in Beja we were invited to a teacher's birthday party. We felt very lucky to be a part of Ana's family and friends. There were 11 of us. I jump out of my chair with joy when the last two guest walked to the table. My Pablo was with his mother. I received more time as a gift.