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The Cluttered Desk

Volume 1 Issue 2

“To me the sole hope of human salvation lies in teaching” – George Bernard Shaw  
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Welcome to “The Cluttered Desk”, the semi-monthly newsletter of Just Us Teachers. You are receiving this newsletter because you have requested a subscription. If you have received this e-mail in error or would like to discontinue your subscription, please see the instructions at the end of this newsletter

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If you haven’t seen it yet, check out **1, 2, 3 Math Fonts** at [www.justusteachers.com](http://www.justusteachers.com), the newest way to add graphics to your worksheets, flashcards and posters with no cutting and pasting!

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#### RESEARCH LINKS – ABILITY GROUPING/TRACKING

How do you feel about ability grouping? What should it look like? Is it effective? Is it necessary? Check out these articles on the subject, then let us know how you feel.

Ending Ability Grouping Is a Moral Imperative

[http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed\\_lead/199210/hastings.html](http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199210/hastings.html)

Synthesis of Research / Is Ability Grouping Equitable?

[http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed\\_lead/199210/gamoran.html](http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199210/gamoran.html)

Ability Grouping in Elementary Schools

<http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed290542.html>

Ability-Grouping Research Reviews: What Do They Say about Grouping and the Gifted?

<http://www.donet.com/~eprice/sdallan.htm>

Homogeneous or Heterogeneous: Which Way to Go?

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/admin095.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin095.shtml)

Is Ability Grouping the Way to Go---Or Should It Go Away?

[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_admin/admin009.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin009.shtml)

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## OVERHEARD IN THE CLASSROOM

I recently “celebrated” my 37<sup>th</sup> birthday. One little girl in my class gave me a hand-made birthday card with the following message inside.

Dear Mr. S.

I love you because you are very special to me. Just because you are not cute does not mean that I cannot love you.

Happy Birthday,  
Brittany

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## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS –

### FREE MATERIALS

Most of our subscribers are math teachers, but if you teach reading or writing to younger children, check out <http://www.starfall.com>. You can sign up to receive FREE materials. I ordered these for my partner, and they sent reading materials , pencils, certificates and stickers for 40 students. They even covered all shipping costs!

### TEACHER APPRECIATION AT WALDENBOOKS

Waldenbooks is having a Teacher Appreciation Weekend March 28 – March 30! Present your teacher ID at the counter and receive 25% off your purchase (excluding gift certificates and magazines). Stock up now!

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### FEATURE ARTICLE

“Teacher, He Took My Pencil!”

By Christopher Norman

The “Tattle Book” seemed like such a good idea at the time...

For months I had been confronted by an endless parade of 8 year olds marching up to my desk to inform me of the latest shortfalls of their 2<sup>nd</sup> grade companions.

“Johnny wrote on my paper!”

“Sarah said that I like Juan!”

“Alex is breathing too loud!”

Now, you must understand, 2<sup>nd</sup> graders have a very keen sense of justice. If someone does something to offend them, they must be punished immediately. “Teacher, he took my pencil! Off with his head!”

And in a way, this is our own fault. We drill them very early on the importance of following the rules. Raise your hand. Stay in your seat. Don’t look at your neighbor’s work. They know these rules are very important to us, so when they see the rules violated, they have to tell us right away! It is just too bad that they can’t seem to apply these principles to their OWN behavior.

“Teacher, Michael is bleeding on me!”

“Why is he bleeding on you?”

“Because I hit him in the nose.”

What clinched it for me was the day when little Mary came up to my desk approximately 1.3 zillion times to inform me that her neighbors kept getting out of their seats. Well, after calculating that I spent almost 8 hours of my 7 ½ hours of teaching time dealing with “the tattlers”, I decided to do something about it.

Now, you can't just tell an 8 year old not to tattle. That's like telling a dog not to bark, the wind not to blow, or your superintendent not to give you more paperwork. Talking is just not going to change anything. So, I came up with... the "Tattle Book".

Simply put, the "Tattle Book" is a spiral notebook with the oh-so-clever title of "Tattle Book" written across the front cover. I told the children that they were no longer allowed to approach me with ANY kind of tattle unless their situation met one of the following 3 conditions...

