

# Teaching Secrets

Welcome to the real world. This is a world that probably no college professor has prepared you for. Unfortunately most of the staff that has taught you has not been in a classroom for ten years, if not longer.

The total reality of your new world will hit you about the fourth week of school. You will wonder why you ever chose teaching as a profession. By the fourth week the new has worn off. The students have analyzed your strengths and your weaknesses, and will now go to their regular battle stations.

That's what this guide is about. It's about teaching you to avoid the battle that you would otherwise have to face, defusing the conflict before it even begins, and showing you how you can transform everything you've ever learned about teaching. Using the secrets in this guide, you'll be able to stay better organized, remain consistent, and instill discipline as you manage your classroom better than you ever thought possible.

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## **The Participants**

While you will encounter countless people in your teaching career, they generally will fall into a few main categories.

### ***Principals***

The principal is generally an ambitious career politician. They have their sights set on a school board position further down the road and are in a delicate juggling act. They want to keep their teachers happy and back them up, but then they don't want to offend any parents. As such, sometimes you can think they are your best friend and at other times your worst enemy.

You need to be sure that you understand the chain of command in a school. The principal is the boss. A good principal will be there to give you advice but he can not spend all of his time in your classroom maintaining discipline because you can not control the students. I was once being interviewed and the question was asked "What do you expect from the principal?" I answered for him to stay out of my way. I did not mean this to sound ugly, it was just that if I am hired to teach allow me to teach and support my efforts. I did not plan to frequent his office to make him feel good about himself or to boast his ego. When I found it necessary to go to the office, it would certainly be because I wanted his support in meeting with some parent. Since I turned in my lesson plans which of course were so easy to write because of the typed classwork/homework sheets, he would always know exactly what I was teaching.

### ***School Secretary***

In many schools the secretary is more in tune with how to run the school than the principal. She is probably already established in the community. She will hear rumors about how organized you are and will carry this news to her friends and neighbors. She will be the one that lets you know if a parent called for a conference. This was an especially important issue for me because I believe in contacting parents from school not my home.

One of the unsung heroes in a school is the custodian. Believe me, if you want to know who the real teachers are just ask the custodians. The custodian will be the one to find you much needed desk, or keep a working pencil sharpener in your class. It teaches the student some value lessons to pick up around his work area before he leaves the class. You may be surprised to find out how many teachers leave all the cleaning up to the janitor. A new set of desks were delivered to the school. The principal mentioned putting the desks in a certain class and the custodian said which teachers should get the desks, because he knew that they would last longer.

### *Coworkers*

What a joy to have such great coworkers through the years! I have had the pleasure of teaching with some wonderful professionals. We worked as a team and supported one another. Parent conferences were most effective when we all met together. It is also nice to have witnesses to what goes on. Unfortunately we live in a sue-crazy society. It is so much harder to teach students who come from a ridiculously relaxed classroom where they mainly sit and chat about sports, fishing, etc. It is wonderful to know the lasting friendships that you will establish because you taught together.

### *Substitute Teacher*

In trying to cover many of the topics I need to mention the substitute teacher. Think about the times that the sub has entered the classroom and there are no lesson plans. This is an unfair situation in which to put your sub. It is very hard for anyone to be able to have good discipline in this type of situation. There is also the opposite extreme of the sub who comes and does nothing that is on your lesson plans. You re-enter the next day to complete chaos.

My sub always knew what to do and so did all my students. Posted around the room were the classwork/homework sheets. If I was absent, this gave everyone a chance to really get caught up and do several assignments ahead. I always found that a great day for an open notebook test was the day that I returned. It was a way to reward the ones

who worked and an excellent way to expose the ones who decided to visit or take the day off. Unless I recognized a very definite problem, I did not spend thirty minutes wasting time trying to figure how who did what. My open notebook test scores told me all that I wanted to know. (There are examples of these in the back of this guide.)

### ***Parents***

While you will meet a lot of interesting students in your teaching career, that won't compare to the types of parents that you will meet. Some will be behind you 100% and excited to help out in their child's education and give you the support you need. Others will function as an enabler to their child's bad behavior and think that their child can do no wrong and you must be mistaken if you even hint that their darling is at fault.

### ***Student***

By far most of your contacts in your teaching career will be with students. They are probably the reason you decided to teach in the first place, having a desire to mold and shape young minds and give them a good education. On the surface it sounds like an easy task, but each day can be a renewed battle if you're not prepared. That's what this guide is about, preparing you to face students, parents, and principals and have a smile on your face and go home each day knowing that you're still on top!

### ***Yourself***

You're just a smiling, innocent teacher that is soon to become not only the target of the students, but parents and grandparents as well. The principal is now caught between the lines. He would like to be known as a principal who stands behind his teachers; however, his job for the most part is to keep peace with the parents. So he will assign an older teacher, who is already overloaded with responsibilities to try to help you maintain order in your classroom while you try to teach. The main problem with that is that "other teacher must be in her classroom and not across the hall trying to discipline your students or she will lose her effectiveness.

## **Chart Your Course**

You must chart a course if you plan to succeed. This small guide is for the purpose of helping you to be a happy, successful teacher.

### ***Rule 1***

You can not be lazy, and be a good teacher.

### ***Rule 2***

You must let the students and parents know that you are well prepared. This is extremely important.

### ***Rule 3***

Teaching is not a popularity contest. If you are a good teacher, you will have a lasting impression on many students. It is not your job to put yourself on their level. Students desperately need an adult role model that can help to inspire them to reach their dreams. It may be many years after you have taught that student that they will share with you how much you brighten their day and gave them a thirst for knowledge.

### ***Rule 4***

You must be consistent. Most of your students have had years of training in “how to get their way.” Many of them will have the equivalent to a master’s degree in debate. Consistency means you need a routine. I suggest a routine that has a particular day of each week for some type of test.

## Typical Schedule

This is a typical schedule for an English teacher.

### *Monday*

Teach a section on direct quotations

### *Tuesday*

Repeat the rules and review what you taught the previous day. Give notes for the test that will be on Thursday.

### *Wednesday*

Review classwork from the typed classwork/homework sheet. This is a typed sheet with minimum assignments for each day for the nine weeks. It is kept in a spiral notebook and all students are allowed to work at their own speed, but not to exceed five days assignment because the teacher teaches five days ahead of the sheet. This will be discussed in detail in a later section. On Wednesday it is important for anyone who was absent on Tuesday to get the notes for the test on Thursday.

### *Thursday*

Test day. Every Thursday there is a test. No longer will the student tell his parent he did not know there was going to be a test. At the beginning of the school year, you make it plain that there are 36 Thursdays so that means 36 tests.

### *Friday*

Give back papers and review mistakes. Take papers back up and give out again on Monday to take home for parents to see. Friday is not a good day to send home papers. Many students have games, shopping trips planned with peers and some do not see their parents until Sunday night. For some children, it may be the weekend for Father's visitation. I have always found that Monday is a good day to send home papers. Later I will discuss in this guide that you do not want to waste your time picking the papers back



up. The parents by this time have been informed that it is THEIR responsibility to ask their child for the paper on Monday night. If the child tells them that the teacher failed to give out the papers, then that parent should call the school to find out why the teacher did not give out the papers. (If the teacher has an emergency and really could not give out the papers then the teacher should send home a note so that when the parents ask to see the test papers, they will realize there was an emergency.) The biggest lesson for everyone here is that the teacher has told you when the papers will be coming home and it is the parent's responsibility to ask for the papers. The question should not arise in a parent conference about why the teacher did not let the parent know that the student's grades were falling.

## **Relationship Secrets**

### ***Get the Students on Your Side***

The brighter students love the classwork/homework sheets. They can work ahead five days. You are allowed to work at your own pace and put a check by each assignment that you have completed. It makes the student extremely proud to be able to have so much control over their work. It is a must that even if Susie is ahead for five days, she is to put the date that corresponds with the typed sheet, not today's date. Even the child moves at a slower pace can label his notebook or you can help him label it. Students seem to be amazed when they flip the pages to see the amount of work that they have accomplished. A child that I recognize may have trouble getting into the routine is one that I immediately help get the notebook set up. It is easy for me to put the dates and the page number of the assignment in the left margin and just allow a few more lines for the assignment in case the student writes rather large. The classroom is quieter to work because even talkative students realize that they can no longer say they don't know what to do. I even had one student who told me that I had taken away all of his excuses to his mother. One of his excuses in the past was that he didn't have any homework, but now his mother had seen the classwork/homework sheet.

Another of his frequent complaints was that he did not think it was fair to have homework on Friday. But it is typed on the sheet that the only students that will have homework will be the ones who did not use their classroom time wisely. Almost all students love to work ahead. If they get over four days ahead they will work on any other assignment while the rest of the class is finishing their work. I have had some students who were always four days ahead because they loved to read or use computers in the back of my room. Another excuse that this young man tried to use was that he had soccer practice on Thursday and got in too late to do homework. Well, his parents now knew that he could work ahead in preparation for the days that he know he was going to be busy after school. One parent told me that since she knew her son could not be trusted he had to bring his notebook home for her to see before he left the house to go to soccer

practice. The student finally told me that he was in a predicament. He would have to get a new mother or a new teacher because I had robbed him of all his excuses.

