



# Classroom Connections

Linking National Middle School Association to middle level classrooms around the world

Every teacher who enters a middle school classroom aspires to be great. Each person brings knowledge of curriculum, some teaching experience, and a long list of college coursework. However, to truly understand young adolescents, you must first come to understand why they do the things they do and what makes them connect with you in the classroom. This edition of *Classroom Connections* focuses on how to be a great middle school teacher. Whether you are an experienced teacher or new to the profession, take these helpful hints to heart.



## Rules for Being a Middle School Teacher

### Rule 1. Never take it personally.

There are times when young adolescents will act out toward you. They may even say things that are inappropriate. They may comment on your attire, mention something hanging from your nose, or giggle over your new haircut. Try not to take it personally. In many cases, this is a power play. They tend to look for the smallest changes or flaws and pounce on them with vigor and excitement. The best thing to do is laugh it off. Don't be afraid to approach them if their comments are out of line. Often, they are just being playful or looking for ways to aggravate you or get your attention.

### Rule 2. Patience, patience, patience!

At times this will be very difficult, especially when you have to answer the same question over and over again. For example, you may hear these questions when you're in the hall: "What are we doing today?" "Are we going to do anything fun today?" Your response might be, "I will tell you and the rest of the class what we're going to do when class begins." Before you answer that way, think about this: The young adolescent might really be saying that he or she is looking forward to your class. The problem is that most middle school students will not walk up to you and say, "I am so looking forward to your class. I am sure the lesson will be well-planned and meet the objective outlined on the board."

### Rule 3. Always have plenty of activities, assignments, and items to share.

Down time in a middle school class can lead to chaos. Be prepared for students who finish early. Consider setting up the lesson with follow up activities. These should not be busy work. Alternative readings or activities will enhance the lesson and provide more background knowledge.

#### Ideas for students who finish early:

- Read a newspaper editorial and write a response.
- Do a Web search on the topic being studied and share information with the class.
- Add material to the class Web site.
- Update your portfolio.
- Read a magazine or news article that interests you.



**Rule 4. Be creative when having students work independently.**

One of the biggest frustrations for teachers is getting adolescents to work by themselves. How many times do you hear, “Can I work with a friend?” Then when you let them, you hear, “I am the one doing all the work. They just copy my answers.”

**Rule 5. Understand current pop culture.**

Many times, middle school students look for ways to stand out and be different. They do this through hairstyles, music, language, and clothing. Being able to understand their love of certain pop culture fads helps you make a connection. So, go see the most recent adolescent movie, listen to a different radio station once in a while, or watch a television show that has the young adolescents abuzz!

**Idea to Try!**

Try this when you want students to work alone:

1. Walk in the room and tell the students that by the end of the period they must have obtained 50 points.
2. Place on the board various assignments for which you've noted different point values. Describe the assignments and let students know that they can select any of the assignments as long as they add up to 50 points. You need to list 7-10 assignments of various levels. More complicated tasks that require extra time, research, or expanded answers should have higher point values.
3. Update the class on the remaining time every 10 to 20 minutes. Make sure everyone is moving along.

This activity works great when reviewing a lesson or topic. Be sure to consider technology when creating some of the tasks. You may need to suggest specific assignments to some students. You will know what's best for your students.



**More Resources**



- *H.E.L.P. for Teachers* by Judith Baenen and Jack Berckemeyer  
Perfect for every staff member in your school. Topics include working as a team, understanding young adolescents, and more.



- *Day One and Beyond* by Rick Wormeli  
Filled with practical ideas and strategies for every middle level teacher.



- *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*  
National Middle School Association's position paper that defines the 14 characteristics of successful schools serving middle grades students. Includes a chapter on young adolescent development.



- “This I Believe” (poster and flyer)  
A perfect reminder of our commitment to the education and well-being of young adolescents. This should be posted on every teacher's bulletin board.

Call **1-800-528-NMSA (6672)** or visit **www.nmsa.org** for more information or to order these resources.



*Classroom Connections* is published by National Middle School Association (NMSA) as part of our ongoing commitment to middle level education. For more information about NMSA, to purchase multiple copies, or if you have an idea for a future issue, please call 1-800-528-NMSA. Visit us at [www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org).

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