

Gotchas and Gorillas: **Appendix B**

SAMPLE GOTCHAS AND GORILLAS

GOTCHAS

Thomas:

This year I have had great success building in better routines and directions. It was very easy to assume that students would understand my intentions last year. Needless to say, it was a rude awakening. Now that I know how to get my message across in regards to expectations, I can spend more class time on issues that matter. A prime example of this would be my "bell ringer" activities. Last year I assumed that students would march in, sit down, and get to work on whatever I had on the overhead. In reality, the overhead might as well be in the classroom down the hall. It took time to teach the expectations behind an opening activity, but it has paid off. Now I can expect students to get to work because I communicated that expectation to them.

Sarah:

Getting to the school by 6:30 AM has changed my life! Trust me, I'm not a morning person, but this really works!

Ami:

"Get the King off the top of the Hill"

I have found that in almost all my classes I have a "king" or "ringleader." He/she likes to act out and get everyone off task. Once I have identified them and managed their behavior (usually by moving them, seating them in the hallway, speaking with them outside, etc.), the rest of the class falls in line.

Jody:

My gotcha stems from one of my earlier gorillas--what to do with those whining students? I told all of my students I would hear them out if they brought to me a reasonable concern and some valid reasons to back it up. This stopped a lot of senseless complaining. For those that were brave enough, they found out the conversation was much easier and results more pleasant if they came to me with intelligent things to say. They also quickly found out that they'd better do their homework and be prepared to defend their argument.

Robin:

My current gotcha: I am really settling into a groove with my teaching. I have my grading under control and get to spend time with my own children sometimes. I also have been able to try new things in my classroom and I even remembered to give out some Pride Tickets today.

Just a week ago I was still stressed out about covering all of the curriculum for the school year and now I am more at peace about teaching for understanding.

GORILLAS

Nikki:

My gorilla is keeping the higher kids interested, while trying to teach the lower kids. So much of my curriculum is easy and most kids get it right away, but not everyone (of course). I struggle with challenging some, but making sure the rest "get it."

Thomas:

I would say the most stressful part of being an English teacher is falling behind with grading. Once papers start to pile up my whole routine is thrown out of synch. More time spent grading papers results in less time spent planning. This lack of attention often results in more assignments and the cycle continues. It also takes away from the "downtime" that should balance the stresses of the classroom. Taking a stack of papers home every night is not a great way to relax. Not to mention it only gets worse if you neglect the stack in favor of a few hours of rest and relaxation.

I have tried a multitude of strategies to alleviate the stress of excess grading. I have trimmed certain assignments to the bone, making sure that I focus on key points rather than everything under the sun. I have focused the bulk of my attention on formative and summative assessments rather than practice. However, it is still easy to fall behind. This inevitably results in a Sunday spent indoors, huddled over a stack of essays.

Andrea:

One of my greatest weaknesses is that I need to do a better job at assessment whether it be formal or non-formal. I always have some way of assessing, but I am not as good as using that form and actually gathering some sort of "data" to see what they actually learned. For example, I will have an assignment for practice, they turn it in, I spend too much time planning what I am going to do next, and don't get that assignment graded in enough time for it to still be fresh in their brains! This may just be an efficiency issue :)

Nikki:

HOMEWORK!!! I only assign homework 1-2 times per week. The homework usually takes about 10 minutes. Many of my students refuse to do it. I have tried rewarding those that do it in front of those that don't (PRIDE tickets, candy, etc.), but that still doesn't work. I have tried lunch detention for those who don't do their work and they still don't do it. How do I motivate them to do it especially when parents aren't really involved?

Robin:

My current Gorilla is that several of my students do nothing. They don't do any assignments. School is not important to them, their social life is much more important. Last quarter I had students come in for lunch detention if they were missing 2 or more assignments. Well, this quarter I have not been enforcing that policy. I still have students in my room everyday at lunch, but they are the ones that want extra help or want to retake a quiz. Due to this change I now have 5 times more D's and F's in my class. How do you handle students that won't do anything?

Sarah:

Gorilla: I have 3 students with Aspergers and I find that I can't keep up with their needs as well as spend those extra minutes with those kids who just need a boost in their self-esteem (not to mention my 2 ADHD kids). As a result, those students who are being ignored are now picking on my students with Aspergers. There is only so much of me to go around! I've spoken with my principal about assistants for those students, but she said they are cutting all extra assistants not being used for students with severe disabilities.

What ever social skills they may acquire are out-weighed by the disruption and dysfunction produced. Students feel imposed upon by the needs of the few. Their goals are social and not academic and we are at a loss has to how to change it.

Andrea:

Gorilla: I HATE CALLING HOME! I don't know if it is because there is a huge Spanish speaking population where I am, but I am terrified of it! Any suggestions?

Nikki:

Lately, I have been so overwhelmed by everything I have to do. Teaching, coaching, tutoring, and trying to have a personal life. Even after a long and relaxing spring break, I'm right back to where I was before. I always get my stuff done, but I just stress too much. I try keep my weekends free so that I can really have some time to relax and that seems to help. Let's just say I'm excited for summer!