### ***Don't Become a Buddy***

I remember years ago trying to prepare a handsome young man to take my place in an eighth grade math class. I can still see the smirk on his face as he observed my class management techniques. With a twinkle in my eye, I told him that I know you think my rules are ridiculous but notice everyone is happy and working in my room. I had left on maternity leave, and he decided to become their “buddy” and quickly disposed of all my “routines” that had kept my ship sailing so smoothly. At the end of the semester, he checked himself into a hospital on the verge of a nervous breakdown. His nerve pills and alcohol addiction almost wrecked his career. I reentered the work force five years later and was pleasantly surprised to see the young man back in the classroom doing an excellent job of teaching. He gave me a big hug and then took me to his classroom because he wanted me to see how he had now employed most of my “hints”. He could have fallen by the wayside, but I am very pleased to say that he ultimately received numerous honors for his teaching ability.

### ***Get the Parents on Your Side***

Once the parents see the depth of interest you have in their student they will usually sing your praises and want to work with you. The teacher must have a better plan than just to shoot from the hip. We are there to teach. The sad thing about this is that many young teachers are getting out of college with such enthusiasm but the students are so noisy that the teacher cannot teach. The teachers' degree should have been in crowd control. Too many college professors do not have a clue as to what the classroom is really like today.

I believe that as busy as the parents are there are some who are willing to help if they are “forced” into the situation. No longer can they say that they would be glad to help if only they knew how. With these organized detailed classwork/homework sheets, parents no longer have any excuses not to help. On the sheet in bold print it is stated that every Thursday there is going to be an English test and every Monday the paper is going to be sent home. Shame on the parents who can not encourage their child to be sure and bring that paper home. Three cheers for the parents who has the guts to enforce rules as simple as this. Once the junior high quarterback thought that he was too valuable to miss a game. His father told him that if he could not comply with the simple rules of bringing home his test paper on Monday then he would miss the game. Well, he did miss the game but trust me it was the only one he ever missed. When he graduated from high school and he gave me a hug and told me that that was a turning point in his academic career. The coaches weren’t too happy with me or the parent but the child is successful today and that is what counts.

### ***Eliminate the Excuses***

This section about the classwork/homework would not be complete without telling you that more than one ADD student has prospered using this program. We must try to meet everyone’s needs. This sheet robs the lazy or disruptive student from many of his excuses on why he does not do his work.

If you are teaching math, the classwork/homework should contain a limited number of problems of things that you have discussed for the last four days. I teach about five days ahead of the sheet so that when a student gets to that assignment, it will be something I have already discussed and rediscussed in class. The object of the assignment is mainly to review and also to try to help the student to accept responsibility. It is so easy for the student to try to convince his mother that he does not understand the assignment which is the reason that he did not do his homework. Once his mother calls she will find out that it is typed on the classwork/homework sheet and that the teacher does not send home new

material. If the child uses this excuse and has been at school (not out for illness) then he must not have been listening. Every time an assignment is finished the student just draws a line under that section of the notebook and puts the new date in the margin and starts the next assignment. This way if an assignment is missing I will write with a green pen incomplete or no work can be found. When I meet with the parents these messages will still be in the notebook because the student will not want to tear them out for fear of losing points on other assignments that are located on the same page or the back of the page.

### ***No Need to Ask for Returns***

Let me explain why I do not require for the parents to sign the papers and return the papers to me.

1. Forgery is common, especially in junior high.
2. I did not want to take up classroom time for the student to search for their paper. Usually this meant that the student needed to go to his locker to look for the papers plus a note from me to be in the hallway.
3. Naturally if there was anything that he missed on the following Thursday's test I was accused of him never hearing me tell them to study that section because he was at his locker searching for his signed paper.(which he probably never had) The teacher absolutely does not need to leave themselves open for any criticism. My rule states that the papers are sent home every Monday and it is the parent's responsibility to ask to see the papers. The parent can review the mistakes so that the student will not make the same mistakes on the next test. Remember I believe in some form of repetition on each test.

## Environment Secrets

### *How to create a good learning environment*

The next section may be boring but let me walk you through items that speak volumes about the teacher. Any older teacher is able to walk into someone's empty classroom and tell you many things about that new teacher by observing the class. Everyone, regardless of their walk or station in life, enjoys a pleasant learning environment.

Regardless of how old your building may be, make all attempts to have an appealing (not cluttered) classroom. Buying lots of STUFF at the education center does not compliment your teaching ability. Many times my classroom had window cooling or heating units. I would purchase a flavored (not strong) filter to override the steaming body odors of some of the young teens. This is particularly important if your students come to class directly after recess or P.E.

Your student desks may be junky, but sometimes a co-worker and you can swap desk so that your classroom set of desk will appear to look nicer. Example: maybe you can get all the seats that are painted blue and the co-worker take all the red chairs. This may sound silly to the young teacher but it speaks volumes about your organization. On occasion I painted my backboards with a high gloss white enamel. It was easy during the year to switch the borders. I got tired of chasing down the large rack with the colored paper. This is the rack of paper that is usually kept under lock and key and rarely does a teacher have the time to find the key holder. One more side hint about the bulletin boards, I usually started the year with yellow border, and in the fall put orange border on top of that, red border was next, and by spring I would go back to the orange and end the year with the yellow border. It surely is nice to get to the red "time" and start peeling to get back to the beginning yellow. It saved me time plus I usually had limited storage space. By leaving the border up and working back to the color, I saved time and money.

### *Create the Atmosphere*

I have already stated that the first ten or twenty minutes of every class time is a quiet work situation. The responsibility for the work is easily shifted to the correct shoulders—that of the student. It is so easy to check the seating chart and then start walking around to see if anyone needs assistance. Some students will be sitting quietly enjoying a library book because they are already ahead for five assignments. These students will have their notebooks open so that I can quietly put a green check indicating that they are not only on task but ahead of the assignments. These students always have a coy smile that says that not only are they proud of themselves but are pleased that I am so happy with their ability to accept responsibility. Many times they have told me that they love the classwork/homework sheets because I treat them like adults. It is obvious that I have charted a course for these students that makes them happy to be on board. There is no myth about what is expected. They all want to be on board.

## ***Organizational Secrets***

### ***Color Code***

Let's talk about an easier way to manage all those papers. I suggest that you get colored pocketed folders to keep each classes' papers in. Example: Green for the first hour class, yellow for the second hour class, red for the third hour class etc.

See if your school has adopted a standard heading for all papers that are turned in. If not check with the English teacher for the next grade level to see what that teacher might want. That way the following year you have already won "points" with your coworker because at least your students consistently do a proper heading. We have a bad habit as teachers of wondering if the previous teacher taught anything!

### ***Stay Organized***

A very important aspect of handling papers is keeping them organized. In the students top right hand corner, it is good to assign a number to each student. This could be straight from your grade book. The first student in alphabetical order is assigned a 1, then the next student a 2, etc. Then all of your students paperwork should have their numerical code in the upper left hand corner of each front page.

It is a very easy task to ask a student right before the bell rings to put the papers in numerical order. I keep post-it notes on my desk for the student to use to record any numbers that are missing and stick the note on the front of the colored folder. It is a very simple task for me to scan the post-it note and check to see if all the papers for the students that day are in the folder. I learned to do this the hard way. I had a student who was quite skillful in putting his test paper in his book bag or pocket and then trying to accuse me of losing his paper. After this happened the second time, the above plan went into action. The student later became a friend and told me he had been able to do the "missing paper trick" on many occasions. That way the make-up test by some teachers was easier for him or he did this to avoid turning in a paper that would bring his average



down. He could not believe I was so foxy. There was no arguing, just a new rule. End of discussion.

It was so easy to check the folder before the students left the class, but an added bonus was the fact that some student who had probably never been asked before to help a teacher could be selected to put the papers in numerical order by glancing at the top right corner and making the proper adjustments. It is nice to see the smile on the face of a student that usually does not get asked to help out. This did not infringe on the other students' rights because the student never had the folder long enough to scrutinize any of the other students' work or blank spaces that may have been left on someone's test paper. It is very important that the teacher realizes that it is not your job to try to embarrass or nail the student who did not turn in their paper. It is so easy to smile when the bell rings and ask the "missing number" to glance through the papers and see if he can find his paper. I usually would ask if they would mind helping me for a moment to locate their paper. I can assure you the paper is quickly found because the student wants to get to his next class on time. On rare occasions I had to write a note to please allow a student to enter later because I needed him for a few minutes.

### ***Use a Typed Copy***

Regardless of the subject that you teach, give the students a typed copy of what you plan to do month by month or grading period by grading period. I prefer the nine weeks copy that is stapled into each student's spiral notebook. This is dated day by day. There is a note at the top of the typed sheet that states classwork/homework. The note tells the parents that I do not believe in much homework because of the schedule that everyone follows. If the student uses his/her time wisely in class than there is no homework. If the student spends all of his time looking for his notebook, his textbook, his pencil then he probably will be the one that does not have enough time to complete the work at school. You are probably thinking that you barely know what you are going to be doing week by week let alone for a nine weeks period, but it's all a part of staying organized.

