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The Cluttered Desk

Volume 3 Issue 1

"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."– James Baldwin

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----- FEATURE ARTICLE

My Sense of Humor

By Chris Slaughter

A sense of humor can be a wonderful thing in the classroom. Research shows that happy children learn better than unhappy ones, and nothing makes a child happier than a good Knock-Knock joke. Unless it’s a joke about underwear. Or flatulence.

I have instinctively used humor in all of my years of teaching. Usually, things work out pretty well. Toss a few zingers out, get a couple of chuckles, learn a few math facts...

“Hey, why is 6 afraid of 7? Because 7 8 (ate) 9!”

<Dead Silence>

“Underwear!”

<ROARING LAUGHTER!>

If you like the reaction you get with that, try saying something about “pantyhose”.

With a room full of 10-year olds, the jokes can come pretty easily, but sometimes a well-intentioned gag can backfire on you. For instance, once I was changing the light in my overhead projector. As I reached in and pulled out the old bulb, I made a loud “ZZZZZTZZTZ” sound and began to shake like I had been shocked. They thought it was HILARIOUS! They laughed, pointed, jumped up and down... all except Meagan. She jumped, her eyes opened wide with surprise, and then did the unthinkable...

She cried...

Now, telling a bad joke that gets a sour response... you can live with that. But a practical joke that upsets a child makes you feel HORRIBLE! Sure, I made the rest of them laugh, but this sweet child was genuinely concerned for my welfare, and I had scared the wits out of her.

I am such a heel.

So, a sense of humor CAN be a good thing, but you have to be careful HOW you use it. And how FREQUENTLY you use it.

While the whole Meagan-scare slowed me down a bit, and made me re-evaluate what is funny and what is not, I continued to use humor whenever I could. Which turned out to be way too often.

Oh, I made sure that I never scared or upset another student. But what I discovered was that the more I joked, the more THEY joked! As matter of fact, EVERYTHING became a joke to them.

“Where is your homework?”

“My underwear ate it!”

I had created a roomful of little monsters. I know, I know... I deserved it, I had no one to blame but myself, blah , blah, blah... But once again, something had to be done, and I knew just what to do.

I came down on them. Hard. I read them the riot act, lectured them for 45 minutes about the importance of being serious about their work, how they were all going to serve detention for the rest of their natural 4th grade lives, which would be another entire year if they didn't straighten up NOW!

They sat in stunned, shocked silence. Was the party really over?

I plopped down into my rolling chair next to my overhead projector and flipped on the switch to begin the day's lesson. Glancing back, I noticed that the overhead screen was not pulled down, so I pushed my chair back to reach it.

What happened next caught me totally by surprise.

It seems there was a cord on the floor directly behind the back wheels of my chair. When I pushed back, the wheels stopped. The chair, however, did not. I felt my body tilting backward in slow motion, my arms flailing in a manner that surely made me look like a psychotic chicken taking flight. I thought that I could right myself before I completed my fall, but it turns out that gravity is WAY more powerful than wishful thinking.

My fall continued as my life flashed before my eyes. Hmmmm... I had forgotten to take out the trash... I had a Pop-Tart for breakfast... My lost shoe is under the bed... Note to self: Get a life!

I couldn't believe it. I crashed to the ground, landing flat on my back, with my toes pointed straight to the ceiling. I lay there, stunned for what seemed like hours as my breath left me, only to suddenly return in a rush. I could hear the blood roaring in my ears... Wait a minute! That's not blood!

IT'S MY STUDENTS!!

The depth of their amusement had reached epic proportions. I couldn't have gotten a stronger reaction if I had told a whole series of jokes about a family of underwear that had beans for breakfast every morning.

The party's over?! Yeah, right...

Now they think I am SO funny... Except for Meagan.

I am such a heel.

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RESEARCH LINKS – LITERATURE IN MATH

Math and Literature -- A Match Made in the Classroom!
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr249.shtml

Children's Literature in Mathematics Instruction
<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/mathpict.htm>

Math Literature – A collection of titles grouped by concept.
<http://home.nyc.rr.com/teachertools/mathliterature.html>

Mathematics: Making a Literature Connection
<http://www.lindaslearninglinks.com/MathLiterature.html>

See samples of 1,2,3 Math Fonts at <http://www.justusteachers.com/MathFontsSamples.pdf>
These are images that you just TYPE into your documents. NO CUTTING AND PASTING!

VALENTINE'S FUN LINKS

Valentine's Day Themed Math Pages
<http://www.kidzone.ws/math/valentine/index.htm>

Printable Puzzles and Activities
<http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/val/word.html>

Valentine's Math Message
<http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/val/print/mathadd1.gif>

FEATURE VALENTINE'S MATH LESSONS

Mend My Broken Heart – 2-3

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/MathLAAdditionSubtractionMendBrokenHeartIdea23.htm>

Valentine Battleship – 3-4

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/MathValentineBattleshipPlotLatLongCoordsIdea34.htm>

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!! 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@justusteachers.com

Did you 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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