

## Trying To Make Sense Of What Happened

I switched on the TV in front of the room, and my students and I listened to the announcers try to make sense of what had happened — only to see the second plane hit. At first, the sight of the towers burning didn't seem much different from a TV action movie.

Soon, however, the events of that day would become very, very real.

After what seemed like a half-hour, we heard a loud explosion. Several students were startled. I told them not to worry, that "it was just a car backfiring." Then, a boy sitting near the windows said, "That's no car, look at that black smoke." An enormous plume of smoke rose in the distance.

## Plane Had Hit The Pentagon

A few seconds later, a reporter at the Pentagon came on TV, saying that he heard an explosion and felt the ground shake. It was obviously the same one that had just startled us. Several minutes later, it was announced that a plane had hit the Pentagon.

At that point, a boy sitting across the room from the windows — a football player — suddenly came undone. His mom worked in the Pentagon. He wasn't able to reach her on his cellphone.

## Street Outside School At A Standstill

Students from other classes whose parents worked at the Pentagon were also panicking. They had gotten permission to try to call their parents, but there was no service anywhere in the area. The street outside the school was at a standstill. It made us feel as if we were trapped.

We had no idea what was coming next. Students could only leave the school if their parents came to get them. A number of Muslim parents came to take their children home, worried their children might be blamed for what happened.

(By the way, the football player's mom at the Pentagon reached the school later in the day to say that she was OK.)

## Special Bond

I spent that whole day with my new students. I didn't even know all of their names yet, but we shared a special bond. Whenever someone asks any of us, "Where were you on 9/11?" I'll remember them and they will remember me.

How do students — or any of us — remember, absorb and see the significance of our national history? This is something the events of 9/11 forced me to really think about.