By doing this, parents saw that I was a well organized teacher, thus putting a stop to the initial student argument that my teacher does not know what she is doing. Remember at the top of this sheet is a note telling the parents when to expect papers (On Monday). This allows the parents to see that every Thursday there is a test. Thursday is established as a test day. Parents like to say that they can't help because they don't know what is going on at school. Now parents can see the typed copy for nine weeks' worth of work. Parents also like to say that they never sees their child's papers. Whose fault is that? It is on the typed sheet in bold print that the papers go home every Monday and it is the parent's responsibility to ask to see the papers or call the school to find out why the papers were not given out that day. Parents are busy, but they are the child's caretakers, and they are the ones who should be held accountable for a child not doing his work.

### ***Stay With the Program***

When I start teaching that day's lesson, the students seem to be calm and ready to listen. I think it is very important to stay with the program. There may be a pep-rally or a candy salesman there for that class time but I assure them that I will allow a few more minutes the next day for them to get everything accomplished.

After the test on Thursday, I encourage the students to use that class time to get ahead. That way the room stays very quiet for others to finish the test. Usually there is enough class time for all the students to complete their classwork/homework for Thursday and Friday.

Once you are established as an organized and fair teacher, the students will respond beautifully.

## *Responsibility Secrets*

### *Teach Responsibility*

The classwork/homework sheet definitely teaches accepting responsibility. No more excuses for not knowing what to do. Being able to work ahead is a real bonus to the busy student with so many after school meetings and sport events. You must also take into account that many students have busy weekend plans.

Let me review once more about the reasons behind the classwork/homework sheet:

1. The parent is no longer in the dark about what is expected each day in your class. The parent nor the student can say that he did not know what to do for that day.
2. The student can no longer use the excuse that he did not understand the assignment because it is stated at the top of the typed sheet that the teacher plans to teach five days ahead of that sheet. Plus, the teacher gives the first ten to twenty minutes each day to do the assignment. This is the time that Joe can ask for help on the part that he does not understand.
3. The student can not say that he did not know that he had to complete the assignment at home. It is typed on the sheet that if a student uses his time wisely in class than there is no homework for that student.
4. The student may say that he does not think it is fair to have homework on Friday. The teacher does not believe in any homework. Either the student is wasting time in class or has been a deliberate choice not to work ahead when time is given. Every Thursday as soon as you are finished with the test and it is turned into the proper colored folder you are required to complete your week's work. The test usually does not require more than thirty minutes to take.
5. I had soccer practice and could not finish the homework. Well, work ahead on the weekend if necessary. (This would not be necessary unless the student is one who chooses to waste time in class.) One parent informed me that the sheet enabled her to see exactly what the student was doing or not doing. She had a rule that if you were

not through with the assignment you would be late for soccer practice. He was only late once. The coach had him run laps for being tardy.

## ***Classroom Secrets***

### ***Manage the Classroom***

My next topic will be on how to manage the classroom. Some of these suggestions may sound completely off the wall, but thirty years of teaching testify to the fact that these principles work. Regardless of how tall someone may be, I rotate seating every week. The person that sits on the last seat of each row moves to the front along with his/her desk. This is done quietly at the end of each class on Friday. That way on Monday when they walk into the class they are ready to work. Each person moves back one seat. There are some students (I was one of them) who because of height or size spent our lives on the last seat. This also encourages some backseaters, who love to entertain the class, to have an opportunity to be close to the board. I have found that usually the discipline problems stem from not assigning seats and allowing the class clowns that play off each other to choose their own seats.

### ***Stick to the Schedule***

Some days I entered the classroom and did not feel like teaching what was on the typed sheet. Regardless of the situation, I used the typed sheet to help keep me on task. Too often the teacher is told in parent conferences that they just do not know what is going on or how to help. It is so easy to show them the notebook with the typed sheet attached and then the ball is back in their court. As a side note, I generally allow the student to skip one assignment if their parent signed the place on the typed sheet that said that they saw the sheet on the first day of school. Naturally everyone wants to skip an assignment so you have total cooperation. Since all assignments are kept in the spiral notebook I just flip to the first week and find where I put a green check mark by the statement that the child writes that says, "Yes, my mother saw this and I do not have to do homework tonight." I initial and look at the signature.

### ***Test the Material***

We live in the age of rewind or replay. I believe one of the main things we are missing in the classroom is not frequently including previously taught material on each test. In other words, if I am teaching quotation marks, then I could still ask two or three questions about that on many following test. We all learn by repetition. It can be quite frustrating when you try to teach an important concept and then the book moves on to something else. Three weeks later you say something about that concept and the class looks as though you forgot to teach them something. Repeat, repeat, repeat valuable concepts on every test. It is almost funny to see a parent come in so angry with you because their child claims that your test is so difficult and then you pull out the last five tests and show how you have a lot of repeated material. All of a sudden a parent realizes their child has not been truthful with them. Also, remember they must not have been asking to see those papers or they would have realized long before now what the problem must be: their child is not trying very hard.

### ***Keep the Pressure On***

The purpose of the classwork/homework sheet is to always have something for the students to do. The classwork/homework sheet shows that you are not in the class to waste anyone's time. It has often kept me on task when I just did not feel like pushing very hard that day. I personally taped each assignment sheet into the students spiral notebook so that no one could say that they did not get the sheet. I also have several extra sheets posted neatly around the room.

All work is kept in a spiral notebook. I do not like college ruled paper because the lines are so narrow. While students are working it is easy to check roll and then walk around and check notebooks. If a student does not have all the work, I write "incomplete" with a green ink pen. Green is a personal preference. I typically tell students that the green marks on their test and in their notebooks are to remind them to "grow" from their mistakes. The students will not tear out the incomplete page because on the back of the

sheet is another assignment. It surely makes a parent conference easy when you have the student show his notebook to his parent in front of you. When a student fills up a notebook, there is a box in the back of the room that the notebook is placed. If there is an open book test and he just started in a new notebook than he can go to the box and get his old notebook in order to be able to make 100 percent on the test. When a student completes an assignment, he just draws a line beneath the assignment and starts on the next assignment. Pages are never torn out of the notebook. If I recognize that a certain student is not keeping up, I can easily ask him to come to the back of the room and we will try to get organized while the others are working.

### ***Open Notebook Pop Quiz***

The above predicament made me realize the need to give open notebook pop quiz. For years I would not have dreamed of giving an open book test of any kind. Mainly because there are some teachers that give these type of tests because they have nothing else planned for the day.

In some school districts, it is no longer kosher to give a percentage of the student's grade for doing your homework. I wanted to be able to reward those students who so faithfully did the assignments on the classwork/homework sheets. I would always type the open notebook test and leave space for the appropriate answer. Example: I would type the date Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> and tell the student to write what they have in their notebook for number 2. The typed copy makes it unbelievably easy for me to grade. Either the student has it or he doesn't. The test usually did not have more than ten at random requirements. For the third hour I might change and ask for Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> number 7. This way the person who thought that he could hurry and fill in his notebook from some friend in first hour was out of luck. There was a possibility of gaining 300 points in a nine weeks just for keeping your notebook up to date. Remember the student that had gotten a new notebook could go to the back of the room and look in the box and locate his old notebook in order to take the test. I did assist in helping to find the owner's notebook. Because it was an open notebook pop quiz the special ed students did not have the right to go to their teacher for

help. Even if they went to the special ed teacher the empty notebook did not help answer this type of test. These student could no longer have 100% averages unless they kept up with their work. One precious special needs student told me that he made D's for me but felt good because he knew he was doing something to earn it. These students and I got along extremely well. Whenever I was on duty, they seemed to want to stand close by so that I could notice them and chat with them.

For the most part, my students enjoyed the organized and relaxed atmosphere of my classroom. I remember one time having a classroom that had two doors to the hallway and some of the students would enter through one door and quickly walk out the other door on their way to their classes. I smiled and asked for an explanation. They just said that it picked them up for the rest of their day.

When the students entered and realized there was going to be an open notebook test you could almost see the pleasure in the eyes of the majority of the students. This was their chance to rake in 100 points. Not a bad deal. On some days the students would ask me not to wait too long before another open notebook test.

### ***Start Work Immediately***

Let me refresh your thinking for a few moments. The typed classwork/homework sheets are used by the students to start work immediately when they enter the room. I would check the roll and then start walking around the class. Walking is a very valuable part of keeping order. Gone are the days that you can sit at your desk and get caught up on some paper work while they work. If the students came from a noisy classroom, this combination of my walking around and them working on whatever assignment that they needed to accomplish helped to act as a sedative and prepared them for my forty-fourty five minute teaching for that day. If I covered all that I thought was appropriate for the time frame then I allowed them to work quietly on the next day's assignment while I read to them.



### ***Read to Them***

In my teaching experience(kindergarten-eighth grade) I found that all the classes loved for me to read to them. I am afraid that with both parents working outside of the home very little time is used for reading. Naturally the home life does have tremendous competition for reading with the net, the TV and all the outside sport activities. Reading is so important to help establish a warm relationship with your students. In this generation it is hard to have enough discipline within the walls of the classroom for anyone to listen but I firmly believe that the classwork/homework sheets plus an organized day to day teaching style affords a time for reading to the class.

I have moved several times during my teaching years because of my husband's work. It is amazing the number of former students that I run into whose first comment to their spouse or children when he introduces me is that this is the teacher that read to us. A friend was a boss on an off-shore rig found out that one of my former students was his deckhand. When he told the student that he knew me , he said that the young man smiled and said that I was the only person who ever read him a story.