- 1) Someone was bleeding.
- 2) Someone was vomiting.
- 3) Their mother was the principal.

If they did not meet these criteria, their tattle would have to be written in the "Tattle Book". They could write their name, the date, and their tattle, but they couldn't TELL me anything. I told them that I would read the "Tattle Book" at the end of the week, and if a tattle was REALLY IMPORTANT, I would take care of it. Of course, my translation of "REALLY IMPORTANT" meant that it was "NOT IN THE TATTLE BOOK".

I fantasized about the time I would save. I could grade papers in class. I could teach complete lesson plans. I could get my Doctorate.

Reality has a funny way of interfering with our dreams, or as it turned out in this case, my delusions.

The first problem was the sheer volume of material the children came up with. They filled up the first "Tattle Book" in 2 days. I can't get them to write their names at the top of their papers, but they wrote on every line of every page of a 5 subject notebook. Front and back! The same children who would cry, whine, and have convulsions when required to write a complete sentence were making mad dashes to the "Tattle Book" at every available opportunity. Which usually meant either when I was teaching or when they were supposed to be working.

And then there were special cases like Mary. Mary, sweet Mary. Mary is one of those children who are extremely darling, but often struggle academically. On spelling tests, Mary gets her name right half the time, but never any of the other words. Well, the "Tattle Book" revealed that there ARE some words that Mary can spell! They start with "Sh" and "D" and "A" and she even has a couple of "B"'s in her repertoire. The problem is, I can't tell who she is tattle on because her sentences (with the exception of the "colorful" words) all resemble a spilt bowl of alphabet soup. For example, she once wrote...

Rksg tkes thu sayd "S@#&" to Brebtn.  
Yes, I'll get right on that.

The last straw was when the "Tattle Book" became a way of tattling on others for tattling. I kid you not, I found 7 consecutive pages of "So-and-so is tattling on me!" The only thing that changed was the name of So-and-so. With its purpose a dim memory, the "Tattle Book" joined the "Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time" Hall of Fame, along with the Flowbie, Reality TV, and state standardized testing. It has been retired to the Teacher's Lounge for entertainment purposes only, much like our current insurance provider.

We have a newer, much more simple method of handling tattles now. It's a 3-step system.

- 1) Get out piece of paper.
- 2) Write tattle.
- 3) Throw paper in trash.

The good news is that I now have much more time to teach. The bad news is that the "Save-A-Tree" foundation has declared us a serious threat to the national forestry and has released our names to every environmental agency in North America.

Those darn tattlers.

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## READER COMMENTS

“I loved your “I Hate Being Absent” article! You really captured the essence of how I feel when I miss a day of school.” Kim S., Highlands, TX

“Thanks for suggesting the Valentine’s Candy Graphing activity. My kids really had a good time.” Sandra K., Carmel, IN

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## ST. PATRICK’S REPRODUCIBLES LINKS

<http://www.bry-backmanor.org/actpag32.html>

A leprechaun money printable. Match the coins to the correct amounts of money.

[http://www.edhelper.com/st\\_patricks\\_day.htm](http://www.edhelper.com/st_patricks_day.htm)

A wealth of Saint Patrick’s Day printable activities.

<http://www.geocities.com/holidayzone/stpat/index.html>

A great source for St. Patrick’s Day activities, crafts, songs and more.

<http://www.abcteach.com/MonthtoMonth/March/wordsearch.htm>

A St. Patrick’s Day word search.

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## ST. PATRICK’S DAY GRAPHING LESSON

Well, the holidays sure do lend themselves well to edible lessons! Use the links below for a fun estimating and graphing activity using Lucky Charms. Your kids will love it!

<http://www.learnnc.org/LearnNC/lessonp.nsf/docunid/39939D13EED227ED852568F1006478FD?openDocument>

Lucky Charms Math – 2-3

<http://www.wcboe.k12.md.us/mainfold/curric/palspage/PALS2001/K/LuckyCharmsMath.html>

Lucky Charms Math – K

Do you have a lesson, link or funny story that you would like to see here? We welcome your submissions! E-mail us at [ezine@justusteache.com](mailto:ezine@justusteache.com)

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Enjoy this issue? Pass it on to your friends and coworkers! E-mail us and let us know your thoughts! We look forward to hearing from you!

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