

Boot Camp Activities

Day 1: I share my “backpack,” an “All About Mrs. May” slide deck, which shows me as a person, not a teacher. I also pass out a worksheet called “All About Me” so I can learn who the students are both in and outside of school. They complete this (either as homework or in class) and I only count it as a Work Habit score. Some years I give students time to complete the worksheet in class because some schools don’t give homework.

Days 2-10: I begin the “Trust and Respect” slide deck.

A few specific activities from these early days include the following.

- **Lip Syncing:** I choose three rowdy boys to be brave, put on boas and pink sunglasses, and learn to lip sync Aretha Franklin’s “Respect” song by modeling it first. I teach the “audience” to be supportive by cheering and clapping for their classmates’ willingness to display bravery in front of their peers. This teaches that vulnerability is encouraged because our classroom is a safe place to demonstrate that trait. It also shows how being silly and having controlled fun is acceptable in our room.
- **Role Playing:** To teach *The Four Agreements* (Ruiz, 1997), I choose brave students to help me role play the wrong way to act in class. This is an extremely popular and engaging activity because I tell the actors to go all out. Seeing the ways things shouldn’t be and discussing how to make these mistakes right are huge teachable moments. I tell them I expect them to make mistakes and then I explain that it’s what they do afterward that is the most important part of each scenario. Groups discuss people who are affected by the mistake (other students, the teacher, and so on) and then brainstorm what will make it right. It’s a powerful activity.
- **Brain Breaks:** After thirty minutes of sitting down, the blood pools in your bottom and in your feet. Explaining this fun fact to my students gives me the opportunity to teach them three different brain breaks, which helps with better blood flow to their brains. I use them often when the class feels lethargic or before an assignment that requires sharp brainpower.
- **Writing Expectations:** I have students in groups writing answers on small whiteboards. I teach them that no matter when and what they write, I have expectations for One Good Sentence (OGS)—an updated version of the art of the sentence (Lemov, 2021)—using capital letters at the beginning, complete sentences that restate the question, and a period at the end. I also teach them CPUGS (capitalization, punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling, which a student of mine created in 2012). After each question, the whiteboard rotates to the next teammate. All other teammates need to make sure the writer did OGS and CPUGS correctly . . . no one can put 100 percent of the blame on the writer. This activity lets my students know my writing expectations for everything they do.

- **Money Demonstration:** This activity is a great visual for explaining equity versus equality. I hang two \$2 bills (because most students haven't seen them, so they're novel) on a string with a paper clip, both are hanging at the same height, up quite high. Then I ask, "Who wants some money?" I purposely choose the tallest student whose hand is raised to volunteer. They walk to the hanging money. I tell them to grab either of the \$2 bills. They grab one and I congratulate them for a job well done. Everyone claps and the student walks back confused at what they did so well. Then, I again ask, "Who wants some money?" I now choose the shortest student whose hand is up. I tell them to grab the remaining \$2 bill. When they go to jump for it, I respond by saying, "No, no, no, no. You can't jump. The other person didn't have to jump to get their money." I've had kids try to grab a desk to stand on, recruit a taller friend to help, use something to throw at the money, and so on, but each time I stop them and remind them that the other student didn't have any help. At this point, the whole class is yelling that this is not fair because the other student is shorter and the money is too high for them. I remind them that they always want their teachers to be fair with everyone in class, and I'm just trying to be fair. They gripe about how that's actually unfair. I then ask them what the student needs to successfully accomplish the task. They always say they need to step up on something higher. I've previously planted a step ladder in my room, and I tell the student to look around to find something other than a desk because that isn't safe. All their peers are yelling and pointing to the stepladder, so they go get it and grab the money with lots of applause from the room. I then ask the class why I would do this demonstration and give away my money. What was the point? They can always name it: Not everyone can do the same thing; sometimes they need a little help or other type of support. I then show the slide explaining the difference between equity and equality. I also explain that sometimes they won't see the help and support I offer them, but sometimes they will; no matter what, I ask them to trust that I know what's best for each student so they can be successful. Then, throughout the year, when students start to think that something isn't fair, I point to the ceiling where we did this demonstration and remind students of the "money" activity. They immediately recall the reason I may be doing something different for a student, and the questioning and feelings retract. It's the greatest visual lesson, which I learned from my co-teaching partner.