## *Consistency Secrets*

Be consistent, be consistent, be consistent. Do not be led into some wild goose chase that is designed to sidetrack you and kill time. In each class group there is usually at least one student who has the reputation to get you off track. Usually this student does not care about an ACT or SAT score. If you allow him to kill time you will be penalizing other students from learning.

Under this topic of being consistent we are missing the boat in education because we teach a new concept and then go on to something else. Example: You teach a child how to subtract and then six weeks later you put a subtraction problem on the test and the child does not have a clue on the process. Wouldn't it have been easier on a weekly test to include one or two problems to keep this concept fresh in their mind. If you are teaching science and there is an outstanding objective in that passage, why not include it in some small way on the next test. Another example: Quotation marks can be loaded down with all kinds of valuable comma and capitalization rules. Why not include one or two of these on each test. Repetition is the key to success in the classroom.

## ***Special Students***

### ***Students with Special Needs***

The new teacher needs to be aware of some of the problems that he may encounter dealing with students that have special needs. Mainstreaming is here to stay so somehow the teacher must be prepared for this. Each year the list of special needs students seems to grow. Of course, most of the students that fall into this category have an abundance of special services provided that the classroom teacher must work around. I once received a new student from another state whose IEP stated that I must notify the parent two days prior to calling on the student to read anything orally. Also the IEP stated that I could not skip the student because she needed to feel like a regular student. When I met with the parents they informed me that they had had to take this matter to higher authorities and how did I plan to deal with this. I just pulled out my good old classwork/homework sheet and immediately documented for the nine weeks what she would be reading. I marked it on my copy and gave the parent an extra copy so that they could practice at home. It took me less than ten minutes to make sure that no lawsuit would be facing me. Needless to say in a brief period of time the family moved to another location. I think there was a possibility that the family used this IEP as a source of income.

### ***Watch Out for Aides***

One year I received a straight A student that had a full-time aide who had assisted the child for the past five years. The child had limited reading skills. It did not take long for me to realize that the aide was really my student. The IEP stated that this student could have extended time for testing. This meant that the aide would find an empty room and she and the student would complete the test. The main emphasis in this sentence is on the 'she' - the aide. I tried to tactfully discuss how important it was for this child to do the work. The aide would often raise her hand to answer a question as I taught. Regardless of how hard I tried to be sure that the test would reflect the child's ability, I always knew that the aide was the one that was making the A's.

Since the aide did not seem to think it was necessary to change the fact that she was taking the test, I went to the principal but he did not want to get involved.

After three perfect test papers were turned in from the other room, I decided to allow the student to only take a fourth of the test and grade her accordingly. This meant that she was to stay in the classroom with the other students to take the test. The grades were in the teens. The parents came for a conference and could not understand how for five years their daughter had been given a straight A plaque in the closing ceremonies of school and now they find out she can not read or pass an English test. The parents hired a lawyer because the school had misled them. It is very important that you take time to read the IEP and see if indeed an adult has permission to read the test to the student. My co-workers realized the situation and stood firmly with me. Later former teachers came to us to say that they knew the aide was doing the work but did not want to rock the boat. If you are faced with a similar situation be sure to make a copy of the IEP for your folder.

### ***Special Education***

Now let's discuss some of the problems you are faced with because you teach a subject that the special ed departments decide are not too difficult for the student. Their argument is that the student needs to mingle with average students. I am not against this but wonder how they can feel comfortable putting the student in a class that is way over the student's head. The student is allowed to feel frustrated for three nine weeks because he can not do the work and fails the class. In the last nine weeks the department decides that the child is too old to retain so they take him out of your class the last three weeks of school and he surprises everyone and makes an A on the fourth nine weeks.

There are some wonderful special education teachers out there but some have lost sight of what the grading system reflects. In some cases I have taught students who could not read the science test but their IEP stated that they could return to the classroom to take the test with their regular teacher. When the papers are returned for me to grade, the students all

make 100%. I was really impressed to see such outstanding results. I went after school one day to try to figure this strange mystery out and to my horror all of the answers were written on the board. She was surprised to see me and quickly stated that she did not always write all the answers on the board but this seemed like a rather hard test. Now I understood the mystery.

Another student was the only member in his family that was in a regular classroom. When report cards were sent home at the end of the nine weeks, he was the only child in the family that was punished. ALL of his brothers and sisters were in special ed and came home with straight A's. Even though I tried to explain to the parents that his B's in my class were outstanding grades, this did not change their position. His punishment was that he spent lots of time in his room. At the end of the year, this student received the award for reading the most books and getting the highest test scores on what he read. At the assembly program there was a verbal 'Wow' from the student body. It is my firm belief that special ed classes should also challenge the students.

### ***Something for Nothing***

We live in a society that sometimes want something for nothing. On some occasions at parent conference I was tempted to ask the parent to just tell me what grade they wanted me to give their child. The open notebook test that I showed the parents was clear proof that the student expected something for nothing.

### ***The Revolving Door***

The school architects need to redesign the doors for the classrooms. I suggest that they be the type that you see in the old western movies. The saloon door that swings open very easily. Once we try to start teaching the revolving door starts. The drama, art, occupational therapy, speech, resource rooms, etc. all need a student for a few minutes. I am not saying that some of these things are not extremely important because we all know

that the students have special needs and do need assistance. The problem is usually that whatever is taught while the student is gone is exactly what he misses on the test. That is another reason that my Thursday test is always a repetition of several weeks of teaching.

When I taught science, the day of the test I had a typed list of ten or fifteen facts that the student would need to know for the next Thursday test. In fact the homework sheet that night stated, "Copy the notes for the next test."

When the student said that he did not get to copy the notes, it was easy for me to show his mother that he had taken the test because the grade is recorded so that meant that he had indeed had an opportunity to copy the notes for the next test. It was a standing fact that if the student did not have time to copy the notes then he would complete the task the next day during his ten to twenty minute time to do classwork/homework. In other words he had five days to get his act together and copy the notes. On some occasions, I did give a parent at a parent conference a copy of the notes for the entire nine weeks of test. The student would be able to copy them at home, especially if he was a slower writer. When the open notebook test came around it would be easy to see if he had indeed copied the notes in his notebook.

### ***Dealing with Parents***

It is extremely unfortunate that the classroom teacher has to guard so much against family criticism. It seems as though grandparents and parents can always furnish you with an excuse for why a student did not do his work. I believe the only way to be a winner in a situation like this is to have an organized plan that the parents can see in the child's notebook day by day. Remember for years the child has said that he did not know that he had homework, he did not know that he had a test on Thursday, he did not know that his papers were going home on Monday, he did not know that when he missed your class that there was a typed list of what to do. The strange thing to me is that the parents believe the child so completely.

## ***Discipline***

The first few weeks of class are the most crucial to establishing yourself as someone that your students can not walk on. You must maintain discipline in order to teach.

### ***Be Consistent***

You must be consistent, be consistent be consistent. By the way did I mention BE CONSISTENT!

### ***Post Your Rules***

Post your classroom rules where it is attractive and everyone can easily read what is posted. Keep it simple. Enter the room quietly and begin working immediately on your classroom-homework assignments. No eating or chewing in class. There will be no trips to the locker. This means that you will enter every day with your text book, pencil or pen, spiral notebook and be prepared to work. At all times you will show respect for others in the classroom. Clean up your space around your work area before you leave the room. No cheating will be tolerated.

### ***Show the Consequences***

Now you need to make a neat poster that shows consequences. The first time you are corrected that is considered a warning. Outbursts in class, not staying on task, chewing etc.

The next listed warning will be to contact the parent by phone. (Since most students get home before the parents, and the student has the option of erasing the call on an answering machine, I usually call around 7 AM. Usually at this time the parent will not want to talk long and may also be upset because their schedule has been interrupted; therefore, she may have more tendency to enforce a reasonable punishment at home.

The third step is to contact the principal or counselor. You will soon see who the outspoken or nonworkers are in your classroom and you need to start a notebook and document every time you have to speak to them. I know you are thinking that you would be documenting all day, but just jot a note on a piece of paper and write in your notebook more details later. This seems like a lot of trouble, but eventually you will be meeting with the principal and parent and this documentation really puts the ball in the parent's court. I usually meet with the parents and my co-workers the first time, but the second meeting with the parents does include the principal. This may be a student who does not pass your course and early on you need to be sure the principal is aware of what you are trying to do. At the end of the year when the coach or principal tries to move the student to the next grade, you will have documentation on why he should stay.

I once taught a student who had been retained in sixth grade before I arrived at the school. I tried to win him over and encourage him but he constantly informed me that he had already failed sixth so it was impossible for him to fail again. The parents didn't offer any support either. Unfortunately situations like this are extremely sad and stressful. The principal and I met many times with the parents but it was to no avail.

I was always upset with the teacher who had so little control that her classroom management skills was MASS punishment. What a terrible infringement on someone's rights. If you need to enforce a point such as no chewing in your class, then have the students copy the essay that I have on chewing. I usually read a few of these samples the first week of school and trust me they discourage chewing. It is always a must to stand at the entrance door and greet the students. Perhaps the previous teacher did not object to lollipops or gum, so I can quietly remind them as they enter the doorway to make a trip to the garbage can. That way, later while I am teaching the student can not say, "Oh, I forgot that I had gum."

I usually keep the essays about chewing, outburst in class, cheating in a folder on my desk. This seems to help students think twice before breaking the rules.



