

Teacher Tips

Prepared by Staff Development for Educators

Tip #1: Digital Seating Chart

Try using a digital camera to create a modern seating chart. Simply take each student's picture, laminate the pictures and cut them apart. Then, stick Velcro dots on to the backs of the pictures and onto a laminated poster board. This way, you can easily change their seats around during the year. Your substitutes will love you for this! You can also create a library of student photos for future use and for awards. Of course, if you don't have a digital camera, a regular one will do just fine!

Tip #2: Velcro Mats

Do your students sit on the floor for group activities? Many teachers use mats or carpet squares to designate where students should sit. They are a chore to move and the children continually shift about on them. As a solution, take the hook side of a Velcro strip and cut it into four-inch strips and write each child's name on a strip. The strips cling to the carpeted floor and can even be vacuumed over. Now the children no longer move about.

Tip #3: Drawing Seats

Try this: Give each child a playing card as they enter the classroom. The students must match their cards with laminated hints that you can tape to their desks. The hints are clues to the cards such as H-4 (four of hearts), S-8 (eight of spades), D-9, and C-10. The children must use their critical thinking skills to figure out the clues and find their seats. You can also assign seats by handing out pictures of the presidents and they must match the faces to the names on the desks.

Tip #4: Adjustable Seating Chart

Trim Post-it notes to fit your seating chart board. By using these stickers, you can quickly relocate students to a new seat without messing up your whole chart. You can also photocopy the chart weekly and use it to take notes on students' responses, absences, demerits and such. This can also give you documented participation when grading time comes.

Tip #5: Seating Charts and Grading

When making seating charts, write your students' names on post-it notes and place them on a paper with desks drawn on it. Then, put the chart in a sheet protector. This works very well because students can be moved quickly and easily when their seating assignments don't work. When you need a new arrangement, you don't have to rewrite every name. This also gives you a fast way to record your students' grades. You can also use an overhead marker on the seating chart and then record their grades in the grade book later.

Tip #6: Seating Arrangements

Number all your desks starting with one. Then, place numbers in a hat that corresponds to the number of desks in the classroom. As students walk into the room, they pick a random number. This is where they will sit for the day. This system can save you time because you don't have to make up a seating chart. It also gives the students opportunities to work with different classmates. There's a lot less complaining as students soon realize that where they sit is just the luck of the draw.

Tip #7: Clear Overlays

Put a sheet protector over seating charts so you can write notes on them (participation, bonuses, behavioral notes). If you use an overhead pen, it all comes clean with a little water for the very next day!

Tip #8: Adopt a Hallway

To keep your school looking neat and clean, try an 'Adopt a Hallway' program. Classes volunteer to police the halls for litter and your class can create signs reminding everyone to 'Keep Our School Beautiful'. The volunteering classes can be recognized at the end of the year for their hard work.

Tip #9: Vomit Comets

Request a container of 'Vomit Guard' from your custodian to keep in your classroom cupboard for when one of those inevitable accidents happens. Quick application of the compound makes the room more pleasant to be in and really helps with the clean up on hard surfaces and carpeted floors. Also, stress to your students that they need not tell you that they feel like they are going to throw up. Instead, they should just grab a trashcan. This little suggestion can save many an accident.

Tip #10: Socks and Tennis Balls

Not all classrooms are carpeted. To cut down on the noise of chairs and desks on the floor, put old tennis balls on the legs of each chair. This really keeps the chairs quiet. You can also put tube socks on table legs to protect newly-polished floors.

Tip #11: Clean Tables

A great way to keep classroom tables clean is to cover them with plastic tablecloths or double sheets of butcher paper when children are working with glue, markers or paint. The plastic tablecloths can be attached under the table with Velcro tabs or double stick tape. Check local discount stores for bargains after holidays.

Tip #12: Spilled Paint

When mixing powdered tempera paint, use one part liquid hand soap and three parts water. This makes clean up a lot easier and helps with the laundry in the case of spilled paint.

Tip #13: Neat Treat

Try this: at dismissal time, choose a name from a box and then check to see if that student's desk is neat and clean. If it is, that student receives a 'Neat Treat' to take home. Then, put that name in your desk. When all of the names have been chosen, start all over again. If the chosen student's desk is not neat, put the name back into the box and choose another. This incentive can result in very clean and organized desks.

