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Purcell the Teacher: In and Out of the Classroom

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As a high school student Edward Purcell read articles by K.K. Darrow from his series, “Advances in Contemporary Physics.” Many years later, Purcell, referring to those articles, said they remind us “that great teaching does not require a classroom. . . .” Many of Purcell’s choices were motivated by his devotion to teaching: the undergraduate courses he preferred to teach at Harvard, the textbooks and pedagogical papers he wrote, and the professional activities he engaged in. He delighted in explaining complex phenomena in simple ways – a mark of a great teacher.