### *Cheating*

Cheating is becoming a major problem in schools. There are some teachers who turn their head or walk out of the room while students are being tested. This makes it easier for “Joe Football” or “Susie Cheerleader” to put guilt trips on someone who has prepared for the test. Unless you stay in control of your classroom, you are helping the students to cheat.

### *Plagiarism*

Plagiarism is common. Of course when these situations come up technology has made catching cheaters easier. There are websites that offer software that automatically compares the student’s work to a database of thousands of books about the assigned topic. When a teacher has the courage to fight plagiarism, you had better be prepared to take the heat. Civil rights activists are standing ready to pounce on any teacher interfering with a student’s rights. Teachers’ apathy on this issue are astounding. As you know many parents are only looking for a passing grade, and an education is only of secondary importance.

### *Prepare for Battle*

When parents step forward, teachers need to be prepared for a battle. Unfortunately the teacher sometimes has to stand alone. The principal does not want to rock the boat, the school board members want to be re-elected, and the list continues. Unqualified students often graduate barely knowing how to write their name. Later in life, the teacher gets the blame.

Discipline ties in very closely with how the student feels about himself. The buzz word for the past twenty years has been the student’s self esteem. This band wagon has just about wrecked our society. Inflated grades, happy face stickers, and constant praise with no degree of consequences has shown itself over the fact that students quickly want to settle their disagreements with violence. The student has the parent on their side and unfortunately society is leaning toward a situation of everyone is allowed to do their own

thing. Teachers all too often get the blame. It is our fault that a student does not feel good about himself. All of these factors tie strongly with classroom discipline. Accountability is a word that is placed around my classroom. I do not daily “preach” about it, but students know exactly what the word means.

As a teacher, beware of the phrase, “Next time.”

You begin to sound like a student’s mother so immediately the student smiles to himself and thinks, “My mother is a push over and I think my teacher will be too.”

Once you vary from your posted classroom rules, the students are quick to see this as a weakness. Much of my success in the classroom was that the students knew that all of my students were treated according to the posted rules. One student immediately comes to mind. Her mother was the school secretary and certainly all the rules did not apply for her daughter. I really liked the student and she knew that I planned to stick with the program, but her mother had never had a teacher not cut her child some slack. In fact, the principal came to my class to chat with me. He was then able to go back to the mother and tell her that he had spoken with me but my rules stand. Truthfully, he never mentioned the situation but the mother still did not take no for an answer. The most interesting thing was not that the principal came to my room but some of her classmates came and told me that you have no idea how hot the mother is going to make it for you, but we are thankful that someone has the guts to stick to the rules.

### ***Parent Conference***

How does discipline tie in with parent conferences? The sooner you meet with the problem student’s parents, the better your situation will be. I try my best to meet with both parents if at all possible. Too many times, I have found that a parent is in the habit of covering for the son or daughter. When the parents enter your classroom, they will see immediately that you are no fly-by-night teacher. Your classwork/homework sheets

are displayed neatly around the room. Words like accountability and attitude are on all four walls. The rules and consequences are visible above the chalkboard.

For the conference I always sit in a student's desk. I arrange a few student's desk in a semi circle. This informal setting makes the parents see me as their child's friend. This seating arrangement makes the atmosphere more relaxed and comfortable.

There will be enough desks fixed for the student, his parents, my co-workers and myself. The student's grades are written on a 3x5 index card. It is not good for a parent to look in your grade book. Parents will sometimes scan my grade book to try to see how many low grades there are for other students.

#### ***Put the Ball in Their Court***

I have a copy of the classwork/homework sheet that of course lists exactly what is expected of their child for the nine weeks. (The parents are accustomed to telling the teacher that they would be glad to help but they just don't know what to do.)

#### ***Keep it Short and Sweet***

It is very important to keep the conference short and sweet. You may want to start the conference by mentioning that as they can see the word accountability is an important part of your teaching and you wonder if the child has responsibility in his home and how do his parents get him to do the chores. I may tell the parents that I have children and certainly know what a battle can ensue, if you do not stick to your rules. Then let them do most of the initial talking. You just throw out a few questions. Does he have responsibility in the home? Does he have to be reminded to do these? I love to mention that I think the student might be a good candidate for a public office because of his ability to talk his way so easily out of some situations. The parents will often think that I am complimenting their child but all I am doing is asking some leading questions. You then put the ball in the parent's court by asking did they think they could help to enforce the rules of my class. They are going to immediately tell you that their child has trouble

bringing his books home. I then ask what does the student like to do after school? Perhaps if their child does not bring books home or test papers home on Monday that he could be deprived of soccer practice or video games for a few days. You do not want the parents to leave thinking that you are on that child's case. You stress the fact that you are part of a team and their child is the quarterback. It is important that he be able to PASS more than just the football, etc.

You want to tell the parents that they are paying your salary and you want to be sure that they can see their tax dollars at work. In conferences I frequently stress that I know how difficult it can be as a parent and that my children aren't perfect either.

#### ***Get Them on the Team***

It is extremely important that parents leave the conference knowing that we are all on a team working together to help their child. Remember the student is sitting there for the majority of the conference. Once the student hears all of this, he no longer can go home and have his parents believe that I am just an old windbag that picks on him. At the end of the conference, I include the student by asking him (in front of his parents) what he thinks would help him to be the student that I desire for him to be. It is amazing how the student can sum up all his woes and inabilities to accept responsibility. On more than one occasion the child has told me that I care more than his parents, so why bother. I always assure the student that there is a real world out there and if he wants to have a good job he must learn accountability now. Hopefully after a conference, lazy outspoken students can no longer dish out untruths about me and my class. Many times I drive home from a conference with a smile on my face because I know that I have given that child and parent the best advice on helping him and changing his attitude.

#### ***Bring in Reinforcements***

Your co-workers are usually having the same type of problems so it is wise to have them in on the conference and let them make comments early on. Usually parents only want to

meet with one teacher because they want to target that teacher for all their child's woes, which makes it good to have witnesses present.

***Document Everything***

Document, document, document. In the back of your grade book write the student's name, the date of the conference and highlight what the parent plans to do. Chances are that in about nine weeks they will need to meet again. The second conference should be with the principal. You will look extremely well prepared when you are able to point out facts from the previous conference. In that first conference you want to stress the need for the parents to ask to see the papers on Monday and the fact that they planned to check the notebook. At the conclusion of the conference ask the parents (since you want to document what has been decided) to tell you in a few words what I can expect them to do to help their child. The parents usually left happy because we were now friends. I did all my contacting to parents within the walls of the school building. I arrived early on the days that I needed to contact a parent and used the school phone. You want to leave as much as possible at the school when you leave in the afternoon. Otherwise your twenty-four hour job will take its toll on you. Thursday was the only night that I spent grading test papers at home. I do not believe in giving back papers after they are a week old. You lose your effectiveness for having the student view his mistakes and correct them for the next Thursday's test.

You want to keep all your notes from the parents. On occasion the day after a conference I have received wonderful notes telling me how organized I am and how the parent knows that I care about the students. However, when the parent gets too busy to help the child stay on task, the parent has a tendency to sing a different story. Eventually they realize that the ball is in their court and they must accept some responsibility also. They would love to go to the principal or school board members and paint an entirely different story. They are somewhat shocked at the next conference for the principal to mention that he has read the letter that you sent the teacher praising her for her organization and caring attitude.

One last comment on discipline. A walking teacher that is prepared on a daily basis will not have an unruly class. I have found that students love and function well in an uncluttered, well-organized situation. I personally believe that students were not offended because I was the boss. I think that they felt safe and comfortable in my classroom.

### *Have Definite Goals*

My students saw that I had definite goals that they could easily accomplish by staying on task each day. The minute they entered the classroom work began. There was no talking other than me standing at the door and greeting them as they entered and reminding a few that they needed to get rid of their gum. In the back of my mind, I was always trying to think ahead on ways to avoid problems. I do not believe in taking up everyone's class time to make an issue over something. It is so much nicer to quietly ask the student to stay a few minutes for us to discuss something.

I was teaching out of my field one year because the principal asked me to teach a ninth grade group of very undisciplined students. One of these students was a very outspoken young man whose parents were English teachers. At first he wanted to challenge every grammar rule I mentioned. He obviously wanted lots of attention. I kept him after class and we had a nice chat about the fact that I did get paid to talk and he didn't. He smiled but knew that his days of chasing rabbits in my class was over. I later met his parents. In fact the mother called the school and wanted to take the day off to observe my class because the son had never showed so much interest in school. She was very impressed with the fact that 32 freshman students could work so quietly and accomplish so much in a 55 minute time block.

I allow the students to work for about ten to twenty minutes on the classwork/homework sheet before I start teaching. I keep repeating this fact because I want you to see that I

want the students to settle down so that when I start teaching, they will be calm enough to hear what I have to say.

Extreme discipline cases do occur. I remember having not one but two students in my class that had been in medical facilities for emotional problems. That class will always be remembered as one of my most challenging situations. I was relocating to a new area and had to go to a job fair for the possibility of a job. At this job fair, there were over six hundred applicants applying for about thirty jobs. I really felt out of place sitting in the bleachers waiting for my turn to interview. For the most part the stands contained beautiful young ladies and handsome young men all eager to start their teaching career. I felt out of place to say the least. The good news was that the school that I wanted to teach in had one opening. It was rumored in the stands that this was the class from hell. The class was basically a self-contained class with seventeen boys and five girls. I might mention here that these were not the type of girls that you would want your daughter to have as a friend. During the interview the principal asked me how did I handle discipline problems? I told him that I thought that if you enforce rules to everyone (no exceptions) and are well prepared that the discipline problems would be very minute. I got the job and along with it came lots and lots of new learning experiences. The previous year's teacher was still dealing with many stress related problems.