Tip #14: Shaving Cream Clean-Ups

Shaving cream will remove pencil and pen marks from desktops. Just put shaving cream on each child's desk and then create some form of learning activity with the cream. For example, ask students to draw a picture that illustrates a certain fraction or geometric shape or they can write their spelling words. The inexpensive cream works just as well as the expensive kind.

Tip #15: Clean as a Baby's . . .

Baby wipes aren't just for babies anymore! Ask parents to send in a box of wipes during the first week of school and store the collection throughout the year. Baby wipes are wonderful for cleaning the overhead projector, classroom charts, desks and other items. Best of all, the boxes make wonderful storage containers for science materials, math manipulatives and game pieces. You can even use a marker to label each with the contents so you can see at a glance what's inside.

Tip #16 Bag Books

Have your students store their reading tradebooks in large Ziplock bags. This way they can always have three books on-hand—one they are presently working on, one they just finished, and one that they'll be beginning soon. They can also bring these spill-proof bags home once a week to read with their parents.

Tip #17: EZ Grading Scale

Grading scales can often be misplaced. Try taping a Ziploc bag inside the cover of your grade book and slip the grading scale inside it. Works like a charm!

Tip #18: Overhead Transparency

Whenever you're correcting a science or math paper that has a visual component (matching problems to answers, matching multiple choice Qs and As, or connecting the dots), make a key (answer sheet) on an overhead transparency. You can superimpose the key on top of the papers to be corrected. It saves time and you can correct a 20-problem math assignment in just seconds. It also works for standardized tests.

Tip #19: Weekly Envelopes

Pick a Thursday or Friday to allow your students to clean their desks while you pass back all their graded papers during the week. Look over their work carefully and take the time to comment on each and every one. In a large envelope, put all the work along with your comments. On the front, record any missed homework for the week. The envelopes are then taken home to share with parents. Families can go over the work and discuss it. Both parents and students appreciate this kind of feedback. Parents sign the front of the envelope to acknowledge they've seen the papers and are aware of any missing homework. The signed envelope is brought back on Friday or Monday.

Tip #20: Finding Mr. & Miss No-Name

Tired of tracking down the owners of "no-name" papers? Try a "No-Name" folder. After worksheets and other assignments are returned, students who have assignments missing can go up to the folder to see if they had forgotten to include their name. Try hanging a wall mountable file folder holder as your folder holder. Your students will always know where to look before coming to you about missing assignments.

Tip #21: Color Coding Your Answer Key

Ever find yourself grading your answer key? Try creating your answer sheet on a colored sheet of paper. You'll eliminate "correcting" your answer sheets forever!

Tip #22: Make-Up Work

Getting assignments to students absent one day can take up a lot of your time. Try putting a labeled wall file box on a bulletin board for each of your classes. During class, put the name of the absent student on the paper that he/she should have received that day and put it in the appropriate file box. This way, the students can stop by and get their work anytime without disturbing the class. It also encourages them to talk to you if they have any questions.

Tip #23: Color Coding Journals

At the beginning of the school year, color code your students' journals by putting a red, yellow, green, blue or purple sticker on the front of each journal. Then every Monday for the rest of the school year, the students with the red stickers turn in their journals. Take these few journals home and respond personally to them. On Tuesday collect yellow journals and so on. Use colors in the order of the rainbow -- red, yellow, green, blue, purple -- so you'll never forget which color to collect on which day. This makes responding to journals much easier than collecting them all at once. You'll see every student's journal each week and keep up with responses. If a student is absent, they can turn them in on a day that

is not their regular day. After a while, students are so familiar with the color-coding that they turn in their journals without a reminder.

Tip #24: Call Your Local Chamber of Commerce

At your local chamber of commerce you'll find a variety of books, maps and brochures available in classroom sets just for the asking. Teachers across the curriculum and grade levels can encourage creative writing, improve map skills, work on skimming & scanning skills, and following directions.

Tip #25: Enlist the Armed Services

Check-out your local armed services recruiting office and ask for book covers and pencils. They are usually glad to oblige. They also have other free things for classrooms too. Just ask! Use pencils and posters as rewards.

Tip #26: FREE Posters

Logon to the U.S. Department of Education's Web site www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html There you'll find tons of free stuff. You can also visit your local video store and ask for free promotional posters and cardboard displays (which they would normally toss). They make great displays for book reports and even dioramas. You can also get free posters and informational booklets through government embassies and consulates (listed in many phone books) or their tourist offices. For information on states, write to the chamber of commerce in the state capital.

