

Advice for a First-Year Teacher

By Lynn Aprill

They tell you never smile
until Christmas, the better
to establish the right tone,

and positively never let them
make you cry, at least
not in front of them; wait

until the bell ushers them
out of their desks
like cows from their stalls,

filing into ragged ranks
down the cinder block hallway.
Then slip like a shadow

into a convenient closet,
already stocked with tissues
and your favorite sweater, sob

on its shoulder for two minutes,
so you have the other two
to blot your eyes and gather

the pieces of yourself
for the next class. Notice
that quiet kid in the corner,

the funny one in the front row,
the hungry one in the back.
Pick up their lingo, bridging

the gap between your generations
by being just a little funnier
and little smarter

than they first gave you credit for.
Lesson plan. Assign seats.
Organization is the only thing

that will save you. Keep
the post-it you find tucked
into your drawer that says,

“You’re my favorite teacher,”
but feign ignorance of the condom
slipped into your glove--it’s a test,

a Geiger counter to gauge
the level of your reaction--
Disappoint. Them.

Be there enough--just enough
for those who come to you
needing a champion, but not enough

to lose yourself, to forget that you
are more, to forget who you were
before you stepped in front of them.