I immediately established the fact that I was not there to argue with them. No long sermon just a simple statement. The first two weeks went fairly well. When the bell rang the first day for recess, I was almost trampled. Needless to say we sat back down and I dismissed according to who was sitting quietly. I am a firm believer that mass punishment is unforgivable for a good teacher. It took nearly three days for the students to realize that the bell was a signal for me to quit teaching. The bell was merely a reminder for me, not for them. It was not the signal for them to charge. I lost lots of recess time but in the end it was well worth it. This class worked together as a team to have their way.

I feel quite sure that no one ever read to these students. When they re-entered from their recess time they were ready to swing from the lights. I was always standing at the door when they entered. If I had duty, I kept the door locked so that I would be able to stand there as they walked in. I usually had a book in my hand. As soon as they seem to calm down I would start reading. After about five days, they were entering quietly and the class leaders were telling the others to be quiet so that I would have more time to read. The two main class leaders would play off each other. One day one of the main players turned his desk over and said he was tired of all this mess. I even shocked myself by turning to the rest of the class and continuing to teach. I wanted to write him up and send him to the office but I knew that was what he wanted. It was only a few seconds till bell time. The others sat quietly, wondering what in the world was I going to do. Maybe I was deaf and didn't notice, some of them probably thought. When I started dismissing the students for recess, I asked this student to stay. When they all left the room, he and I sat down. He expected some dynamite lecture, but I just sat quietly. In a few minutes, he could not stand the quiet and told me to go ahead and tell him off. I asked him if there was anything he would like to discuss with me. He informed me that he was missing his play time. I continued to just sit quietly. Right before the bell rang, I quietly told him that I had been hired to teach and I did not appreciate students who tried to rob other students of an education. I think it is very important that in discipline matters we as teachers state our case and not sound like a broken record by constantly repeating ourselves. We want to do the opposite of what their parents did or did not do. I quietly explained that if he continued to play during my teaching time that I would count that as his recess. He was allowed to hurry to the bathroom and get water before the bell rang for all the students to reenter. He kept watching me the rest of the day. I wish I could tell you that from that day forward he was a model student but that was not the case. He spent several more quiet times with me. When I kept students in, we just all sat quietly. No work, they just put your head on your desk and rest. Sometimes they would beg me to let them write spelling words for punishment but the quiet time seem to work the best for me in this situation. They could usually hear the others outside having a good time. Most of these students had heard every lecture available. I am sure they could have written one much



better than I could have given but they hated to be punished by just sitting and thinking about why they were kept in. This young man became one of my best students. His home life was worse than you could imagine. His attendance improved dramatically and so did his grades. He knew that I was the boss and that was fine with him. I remember the buzz on the campus one day that this student had brought a rose on the bus. The teachers even whispered among themselves that this student had a rose in his hand. Needless to say, I felt humbled when he proudly presented me with the rose. He did not have much to say but I knew that he realized how much I cared.

The other class leader did extremely well for the first half of the year. She had been socially promoted but was on honor roll in my classes for the first two nine weeks. Over the Christmas holidays, there were some drug related problems in the home that completely threw her off track. I was broken hearted when she had to return to a hospital learning facility. Regardless of how hard you try, it is impossible to override some of the home situations.

## *Grading*

What an awesome word. You need to be sure from day one that everyone understands what the grading policy is for your school. You need to be sure and find in the policy manual what the district thinks of giving a homework grade. The reason that I am going to stress that is there are on occasion students who never do any daily work and yet can pass your test. I have had gifted students who think that they are above doing whatever the rest of the class is assigned as long as they pass the weekly test.

Every Thursday I gave my regular test. (I have taught grades k-9<sup>th</sup> in many different subjects. The nice thing about this was that my co-workers each took a day to give their test, so no one had to study for three tests in one night. Reading tests were on Monday. Science tests were on Tuesday. Math was on Wednesday. Whenever a student turned in their test paper, they picked up a typed copy of valuable notes for the next week's test and immediately sat down and copied these in their notebooks. This is a great rule, because when a parent says that their child didn't get the notes you can look in your grade book and if the child took the test then you know he got the notes. If the child did not have time to copy all of the notes he could do so the following day while the students worked independently on their classwork/homework sheets. In fact the child had at least four days to get the notes before the next test.

## ***Sample Test Format***

I liked to keep the format for my test the same for the entire nine weeks.

### ***Quotation Marks***

I would give five quotation marks on every test. These were unfinished sentences with grammatical mistakes. The students could not mark on the actual test the corrections, but had to rewrite the entire statements. This may seem like busy work to some but it is important to have them copy the entire sentence. Many students barely know how to write a sentence, because they have had so many fill in the blank tests. The students always did their quotation marks on a clean sheet of paper and turned them in to me before they started on the rest of the test. I could sit in the back of the room and grade this part of the test while they worked.

### ***Analogies***

Every week I gave about ten of these on my test. I would run off an analogies guide that might have 150. We would discuss these during class and figure out the reasoning behind the analogies throughout the nine weeks.

### ***Give examples:***

Provide examples of simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences.

### ***Subject Verb Agreement***

Usually I would give ten sentences and they would write A or B indicating the correct choice. This was to help me with a quicker method of grading.

When the parents came for a conference, I would have on hand the previous three or four tests so that the parents could see that there was no confusion about what to expect on my test.

If I was teaching science, I would still try to follow a basic design for the nine weeks test. You do not want all multiple choice or true and false or all fill in the blank. Remember every time that I gave a test, I had a typed copy on the table for them to take notes for the main facts that would be on the next test. You might be wondering what if you do all this work and I have not covered some of this material. This did happen on rare occasions, so I just said that here are two or three free answers. When I did the review at the end of the nine weeks, I made sure those free answers were some of the questions because by this time I had had time to cover this information.

The daily work is checked with a green pen as I walk around the classroom. There are only two grades, a check or the word “incomplete.” The student will still have to complete the work because that assignment that he missed may be on the typed open notebook test. I wrote an “I” in my grade book (for incomplete) so that when I met with the parents I could bring to their attention what assignments were missing. I seldom had a student tear out the word “incomplete” because he did not want to lose the work that he may have on the previous page. Also, there were times that I wrote the dates for the missing assignment on the inside cover of the notebook. Most students do not want to tear off the front of their notebook. When school starts, be sure you go to the dollar store and purchase extra notebooks. Usually a student can provide you with 50 cents for a new notebook, then go to the store and purchase one for himself. There are occasions where the parents just do not have the money to buy the notebook. It is more important that I lose 50 cents than to let the child just sit without any supplies. I well remember a young man who transferred to a junior high. I saw the young man at the grocery store parking lot and immediately asked how he liked his new school. He said that he could not tell me much about it because the teacher said for him not to come back if you don’t have the proper school supplies. He had stayed home for a week to do odd jobs in order to afford to buy the right things. As teachers we really do need to be careful how we phrase our statements.

### ***Delegate Responsibility***

I do believe in delegating responsibility whenever possible. I have already told you that I get students to put the papers in numerical order and place in a colored folder. The student can write on a post-it slip the student numbers that are missing from the stack. If I have a paper that needs to be stapled, I can assign a student that finishes the test early to do that task. If there is not enough time, the papers will already be in order so it is an easy task for me to staple the papers before I leave school. There are occasions that I hand out all my green pens and answer keys and the test can be graded by a few students with me sitting with them while they grade in the back of the room. I am sure that this is frowned upon by some, but it is impossible for us to do it all and not have to take home hours of grading each night.

## *Class Supplies*

What if you do not have enough books for everyone? This is a very common problem because so many IEPs are written to say that the student needs a set of books at home. The other schools are holding on to their books because they may get a new student. There are times that the schoolboard will not order new books because the following year is the year set aside for the adoption of new books.

I was assigned to teach a seventh grade English and spelling class that had NO books, not even a classroom set. After numerous attempts to beg other schools to send me two or three books which of course they needed, I decided to try to contact another school district. This particular district had a warehouse that was located in a not too popular area of the city. I went there and books were thrown everywhere. I finally located three beautiful books that I knew had value because of the type of material that was in the books. These books were brand–new and had the high school name stamped in the front of the book. I returned home and called this particular school. The assistant principal answered the phone. I explained my predicament. One of her duties was to oversee the book room. She told me that she had several sets that had old publishing dates but I was welcome to them if I would come and get them. These were series that her district no longer used. My principal allowed me to leave my school thirty minutes early so I could get to her school before they locked the doors. My principal had no idea that I would return with 100 brand new books plus a teacher’s addition. The principal that gave me the books was as delighted to get rid of the books as I was to receive them.

## ***Final Notes***

### ***Further Education***

Do whatever you can to obtain your master's degree. It may seem expensive but in the long run it may pay off in your retirement fund. Check the web to see what is available for an online masters if that is what it takes.

