

Building Effective Classrooms in Grades 7&8 Tips from 2nd Year Teachers & Mentors



(1) Be Prepared and Proactive

SUMMER POSTCARDS

- Get a class list with mailing address and phone numbers. You can send students and parents a post card in August introducing yourself to them, include what you've done over the summer, how much you are looking forward to meeting them and what they should bring with them the first day of school.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

- Write a letter to students, introducing yourself and giving information about your summer and outline briefly what you have planned. Make extras for those students that enroll that day or that week. Ask students to write a reply to you by the end of the week, thereby getting your first writing sample.

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS

- Introduce yourself to the secretary and the caretaker. If they are your best friends you will find life to be much easier.
- Find out when you are able to enter the school in August. This is an exciting time to set up your room. Bring your mom or a good friend to help you out. During this time go around and introduce yourself to other teachers, as they can be very helpful. Change the fadeless paper on your bulletin boards, set up seats and tables, and organize materials (paper, markers, etc.)
- Approach your principal and ask if you can have a mentor (this person will be your fundamental support system. It is often helpful to have someone who teaches the same grade as you, however; if you 'click' with someone else it will still work. It is most important to have a mentor you are comfortable with.
- Some teachers look through students' OSRs (Ontario Student Records) to learn about their students. You can find out whether or not they have an I.E.P. (individual Education Plan), past marks, behavioural patterns, etc. However, some teachers do not like to predetermine what their students will be like. Students grow throughout the summer and you may not want to make assumptions on their abilities or behaviours. Some teachers prefer to get to know their students for a month and then look at the OSRs.

- Learn your student's names - there is nothing sweeter than hearing your own name and students will react positively.
- Make sure you have all materials as far as teacher guides, curriculum documents, etc.
- Access TEL (similar to First Class) and make sure you get someone to teach you how to use it.
- Ask questions, all teachers have been in your position, they know how you feel.



(2) Establishing Classroom Rules and Routines

IDEAL CLASSROOM

- What does the ideal classroom look like, sound like, feel like? On chart paper divided into three sections based on looks like, sounds like, feels like, students work in groups to brainstorm ideas for each section. As a class, use the ideas generated in groups to make a set of classroom rules.

SCAVENGER HUNT

- familiarize students with physical environment. "Find locker #110, open it with combination...", " Say hello to the Librarian and have him/her sign the sheet"

SHARED OWNERSHIP OF CLASS RULES

- Let students have ownership on making rules.
- Give one piece of chart paper to each table group (if students are not in groups, form some for this activity).
- Have students brainstorm rules they wish to have in their classroom.
- Enforce that brainstorming accepts all ideas and students should write rules down in a positive manner (rules should start with "do" and not "don't.")
- Once students are finished, take up the rules as a class.
- That night make signs or a poster that outlines four broad basic categories Some teachers find that the TRIBES rules are highly effective: Appreciation/No Put Downs, Attentive Listening, Mutual Respect, Participation and The Right to Pass.
 - Then the next day tell students that you took all of their rules and placed them under each category (you don't have to list them; too many rules posted create confusion). As a class, go over each category and discuss which rules go under which category. When a student misbehaves, point to which category the misbehaviour suits and remind them that they played a hand in making the rules.

- All agreements are put up in class (visible) and in kid friendly language

CLASSROOM JOB BOARD

- Students can come up with jobs, rotates every week/month (use of pocket charts or circle chart)

BODY CONTRACT

- Gather all the kids together, explain to them that you will be making a contract and what a contract is (your class expectations for the year)
- Draw an outline of a person, give the person a name i.e BOB
- Brainstorm with students what things can be written inside the BOB outline that would create a positive atmosphere for our classroom i.e. honesty, punctuality, respect). Emphasize that it is our classroom responsibility to keep BOB healthy.
- On the outside of the body, brainstorm all of the things that could harm BOB and write them down on the outside i.e. lying, tattling, incomplete work, not following routines, etc.
- Explain that in order to keep BOB healthy and not have all these bad things penetrate him, we as a class will act as the immune system for BOB. The only way for the immune system to work is that we (class) follow all the things written inside of BOB's body.
- After talking about it, the students all sign around BOB's body as if they are the immune system protecting against the bad things. Hence this will act as the contract for the class throughout the year. You can then refer to this at all times by hanging it in a visible location.
- Talk about when the contract is broken and class consequences.

ESTABLISH A SIGNAL

- Review what signal you will use to get their attention... e.g. put your hand up, count down from three, wind chimes, allowing students to quickly wrap up. Praise students who are following the expectations



(3) Inclusion Building Activities (First Day/First Week/First Month)

COMMUNITY CIRCLE

- Class sits in a circle, go around the circle and take turns speaking, keeping in mind the Four Agreements. This provides opportunity for sharing and reflection. Topics to

discuss should initially be non-threatening e.g., favourite food, favourite movie, first day jitters, how the first day went - making friends, what you learned, etc.

PICTORIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- In very simple pictures, draw the major events of your life on the blackboard. Have students read it back to you using the pictures then ask students in pairs to do the same thing, they could present to each other to the class time permitting.

PARTNER INTRODUCTION

- by sticker match-up, use an interview sheet with basic questions in order to focus activity, as students walk into the classroom they are given stickers on their hand that match with one other student in the classroom, when activity begins they are to find the sticker that matches them, they will present their partner to the rest of the class.

SNOWBALL

- students sit in a circle and write a getting to know you question on a piece of paper, crumple up paper, toss into the middle of the circle, students pick up a snowball and read question and answer it out loud going around the circle, can continue to play by throwing snowballs back in the circle

HUMAN BINGO

- give students a bingo sheet with a variety of categories, such as find someone who has two brothers and a sister and find someone who went to Wonderland this summer, students mingle throughout the classroom to find someone different for each of the categories, the students complete sheet wins Bingo

CELEBRITY GUESSING GAME

- students write the name of a celebrity on a post-it note and teacher sticks them on the back of students, students mingle and have to ask questions in order to find out who their celebrity is and then at the end can make a guess

PROFILE ART

- Profile Art #1, as a class students agree on a legend in order to complete profile, for example, if you are a boy you will have a square face, if you are from another country you will have a triangle nose, if you like hot dogs you will have wavy hair, etc.
- Profile Art #2, give students a template of their profile and have students decorate it with things that are important to them, for example, friends, family, subjects, hobbies, pets, etc.

ACROSTIC POEM

- have students use their name in order to make an acrostic poem, for example, JIM - Jokester, Independent, Magnificent ;)

WHO AM I

- Have student write about where they are now and where they want to be in the future. Keep it and review it with the students later in the year.