

Laughter & Learning

Remember when learning was supposed to be fun? Try these 4 simple ideas for increasing laughter and humor in your classroom, and let's bring back the fun.

Transition Cartoons:

Your students are working in pairs or groups. You've asked for eyes on you, and most are, but not all. You don't want to yell or become frustrated over a few non-compliers. So you project a multi-panel comic strip or a series of 3-4 single panel cartoons on the overhead screen and begin reading. When you are done, all eyes are up front, kids are laughing or smiling (or groaning) and you are ready to move on.



Tips from Trenches- Physiologically, the brain can't tell the difference between fake laughter and real laughter. Both produce an endorphin release, which elevates mood. Both increase circulation, which sharpens attention. So if your students won't laugh at your cartoons (or your jokes) just ask them to. *"Come on folks. I'm trying here. Can I at least get a nice fake laugh?"*

Legal Joke Time:

"KNOCK KNOCK."
"WHO'S THERE?"
"BROKEN PENCIL."
"BROKEN PENCIL WHO?"
"NEVERMIND, IT'S POINTLESS."

If students are particularly well-behaved and on-task, offer them a few minutes of "joke time" between lessons or at the end of a lesson as a reward. This is time where several students can volunteer to tell the class a "clean" joke. Make sure you have one to add as well. Students love it when teachers try to tell jokes. After hearing a few, and everyone is laughing, move on to the next part of the lesson or to dismissal.

Tips from the Trenches- It may be necessary to teach students a "Joke Recovery" procedure so that they can calm down and re-focus when joke time is over. For example, first tell students you can only continue to offer joke time if they can be appropriate and get back to work afterwards. Then create a non-verbal gesture, like tugging your ear, that indicates time for laughter and silliness to stop and silence is to begin. Teach and practice the procedure with students by telling a few pretend jokes and tugging your ear so they can practice stopping when they see your non-verbal cue. Then try it in real time with real jokes and de-brief the procedure to reinforce.

Assessment Humor:

On multiple choice tests, always have one of the 4 answer choices be something silly or ridiculous. This adds levity and lowers stress during the inherently stressful task of “test taking.” OR... have students create quiz questions with humorous answers based on some bit of new content you taught them.

Why didn't the plant make oxygen from sunlight?

It was too shy to have it's PHOTO-synthesis taken.

Why did the car slow down?

Because it saw a comma coming.

Which of the following correctly describes the solution to question #7?

- A: The solution is a positive number
- B: The solution is a negative number
- C: The solution was eaten by my dog
- D: The solution is not a number

Have students create riddles, puns, or jokes using key vocabulary words or key concepts. OR have students make up jokes that use key vocabulary words in the punch-line.

Content Humor:



The Story of the Quadratic Formula:

Let me tell you about my ex. He was a very negative boy who couldn't make up his mind whether or not he would go to a radical party. He had to decide, would he be there or be square? He decided to be square and he didn't go. But he regretted this negative decision because there were four awesome chicks there and the whole thing was over by 2am.

Turn your lecture into a humorous story “*Once upon a time there was a lonely blood cell named Red who went on an amazing adventure through the body...*” Or have your students re-tell a piece of content as a humorous story.

Let me tell you about my **ex (x)**. He **was (=)** a very **negative boy (-b)** who **couldn't make up his mind (+/-)** whether or not he would go to a **radical (square root)** party. He had to decide, would he be there or be square? He decided to **be square (b squared)** and he didn't go. But he regretted this **negative decision (-)** because there were **four awesome chicks (4ac)** there and the whole thing **was over (divided by)** by **2am (2a)**.

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$