### ***Chart Your Course***

I hope that this guide has helped you to become a better teacher. I do know that teaching is a very difficult field to be in. The pay is nothing to brag about. The parents for the most part want to blame you for all of their child's shortcomings. The real reward is when you know that you have helped someone rise above his family's standards and become a productive happy citizen. There are so many unhappy home situations that it is a wonder that some students do as well as they do. It is so important that you provide a happy comfortable situation for them to be in. You must realize that very little help if any is given from the average home to help you with discipline or to help the child with his homework. Regardless of what society wants to stress, students deserve to have a quiet well-organized classroom. That is why I strongly recommend the classwork/homework sheets so that the individual can finish about 99 % of his work at school. It is obvious that you have charted a course for each day and most students love being on board.

### ***Establish Expectations***

There is no myth about what is expected. The rules and consequences are posted neatly in front of the class for everyone to see. When I start teaching what I have prepared for that day the students are calm and ready to listen. I think it is very important to stay with the typed program. Yes, there may be a school assembly for the magazine or candy sales, but I give time the next day for us all to get caught up. I do not get concerned when I start this program that it seems like I never get to teach. It takes about three weeks to get everyone on board. At times, I notice Mrs. Smith across the hall is on Chapter 7 and I am still on Chapter 1. What I have found is that in time, because of my organization skills and plans, we will not only catch up with Mrs. Smith, but my students will have a better

understanding of the material. I can truthfully say that I feel blessed to have been in the classroom. God bless you in your teaching endeavors.



## ***Special Report - Special Events***

### ***Class Parties***

You need to be prepared for the parties. I have listed some rules that my co-workers and I had to avoid complete chaos.

#### ***Rule 1***

Limit the time for the party. Too long of a time slot ruins the party for everyone.

#### ***Rule 2***

Ask the room mothers to please leave the other siblings with a sitter. A sibling may be cute running all over the place at the parent's home but this party is not a sibling's opportunity to show off. Besides, additional bodies ones makes the room more congested. Needless to say, students' siblings do not know your rules and have no intention of listening to you.

#### ***Rule 3***

Drawing names can be a disaster. Not only does someone usually not bring a gift, but there may be some that give really expensive gifts if they drew a close friend's name.

#### ***Rule 4***

If the students want to bring private gifts to exchange (not names they drew) discourage it. I have been in a class where I witnessed a small group of girls give each other expensive gifts and girls outside their group were always left out.

#### ***Rule 5***

Stop the party in ample time to clean up the classroom. The custodian does not need all the extra bags of garbage to haul to the dumping area. The day before the party ask the custodian for a spray bottle to be used (only by the teacher) to clean desk tops and a few extra garbage bags. Assign a few boys to walk with the custodian to the area that was

designated for trash. In the meantime, I had brought plenty of rags from home and I squirted the desk tops and got the students to help out by rubbing them clean.

### ***Art Projects***

I am by no means an artist; however, I do firmly believe in doing a few projects so that the students can work together and just have a relaxed time in class. I think that group work is often overdone. Group work usually consists of two students doing all the work and the other four getting the same grade.

After the first four grades, students are generally never given a chance to work together in groups just for pleasure. On Fridays I usually have some art designs in the back of the room for the students to relax and do art if they are ahead on their classwork/homework sheets. Spelling dictation sentence tests are the hardest to grade so I would use this time to try to get some of them graded. You might be shocked to see how many students work ahead so that on Friday they can do a few minutes of art. This is a great time to include soft classical music. Under NO circumstances allow this to be an opportunity for students bring what they want to listen to.

### ***Thanksgiving***

Around Thanksgiving time I usually purchase heavy 9x11 paper and run off a design of a turkey with his feathers spread out. The students bring corn, beans, etc and use a variety of items to decorate their bird. I usually display these and write "Gobble, Gobble" as a title.

### ***Christmas***

At the beginning of December, I allow students to "build" their own evergreen. I give them the heavy white paper and with that I hand out twenty green toothpicks. These are not decorated Christmas trees but just trees in the forest. They love doing this project. At

first it looks so simple but then they realize that it is a challenge. I do not let them paste until after they had played with the green toothpicks on their paper for awhile and decided upon a design. In the past, I would dye the toothpicks three days before so that when the glue and paint mix it wouldn't run, but now you can purchase green toothpicks. This is an easy, inexpensive project.

### ***Potato Prints***

Potato prints is another easy project. Ask the students to bring a potato that has already been cut to class. If they have small cookie cutters at home that is also a cute way to make a print. Using spoons the students carve out small pieces of their potatoes and then dip the potato in paint and blot onto the heavy white paper.

Let me restate my reason for these few simple art projects. I do think group activity is necessary but I think it is disgraceful that some students are assigned academic projects and only one or two do the work. It is not good to teach the philosophy of something for nothing. The projects also give me time to see how the students interact with each other. Sometimes a very quiet student gets a chance to shine brightly because of his ability to work with his hands.

## ***Special Report - Financial Advice You Won't Want to Miss***

Retirement is a word that sounds like music in some of our ears because we have been teaching for so long. Advice to the young teacher - do not take money out of the retirement system. When you decide to go back to teaching, it is very expensive to buy back your time. I took out around \$5,500. It cost me over \$20,000 to buy this time back because of having to pay the interest out of my own pocket, which wasn't a wise investment. I have a friend who said that her husband lost his job and she wondered how they were going to eat but she refused to take any money out. In those days, when you got pregnant you could no longer teach. She is retired now and is so thankful that she left the money in the retirement system. Some areas have adopted the drop program. You teach for at least two years and the money that went toward retirement goes into a special fund that hopefully will gain interest. This fund is then added to your salary as a special income check when you retire.

One of my friends opened a junk shop on Saturdays in order to be able to pay social security taxes which in later years would allow her to have this additional income. It really is a pity that teachers get paid so little for the hours and hours that it takes to run the classroom. I almost want to verbally attack someone who says that they wish they had such wonderful hours as teachers and to think that they get paid in the summer for no work. All of us know that our summers are occupied with special classes to update this and workshops that we don't get paid to attend. Many of these unfortunately are worthless, time-consuming, pie-in-the-sky teaching suggestions from people that no longer are in the classroom.

On the subject of money I hope that you will investigate the unions that you are sometimes practically forced to join. You need to see if the national organizations support things that you are interested in supporting. I strongly recommend that you do not blindly sign up to support groups that are not interested in the home or the student. Unfortunately many of us have contributed through blindness to projects that the union

sponsored that we firmly disagree in. Your hard-earned money does not need to support union issues unless you are in favor of them.

## ***Special Report – How to Eliminate the Blame Game***

As a teacher, you'll hear every excuse in the book. The most important way to cut a student and parent's excuses right out from under him is to put the ball in their court. The classwork/homework sheet and the use of open notebook tests is the way to do just that.

### ***Classwork/Homework Sheet Directions***

This is a list of what we will be doing in the classroom for the next nine weeks. There will be given time to class to do the majority of the work if not all of it. If your child is one that likes to talk or waste time, then he / she will need to complete the work for homework. For the most part, I do not believe in homework.

All work will be kept in a spiral notebook. Once an assignment is completed the student will draw a line and start the next assignment. The date and page number will be labeled in the left-hand margin. During this nine weeks there will be at least three open-notebook test. This is an easy way for the student to acquire 300 points. It will be necessary that the student write neat enough to be able to read his own writing on these unannounced test days. I encourage the parents to look for my green checks in the notebook indicating that your child is doing his work. If five definitions were requested and your child only does four, it will be counted as an incomplete. There will only be two grades in the notebook. 100 and incomplete. This type of teaching is to help the child develop organization skills and showing a degree of accountability for what is required for this course.

## ***Social Studies Classwork/Homework Sheet***

<b>Harcourt Brace Textbook</b>	<b>Social Studies</b>	<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Chapter 5</b>
Nov. 4	p. 173	Copy the four bold print words. Use the book's glossary and write the complete definition.	
Nov. 5	p. 174-175	Copy the bold print words and write the definition. Use your textbook glossary	
Nov. 6	p.174	Copy the review questions and write the answers as a complete sentence.	
Nov. 7	p. 175	Copy the review questions and write the answers as a complete sentence.	
Nov. 8	p. 177	Copy the review questions and write the answers as a complete sentence.	
Nov. 11	p. 177	Lesson Review Copy questions one and two. Answer these in a complete sentence.	
Nov. 12	p. 177	Copy and answer question # 4. Be sure to write your answer neatly and in a complete sentence.	
Nov. 13	p. 177	Letter Writing Activity. Remember the letter writing rules that we discussed during our class.	
Nov. 14	p. 178-180	Copy the three bold print words. Use this book's glossary and write the complete definitions.	
Nov. 15	p. 181	Copy the two bold print words. Write the complete definition.	
Nov. 18	p. 182	Review Write the questions and answers for # 1 and # 2	
Nov. 19	p. 183-184	Copy the four bold print words. Use this text's glossary to write the complete definition.	
Nov. 20	We will be dismissing classes at 2:30 today. There is no homework. Hope you have a Happy Thanksgiving!		
Dec. 2	p. 185-186	Copy the two bold print words. Use your glossary to define these words. Don't forget to write the complete definition neatly.	
Dec. 3	p. 187	Copy the part in the book that has blue print about Peter Stuyvesant. Be sure to copy both sentences.	
Dec. 4	p. 188-189	Copy the three bold print words. Use the glossary to define these words.	
Dec. 5	p.190	Copy the question at the bottom of page 190. The question has a red box in front of it. Answer the question in a complete sentence.	
Dec. 6	p. 192	Follow the directions in the book for "Who Am I?"	
Dec. 9	p. 193	Vocabulary : Only do 1-4	
Dec. 10	p. 193	Vocabulary : Complete 5-8	
Dec. 11	p. 193	Copy questions 9-11. Be sure to answer the questions in complete sentences.	

