A woman stands in front of the students with a chalkboard overhead in the background and attempts to give more knowledge to the students in her class. Teachers come in many shapes and sizes; some are tall, some short. Others are graying on the top, while some were students themselves only a short while ago. Some are organized and some can not remember where they put the exams. No matter what their appearance or temperament, good teachers always seem to have one idea in common: they all produce a “tennis shoe” environment. Mrs. Rosalie Naumann, in Lives on the Boundary, is an example of the this type of teacher both to her classroom full of young students and to Mike Rose, a man who will later eagerly attempt to teach actively.

Mrs. Rosalie Naumann is first described as a, “...somber-looking woman-short, tennis shoes, a close crop of gray hair...” (Rose 92). What is striking about this description is the contradiction between being somber and gray and wearing tennis shoes. Picturing a somber woman with gray hair often includes seeing her in “old people’s clothes” a nice matching outfit with pointed, low-heal shoes, but instead, the author describes her tennis shoes to show that there is something different about this teacher. The tennis shoes are a sign that she is an active participant in her teaching. Tennis shoes, by their very
name, indicate activity and possibly aggressiveness. When André Agassi steps out onto a tennis court with his shoes shining, there is no doubt that there will be a workout. The same holds true for Mrs. Naumann, only her “court” is a classroom full of students. Instead of serving up tennis balls, she relays knowledge to her students. However, in tennis there is always a constant play between the two sides of the net. If Mrs. Naumann is “serving up knowledge,” then her students must be on the other side receiving this knowledge and then sending back their questions in hopes of receiving new knowledge once again. Mrs. Naumann designs her classroom to be one of active participation, which means that she expects her students to actively respond to her questions and ask their own.

The book first encounters Rosaline Naumann in the teacher’s lounge. Naumann impresses Rose by how she handles the teacher’s gossip. Instead of telling her that she is wrong for talking about anyone in such a way and offending her colleague, she, “...looked up and asked her why that bothered her so much” (Rose 92). What fascinates Rose is the way Mrs. Naumann makes them reflect upon their improper behavior by asking a question. “She didn’t ask the question in a nasty way; in fact, it seemed an invitation to think the problem through” (Rose 92). The way she invites thought in all her questions brings Rose to the conclusion that he wants to learn Mrs. Naumann’s active teaching style. Mike Rose starts by observing, but moves quickly into helping her work with small groups. Believing strongly in actively learning, Mrs. Naumann knows that he is not going
to learn to teach until he actually does some teaching himself, so she arranges for him to teach a class once a week. Rose is very fearful and uncertain, but "Rosaline pooh-poohed my apprehension and said she'd take responsibility for me..." (Rose 93). The idea that a student must take risks in order to conquer is very important in this situation. In order to get better, every athlete knows that he must be challenged. Rosalie understands the need to challenge Rose. It is never easy to face someone or something new, but in order to grow as a teacher Rose has to win against his fear. So, with some reassuring words, Naumann gives him a teaching position once a week to help him grow and learn. Mrs. Naumann sets up an environment where Rose can make his own lesson plans and do his own teaching, but still has her as a role model, mentor, and teacher. Rose asks for Mrs. Naumann's guidance, but she understands that he needs to do what he thinks is best and learn from his mistakes, so she offers little help, but enormous support. Mike Rose then mimics lessons that Mrs. Naumann has used, and connects with the students. Therefore, Mrs. Naumann succeeds in teaching Mike Rose how to become a good, active teacher through her excellent example and teaching style.

Mrs. Naumann's tennis shoes can also symbolize that she is down to earth and can connect with her students on a more casual, personal level. This more personal relationship with her children was demonstrated when Rose said she, "...always had her hand on their [students] shoulders" (Rose 93). Rosaline understands a person's need to be loved and excepted. Touching a child in a caring way enforces
positive feelings and good behavior. Mrs. Naumann fulfills her students' need for a one-on-one relationship. "They [her students] would talk to her, for I suppose they sensed she cared" (Rose 93). This shows that Naumann cares about her students and forms a personal relationship with each one. Rose decides to mimic Naumann so he can learn her active teaching style. So, he has all the children write about pictures that he presents to them at the beginning of class. This is one instance in which Naumann created different methods to teach her students how to write. By bringing in outside material from the world she tries to connect the world that the children are living in and their education. Therefore, Mrs. Naumann is a perfect example of an excellent teacher because she positively reinforces her students by smiling and touching their shoulders, and she creates an environment where the students are able to make connections to learning and their own lives. She understands that there needs to be active communication in the classroom, which makes knowledge more understandable and applicable for them. Therefore, her students learn more and are healthier in their attitude towards learning.

Teachers are a very intricate part of the education system today, especially in the lower grades. Between sports, daycare, and school, teacher today tend to see children more then their own parents. Therefore, teachers have a large influence on a child's opinions, behaviors, and knowledge. Children, especially at a young age, need a constant person in their life that is always pushing to make them think, act, and dream big. However, with the recent court cases where
teachers are more and more often being accused of sexual harassment and abuse, some teachers are becoming more reserved in their teaching styles. Only a decade ago a teacher could place a reassuring hand on a student’s shoulder having no fear of being accused or sued for sexual harassment. However, today teacher are hesitant to even ask a student to stay after class for a moment to talk to him about problems he is having. Also, society no longer tolerates time in class devoted to creativity and discussion. People believe that children must always be learning from book while at school. Yet, they forget how much learning is done through peer interaction, asking questions, or just simply talking. Now, society has set very tight rules and restrictions on our teacher. While these social rules are made to protect the children, in most cases they are hindering the education system by not allowing the proper bond between a teacher and student to form. Without being able to touch a student on the shoulder, it is harder for a teacher to positively reinforce the good work that he is doing, and by forcing so many facts into a student’s head, the teacher loses the opportunity to develop a learning environment open to peer interaction. By limiting our teachers, society is limiting a student’s chance for an open and active educational environment, which is best suited for learning.

Thus, the relationship between a teacher and student is essential in the learning process. The teacher guides the pupil into a richer understanding of the world around him. Rosalie Naumann, an excellent example of a great teacher, gives her students encouragement by creating an environment that is open for discussion and questions.
By building this “tennis shoes” environment, there is a constant challenge being hurled at each of her students. The students that learn best are the ones that are given the opportunity to “hit the ball back” by asking questions and thinking through problems. Mrs. Naumann is also able to build bonds with them by talking to her students on their own level, and giving support and guidance when they need it most. It is through her “tennis shoes” attitude that children learn about life and feel comfortable to ask questions. Therefore, the truly great teachers break that image of a teacher with a chalkboard behind her lecturing to the class. Instead, a teacher should learn about her students, start discussions, and encourage questions, so she can create the environment best suited to the class. The best teachers are ones who remember to wear their “tennis shoes.”