Tip #27: FREE Computers!

The U.S. Department of Defense operates an Educational Institutions Partnership Program (EIPP) that offers used computer equipment to eligible schools. Requests are handled by the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA). Contact: Defense Information Systems Agency, Automation Resources Information Center, Educational Institutions Partnership Program (EIPP), 701 S. Courthouse Road, Arlington, VA 22204-2199. Or email them at daric-eipp@cc.ims.disa.daric

Tip #28: FREE Reading Performances by a Professional Actor!

Who better to make the magic of reading come alive than professional actors, gifted in the art of storytelling? BookPALS— an all-volunteer team consisting exclusively of professional actors (SAG, AFTRA, and EQUITY members)—read aloud to children at public elementary schools and at-risk neighborhoods, helping introduce them to a world of reading and literacy. BookPALS has branches across the country. For more information visit www.bookpals.net or call (323) 549-6709

Tip #29: Jump ropes, posters, videos, and lesson plans are available through the American Heart Association's Jump Rope for Heart program. For details, call 800/AHA-USA1.

Tip #30: NASA Education Horizons provides inexpensive classroom resources dealing with space. Write to NASA, Education Division, Mail Code SEO-2, Washington, DC 20546-0001.

Tip #31: The National Geographic Society provides teaching kits, posters, and classrooms guides. Write to: NGS, Educational Services, Dept. 90, 1145 17th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Tip #32: Stickers-N-Stuff—For a package of free stickers, write to Stickers-N-Stuff, P.O. Box 430, Louisville, CO 80027. Enclose \$1 for shipping and handling.

Tip #33: National Gardening Association— Plants, seeds, and tools are available to schools with a gardening program. For an application, send your name, school address, and phone number to the association at Youth Garden Grants, 180 Flynn Ave., Burlington, VT 05401 or call 800/538-7476.

Tip #34: The Smithsonian Resource Guide for Teachers lists lesson plans, posters, videos, and teaching packets for free or little cost. Send \$5 to: Smithsonian Institute, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Arts & Industries Bldg., Room 1163, MRC 402, Washington, DC 20560.

Tip #35: Participation Tickets

Try using a set of tickets that are pre-made and have the children's names on them for participation. Keep them in a basket in the front of the classroom. Whenever you are calling on students to recite, pull out a name. You can use the tickets throughout the day until every child has a chance to participate.

Tip #36: Leap-Frog Repeating

Here's a way to increase students' listening skills. When you find a student who has a correct answer, have them say it aloud, *and then* have a student sitting nearby repeat the answer. If that student says it correctly, then ask another student to repeat it. If any student has trouble saying it correctly, the previous student in the thread says it again. In this leap-frog repeating method, everyone has a chance to know the answer.

Tip #37: Participation Popsicle Sticks

Try using Popsicle sticks to encourage 100% class participation. Write the names of all your students on Popsicle sticks and hand them out at the beginning of each class. As they answer questions correctly, they surrender their sticks. You can take answers first from the students who have sticks to make sure that everyone gets a chance to participate.

Tip #38: Questions First

Many times teachers will call on a student and ask them a question. To have the whole class thinking about the question, try asking the question first and then call on the student.

Tip #39: Clips in a Bucket

To make sure all your students are included when you review material, write their names on clothespins and clip them all around a bucket. Now you can ask a question, choose a clip, and then throw it in the bucket. This is a great way to keep track of who's been chosen each day.

Tip #40: The Paper Shuffle

Here's a technique for allowing kids to try new ideas in a risk-free setting. Have your students write an idea or answer on a piece of paper without putting down their name. Then, ask them to pass their paper around without leaving their seat. Your students will love the frenzy as papers are passed from one to another. When you say "stop," the students keep the paper that is in front of them. Then, call on random students for the answer on their paper. No one is embarrassed even if the answer is off-the-mark because only the author knows who wrote the answer.

Tip #41: Response Signals

Instead of having students raise their hands to answer questions, try other signals. Using thumbs up or down, response cards, fingers to signal an answer with choices or heads up/heads down allows all students to participate in answering questions. This also provides a risk-free environment (because they are all answering) so students can try to answer all of the questions asked. This gives you a chance to see all the students' responses instead of just a few.

