

FRIDAY FREEBIE

REACHING & TEACHING THEM



Making quick and lasting connections with every student in your classroom.

Connecting Through Humor

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Humor

A: Knock, knock
 B: Who's there?
 A: Dogs.
 B: Dogs who?
 A: No, owls hoo, dogs bark.

See page 35 for the Humor Checklist.

Some children need to know that it's okay to gently tease if it doesn't hurt anyone and you are clearly just joking.

If you use one form of humor over and over, after a while it's not so funny, so change it up.

Using humor is my favorite way to connect with students. Laughing and having fun with students establishes a camaraderie that in turn builds a positive relationship between teacher and students. Although some people may contest the fact that the knock-knock joke is really humor, all you have to do is tell one to a Grade 1 student to get laughs! Then, they will tell you a knock-knock joke that they made up—one that really isn't funny and may not even make sense—and then they will laugh again.

Being Silly (Kindergarten to Grade 1)

Kindergarten and Grade 1 students love it when the teacher is silly. This is admittedly a double-edged sword, as you need to have control over the class to bring them back after being silly. If you don't know the class well or if you aren't able to calm them down after being silly, then opt out of this form of humor.

One way to be silly is to insist that something that is obviously not true is true. For example, on a hot, sunny day, tell the children to put on their snowsuits when it is time to go outside. When they tell you they don't have snowsuits because it's summer, insist that it is winter and that they need to put on their snowsuits, hats, and mitts. After a few back-and-forths with students, finally admit that yes, it does seem to be summer and they don't have to put on their snowsuits. I usually ask them if I was teasing them; when some of them say yes, I confirm that they are right.

Another way to be silly is to use an everyday object for something other than its intended use; for example, try to write on the board with a ruler. When the ruler doesn't work, pretend to be upset and baffled about why the ruler isn't writing. Then try to use another object, such as an eraser, to write. All the while, they will be telling you to use chalk or whiteboard markers. Finally, do what they tell you and thank them profusely for their help.

Slapstick (Kindergarten to Grade 3)

Physical humor usually gets a big laugh—even from older students, as long as it looks accidental. Pretending to slip and fall will always get a laugh. Pretending to drop something over and over will get a laugh. Having a sticker stuck on your hand and trying to get it off, only to have it stick somewhere else—especially if it's somewhere on your body you can't see but the students can—will get a laugh.

I know that some people don't like slapstick comedy, especially in the classroom, because they think it is not dignified. And if you have an excellent class, there's no need for it. It's when you have a challenging class, when you need help connecting with students, that slapstick can come in handy. Slapstick is an easy way to get students laughing and connect with them. As long as students understand that you are joking around with them, it is harmless fun and helpful in building a relationship.

Jokes (Grades 2–6)

As students get older, they tell more sophisticated jokes. Primary students love knock-knock jokes.

A: Knock, knock.
B: Who's there?
A: Lettuce.
B: Lettuce who?
A: Lettuce in. It's cold out here!

By the time they are junior students, kids have grown out of knock-knock jokes and into jokes that require a bit more thought.

A squirrel walks into a store and asks the owner, "Do you have any nuts?" The owner says, "No, we don't." The next day the squirrel goes into the same store and asks the owner, "Do you have any nuts?" Again the owner says, "No, we don't." The squirrel goes into the same store and asks the same question every day for a week. Finally, the owner says, "If you come in here again and ask if I have any nuts, I'm going to hit you with a hammer." The next day, the squirrel goes back to the store and asks the owner, "Do you have any hammers?" The owner says, "No, we don't." So the squirrel says, "Do you have any nuts?"

Riddles (Grades 4–6)

Junior students love riddles. They love hearing them and they love telling them. They often don't want you to tell the answer right away because they want to think about it. Sometimes I give students the whole day to come up with the answer.

Q: What letter of the alphabet will hurt you if you get too close?
A: Bee
Q: What is tall when it's young and short when it's old?
A: A candle.

Stories (Grades 4 and up)

All ages love funny stories. But I find older students appreciate them more than other types of humor. Students especially love stories about their teacher and

I lived in a small village in Japan for two years. I had driven dirt bikes and wanted to try out a moped, so my boss lent me one that belonged to his daughter. With a dirt bike, to go forward you turn the handle forward; if you let go, the handle turns back to zero so the bike stops. To go forward on the moped you turn the handle backward; when you let go, it does not go back to zero by itself. I filled up the moped with gas and, as I was leaving the gas station, I turned the handle too far and it went too fast. My reflexes took over and I tried to go slower. But the more I turned the handle backward the faster I went, and I ended up popping a wheelie out of the gas station. The

gas station guys (who I knew, because the town was small) were yelling, “Ms. Amanda, are you okay?” And I was yelling back, still doing a wheelie, “Yes, I’m okay!” Eventually I slid off the back of the moped onto the road (and scratched my knee), and the moped took off by itself down the road! I ran after it and picked it up to drag it off the road, but I forgot to turn it off, so it took off again down the road! Again, I ran after it, turned it off, and dragged it off the road. The next day, the whole town knew that I had done a wheelie out of the gas station and that the moped had got away from me twice. But they all politely avoided laughing out loud around me.

Sarcasm (Grades 7 and up)

Older students love sarcasm. Of course, it’s important to be careful that it doesn’t make fun of students. It’s also not a good idea to use sarcasm with students who are behaviorally challenging or who have learning disabilities. Such students will not understand sarcasm at first; when they do understand, they will feel they have been the butt of the joke.

I tend to use sarcasm about the environment; for example, if the room we are walking into has a bad smell, I may say, “Oh, good, they scented the room for us.” If the room is really hot, I tell students that I asked the principal for a hot tub for the class but he gave me a sauna instead.

If students and I know each other well and I’m sure they are okay with me teasing them, I use sarcasm to reinforce rules. If students are talking while I’m giving a lesson, rather than just telling them to stop talking, I ask, “Don’t you know that I can totally see you talking? Don’t you know that you’re supposed at least wait until I turn around so I can’t see you before you talk?” This often leads to students laughing and stops them from talking.

With all this humor in the classroom, it is important that students see that I am able to laugh at myself, especially when I make a mistake or forget something—like the principal’s name! I sometimes wear funny T-shirts or a funny hat (I have borrowed one from my dad that says, *I’m their leader, which way did they go?*)

Humor in Reading and Writing

There are many ways to include humor in your language arts lessons. You can post funny posters, decorate the room with cartoons, or write a funny quote on the board in the morning. Show students funny YouTube videos—my students love the ones about funny animals, like the one at <https://youtu.be/M1djO19aSFQ>. You can use funny test questions: e.g. *If Maria ate 4 worms and Julio ate 5 worms, how many worms did they eat altogether?* You can read funny books, using funny voices, accents, and impressions. Consider substituting words when reading to the class, especially when reading something that would otherwise be boring, and see how long it takes students to realize you’re not reading what is written. For example, when I read directions for a science experiment, I substitute the word “cookie” for “ruler” until they catch on. In response to all this reading using humor, ask students to use humor in their writing. Some Grade 2 students I taught wrote hilarious short stories—one ended with the main character, a frog who had been the hero of the story, being run over by a car!

For more on humor in the classroom, check out these websites:

- <http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/comedy-in-the-classroom-50-ways-to-bring-laughter-into-any-lesson/>
- <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/using-humor-in-the-classroom-maurice-elias>