## *Social Studies Open Notebook Test*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Class # \_\_\_\_\_  
Class Period \_\_\_\_\_

Nov. 4 Copy the second bold-print word and write the complete definition.

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Nov. 6 Copy the review question and write your answer in the space provided.

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---

Nov. 12 Copy and answer question # 4.

---

Nov. 14 Write the third bold print word and the complete definition.

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Nov. 19 Write the fourth bold print word and write the complete definition.

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## *Math Classwork/Homework Sheet*

Scott Foresman Addison Wesley - Adding & Subtracting Whole Numbers and Decimals

Date	Page #	Problem
Nov. 4	p. 81	1-5
Nov. 5	p. 82	1-5
Nov. 6	p. 83	(7-16)
Nov. 7	p. 83	(17-22)
Nov. 8	p. 86	(6-10)
Nov. 11	p. 86	(11-20)
Nov. 12	p. 86	(21-28)
Nov. 13	p. 86	29-33
Nov. 14	p. 91	1-10
Nov. 15	p. 91	11-14
Nov. 18	p. 93	(6-12)
Nov. 19	p. 93	(13-20)
Nov. 20th	There will be no homework tonight. Enjoy your Thanksgiving holidays.	
Dec. 2	p. 93	(21-28)
Dec. 3	p. 95	(1-10)
Dec. 4	p. 95	(11-15)
Dec. 5	p. 96	(17-26)
Dec. 6	p. 96	(27-31)
Dec. 9	p. 97	(55-62)
Dec. 10	p. 97	(63-72)
Dec. 11	p. 98	(1-5)
Dec. 12	p. 98	(6-12)
Dec. 13	p. 98	(13-20)
Dec. 16	p.98	(21-28)
Dec. 17	p. 98	(29-34)
Dec. 18	p. 98	(35-38)
Dec. 19	p. 98	(38-45)
Dec. 20	Classes will be dismissed at 2:00 today. No homework. Enjoy your Christmas Holidays.	
Jan. 6	p. 99	(46-52)
Jan. 7	p. 99	(53-57)
Jan. 8	p. 99	(58-63)

## *Math Open Notebook Test*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Class # \_\_\_\_\_

Class Period \_\_\_\_\_

Nov. 4 Copy # 5

---

Nov. 7 Copy # 21

---

Nov. 8 Copy # 9

---

Nov. 11 Copy # 18

---

Nov. 13 Write problem # 3

---

## *English Classwork/Homework Sheet*

Modern English in Action – Sentence Structure: Subject and Verb

Date	Page #	Problem
Nov. 4	p. 253-254	List the verbs in each sentence. Be sure to number your paper 1-15.
Nov. 5	p. 255	List all verbs (1-12)
Nov. 6	p. 255-256	List the two word verb in each sentence. Be sure to number 1-12
Nov. 7	p. 256-257	Practice 8 Follow the instructions in the text.
Nov. 8	p. 258	Practice 9 Diagram 1-8
Nov. 12	p. 258	Practice 9 Diagram 9-16
Nov. 13	p. 259	Part A (1-5)
Nov. 14	p. 259	Part A (6-10)
Nov. 15	p. 259	Part B (1-5)
Nov. 18	p. 259	Part B (6-10)
Nov. 19	p. 261	Diagram (1-6)
Nov. 20	p. 262	Practice 13 Part A 1-6
Nov. 21	p. 263	Part B (1-6)
Nov. 22	p. 264	Practice 15 Part A 1-5
Nov. 25	p. 264	Part A (6-10)
Nov. 26	p. 264	Part B (1-5)

Nov. 27 Classes will be dismissed at 2:00 today. There is no assignment for tonight.  
Enjoy your holidays.

Dec. 2	p. 264	Part B (6-10)
Dec. 3	p. 265	Part A (1-6)
Dec. 4	p. 265	Part B (1-6)
Dec. 5	p. 269	Part A (1-5)
Dec. 6	p. 269	Part A (6-10)
Dec. 9	p. 269	Part B (1-5 )
Dec. 10	p. 269	Part B (6-10)

## *English Open Notebook Test*

Student Class # \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Period \_\_\_\_\_

Nov. 4 Write the word for # 15 \_\_\_\_\_

Nov. 6 Write the two words for # 11 \_\_\_\_\_

Nov. 12 Diagram # 14

---

Nov. 15 Write sentence # 9 with the corrections.

---

Nov. 18 Write sentence # 10 correctly.

---

## *Special Report – Special Assignments*

### *Classroom Outburst*

It is relatively easy to remember the faults of others, but when it comes to listing our own faults, we may discover a lapse of memory. To compensate for this difficulty, I find it necessary to write these paragraphs hoping that it will diminish my sudden outbursts or comments that are unnecessary.

In no way should I be guilty of disregarding the rules that were discussed and are posted in my classroom. The mind is ingenious at devising reasons for my outbursts; however, I will try in the future to have an alertness in this class to make a wise decision to obey our classroom rules.

It would be good for me to relive my offenses through the eyes and emotions of my classmates. I am robbing them of my teachers valuable teaching time.

I must re-evaluate my priorities. Either I am here to learn or to prevent my classmates from having an opportunity to learn. If the latter choice is the one that I choose, then it will be necessary for my parents to come to school for a conference.

It is both inappropriate and potentially harmful to continue to be so outspoken in my class.

## ***Procrastination***

Webster defines the word procrastinate as putting off something until later. Sometimes to delay doing something means that we increase the probability of not ever finding time to do the project at all.

It is easy to allow our minds to become occupied with many things that do not enhance our reasons for being in this class. It is extremely necessary that we take a quick refresher course as to why the assignment was required. This does not mean that we need to justify or nullify the teacher's reason. This assignment shows a measure of accountability.

It has become necessary for me to copy these few paragraphs hoping that in so doing it will stimulate me to arrange my priorities in order to find time to turn in all of my assignments on the date that they are due. It is unfair for me to think that the teacher should allow me to be the exception to her rules and accept my assignment at a later date.

## *Cheating*

In today's society the word cheating is really frowned upon. We think of the term creative accounting when we think of the major scandals that have recently occurred in the stock market.

Regardless of what term you would like to use it is wrong to copy someone else's completed assignment and then to pretend that you did the work. If the occasion does arise for you to copy someone's written work, then be sure that you understand how to document and give that author credit.

Now let's consider taking someone's notebook and copying their answers because your time was too precious to do the assignment yourself. This action produces a blur on your character. It seems to indicate that you are part of the society that wants something for nothing.

Another factor that enters into this equation is the fact that you have put a friend in a difficult position. You may have tried to make this person feel guilty for not allowing you to copy his work. When all is said and done, there seems to be no accountability on your part.

In my classroom, I am requiring you to write this in order to hopefully give you time to reflect on your actions.

In the future my hope will be that you will see the need to protect your reputation and not infringe upon the rights of others. Your level of intelligence does strongly indicate that you have the ability to make wise decisions. One of your wisest decisions this year will be that you will obey the classroom rules.

It is both inappropriate and potentially harmful to continue down this path of letting someone else do your assignments. You have too much character to allow this to happen again to you. Thank you for obeying the rules in this class.

## *Attitude*

It really does not matter how inconsistent or unfair those in authority may appear to be, we as students are responsible for our responses to them. It is my teacher's opinion that a person's attitude far outweighs a student's academic ability.

Learning to understand what those in authority are really trying to achieve is essential, especially since I am considered the student. A person's attitude will make or break a person. Your personal attitude is far more important than your personal appearance or your level of skill.

I have a daily choice of what to do about my attitude. I can sulk or decide that for no other reasons than for my own health to be a happy productive student who shows a high level of accountability.

The statement has been made that life is 15% what happens to you and 85% how you react to whatever situation you are in.

Webster states that the definition for attitude is the position or posture of the body. The dictionary also states that attitude is a way of acting or behaving that shows what one is thinking or feeling.

In the future I hope to exhibit an attitude that reflects more respect for myself and my classmates. I will make all attempts to control my "body English" in such a way that it will exemplify a positive attitude and help to contribute to a better learning environment for my peers and myself.



## *Behavior Report*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Today \_\_\_\_\_ was disruptive in the following way in my class:

- Not using his time to work on class assignments.
- Continuing to talk after a warning
- Did not have his tools for class. (pen, pencils, notebooks, textbooks)
- Disrespectful to the teacher
- Disrespectful to his classmates
- Sleeping in class
- Eating or chewing during class. The rules clearly state no eating or chewing in class.
- Punish work has been assigned.

When a student exhibits this type of behavior it does detract from your child's learning as well as affecting the learning atmosphere for the other students. This is against all of the rules for our school. Please discuss this behavior with your child and encourage him in the future to be prepared and follow the posted rules. If you have any questions please feel free to call the school and set up an appointment via the secretary. I will be glad to meet with you and the student if you feel it is necessary. Please sign and return this letter to me on the following school day. Thank you for your cooperation.

COMMENTS:

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_