Tip #42: Shuffle the Cards

Another way to avoid calling on the same students is to put each student's name on an index card. Throughout the year, you can continue to shuffle the cards and use them to call on students. Absences or

other needed information can also be recorded. This can help with your record keeping and keep students on their toes since they never know when they may be called on to answer. It also ensures that ALL students participate and no one is left behind.

Tip #43: Hand on the Heart

Instead of asking students to raise their hands, ask your students to put their hand on their hearts when they would like to share something. For some classrooms it is far less disruptive than raising hands.

Tip #44: Lesson Objectives

Give your students a copy of the objective(s) for each lesson. You may phrase objectives like: *'By the time you finish class today you will be able to...'* Each objective is then followed by one or two supporting facts that will be covered in the lesson. When it comes time to study for the tests, students can use these sheets as review tools.

Tip #45: Eliminate the *Pick Me!* Blues

It happens in many classrooms. When you need a chore to assign, the class erupts in “Pick me!” Instead, assign weekly monitors. Choose a clerk, a librarian, a folder monitor and a custodian. The clerk passes out papers, the librarian calls the children by row to put away their book, the folder monitor passes out folders and the custodian gets the kids to pick up their trash. There are a million ways to do this. If someone is absent, the substitute is always the person who had that job the previous week. You can keep a spreadsheet checklist and no one can have a second monitor job until everyone has had a turn.

Tip #46: Right Side of Paper

Making sure lined paper is flipped to the correct side can be an endless headache. To help students learn which side of the paper to use, try applying white (loose leaf notebook) reinforcement stickers on student desks. In this way students can match up the stickers with their paper to know they are using the right side. When students are learning to print, make a couple of holes in the primary paper. This works for early cursive writers, too!

Tip #47: Extra Copy Box

Sometimes students step out in the middle of class for calls to the office, music lessons, or a visit to the nurse— and they miss the assignment hand-out. Try putting a box in your room labeled “extra copies.” After you pass out worksheets, put 10 extra copies in the box for students to use. When a student comes back to your room and notices the class working on a sheet, that student knows to go to the “extra copy” box and get the sheet. You can post all assignments on your backboard so they can check to see what they missed and do not have. Try leaving assignments up for two weeks. This can eliminate class interruptions and makes students responsible for catching up on work they miss. Also, students may ask to recopy a worksheet because it is sloppy and they want to do it over. Just tell them to go to the “extra copy” box and get another copy.

Tip #48: Writing Assignment Chart

Easily manage computer time for publishing. On a large chart paper (you can call it 'Papers to Publish') list your students' names and put a Post-it note with the title of their story or project next to the student who is ready to publish. Students cannot take down their Post-it note until they have turned in their published work. This chart lets you see in a glance where your students are and what they need to complete.

Tip #49: Color Coding Lesson Plans

Try color-coding your lesson plans! Use a yellow marker to highlight the unit, chapter and lesson headings as well as objectives and the core curriculum standards being emphasized for the week. When

you complete each lesson, use an orange marker to show what has been completed. It'll keep you on track and a substitute can see just where to begin the day's work.

Tip #50: More Post-it Ideas

Post-Its are an excellent and inexpensive way to have students reach information in their textbooks quickly and easily. They can be moved daily as they progress in their textbooks and they will not damage the print of the book. You can also write in pen or pencil on the flag to specifically identify a section of the book. You'll also find them handy in your grade book. *Note to Primary Teachers:* When asking parents to make donations to the class at the beginning of the year, ask for Post-Its.

Tip #51: Returning Library Books

Sometimes little ones forget to return their library books. To help your K and 1st graders remember, send them home with a sticker that says "*Help me find my library book.*" You can use ordinary mailing labels. And, with a computer and clip art, you can get very creative. Teachers who use this technique say the next-day return rate skyrockets.

Tip #52: U-Layout

Try taking your students out of their traditional rows and place them into "U"s. Make two rows of "U"s one behind the other with a space in the center to walk through. You may find passing out assignments is easier—just reach over the student in the front U to get to a student in the back U. Students can have a buddy on each side to help them with what they don't understand. And, another benefit of this layout is that it opens up room in the middle of the classroom. This allows you to get closer to your students and provide for more area for the students to do presentations.

Do you have your own great tips you want to share? E-mail them to SDEinfo@sde.com.



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