

Literacy Tips

Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.



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Tip #59: Middle School Attitude

Respect

Wuzzles are a great way to challenge student thinking. These are also known as mindbenders or visual puzzles. I am terrible at solving them; however, I do like them once I "get" them. (For more on Wuzzles, refer back to Tip #49. All LA teachers have hard copies of the past email tips that you can share.) Here is a great one to sum up your classroom rules.

RESPECT
ALL

Did you get it? - Respect above all!

It is from *Day One & Beyond* by Rick Wormeli (Stenhouse Publishers, 2003).

Motto

Now that you have your classroom rules summed up in one simple Wuzzle, how about a classroom motto. This one was submitted to NEA Today, October, 2003, from Michael Pope Georgia, Middle School Science Teacher.

“You can look down in what?”

DESPERATION

“And look up for what?”

INSPIRATION

“But if I catch you cheating or anything that’s shady grady, you’ll get a zero with...?”

NO HESITATION

Poetry Break

And this segues nicely into a poetry break. Who can resist Shel Silverstein and his masterful wit with the English language? Do you know his poem "Ations" from *A Light in the Attic*? I am attaching it in a Word document so you can manipulate the text. (Color code the ation words, enlarge the text for an overhead, etc.) After enjoying the poem together as a class, use these "ation" words as a spelling/vocabulary list for the week. The suffix, *ation*, means the state or quality of.

To begin, find out which of the words students can already spell. I have prepared a [spelling pretest](#) using the nine *ation* words from Silverstein's poem, six additional words, and five blank spots for students to seek out their own words using this suffix. Pretesting students before a word study unit is one of the single best strategies we can use when teaching spelling. Model for students how to analyze their errors by checking off the correct categories. (Also attached is a [blank pretest](#) that can be used in the future. Remember to write in the correct spellings of your word list before Xeroxing. This blackline master is also located in the new teacher LA binder.) Then look at ways to practice these words throughout the week so students can become familiar with not only their spellings but also their meanings.



Eliminating Negative Comments

This tip began with reference to the classroom rule, *respect above all*. Let me close with some thoughts for how to maintain a classroom environment that does not tolerate put-downs. Kylene Beers says, "Adolescents are great at one-liners that can reduce another student to tears or humiliation and, at times, intense feelings of alienation." We witness this every day in classrooms and during passing times. Eliminating negative comments takes perseverance, and we must be vigilant in order to create safer classrooms and schools. Below is one high school's teacher approach. Although I wouldn't feel comfortable using this exact technique, I found the student observations very compelling. This is an excerpt from the book *When Kids Can't Read* by Kylene Beers (see p. 266 - 267). Every middle school has 1-2 copies of this in the LA department. These were distributed last year during the A.C.T.I.V.E. reading presentations.

One teacher bought a bell similar to the kind found on hotel registration counters. She placed it on her desk and told the students the following:

"Every time one of you says something mean, you're acting like a real ding-a-ling. You do it so much and so often, you don't even hear it. In this class, we will treat each other with respect. Every time you make a statement or do something that makes you sound like a ding-a-ling, I'm going to ring this bell. The first day you go all class period with no ding-a-lings, you get to go to lunch five minutes early. The first time you go all week with no ding-a-lings, you all earn a hundred for a major test grade. When we've gone a month with no ding-a-lings, we'll have a pizza party with a movie."

As you can imagine, the first day she was ringing the bell constantly. Kids were testing her - hard. By the end of the week, the bell was getting to be annoying to all. Peer pressure set in. Soon the class did go for an entire period without the bell, but that didn't happen until the third week. Over time, the negative behavior did go away.

A few student observations:

"Ding-a-lings become so common that you don't even hear them. Now I hear them so much in my other classes that I'm amazed how awful they really are."

"It's like this class is safer now. You know that people are going to respect your ideas. They may or may not agree with them, but they are going to let you know that in a better way."

"When folks are dissin' you, you can't be focusing on anything but how they are acting. And you got to act a certain way back, you know, to let them know that you won't take no disrespect. Now, now with that gone, you are focusing on what they are really saying."



Ations

If we meet and I say, "Hi,"
That's a salutation.

If you ask me how I feel,
That's consideration.

If we stop and talk awhile,
That's a conversation.

If we understand each other,
That's communication.

If we argue, scream and fight,
That's an altercation.

If later we apologize,
That's reconciliation.

If we help each other home,
That's cooperation.

And all these ations added up
Make civilization.

(And if I say this is a wonderful poem,
Is that exaggeration?)

- Shel Silverstein



Name _____
Lesson: _____

List Word	Correct Spelling	Left out letters	Extra letters	Letters in wrong order	Double letters not needed	Wrong letters for a sound	Heard word incorrectly	Other
1.	salutation							
2.	consideration							
3.	conversation							
4.	communication							
5.	altercation							
6.	reconciliation							
7.	cooperation							
8.	civilization							
9.	exaggeration							
10.	desperation							
11.	starvation							
12.	inspiration							
13.	fascination							
14.	hesitation							
15.	designation							
16.								
17.								
18.								
19.								
20.								

Explain the spelling rule!

My spelling goal for this week is...



Name _____

Lesson: _____

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1.								
2.								
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5.								
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