

## Substitute Teacher, Have You Prepared?

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Being a substitute teacher is one of the great ironies in life. All the devious and tricky things you once pulled on your own substitute teachers will come back tenfold. When in elementary school, nothing compared to having a complete stranger come into the classroom and attempt to uphold order while ensuring the daily work was done. No matter how young the students, they understand that as a complete stranger in their classroom community, the sub is at a disadvantage. Success is largely determined by the preparation of the permanent teacher. It has been my experience that the more organized the teacher, the more fun the substitute will have. Following a few simple guidelines will ensure that the sub has a productive day and that the homeroom teacher comes back to a smoothly running classroom.

The cardinal rule for both homeroom and substitute teachers is to assume nothing. Aspects of the classroom that are obvious to the homeroom teacher are new and unfamiliar to the sub. While preparing before class during one of my substitute teaching adventures, it took me over ten minutes to find the socials unit for the day. While the chapter had been named in the lesson plan, there was no indication as to the name of the unit or where the packet was located. I ended up locating the plain, unmarked folder on a shelf, wedged between other binders and notebooks. Although a student would have eventually helped me to find the packet, this is the type of information that the homeroom teacher should provide. Book titles for subjects and their locations are important, but other items should also be identified. Seating charts, student chore schedules and yard duty rotations all come in handy during a substitute teacher's day. Make sure these are placed in an eye-catching folder in an easily reached location. This packet will help to smooth out technical bumps throughout the day.

Another point of concern for both homeroom and substitute teachers is the behaviour strategy of the classroom. Every teacher does it differently; some use cards while others write names on the board. Whatever the system is, the substitute teacher will probably appreciate a crash course in its operation. What sort of behaviour warrants certain consequences? Are there patterns of negative behaviour that the class has recently struggled with? Students often look for ways to bend the rules when a substitute teacher is in charge. "Our teacher always lets us do that" is a phrase that frequently weasels its way into conversation with the new teacher. Unless the rules are made known, substitute teachers can fall victim to this tried and true strategy. On the other hand, a few clues as to what motivates the students are also handy. Maybe reading aloud a chapter of a novel or playing a quick game of bingo inspires the students to work quickly and quietly. Both the homeroom and substitute teachers need to have shared knowledge of the way the classroom runs in order to have a reasonable amount of control over the group.

Finally, substitute teachers need to be aware of their support system. Names of the principal, teachers of the same grade and support teachers come in handy when looking for answers to questions that arise during the day. It's reassuring to know that there is someone down the hall who knows what the Social Studies packet looks like.

Substitute teachers are a vital resource, but they can't do everything on their own. They rely on the organization and foresight of the homeroom teacher to provide them with the tools they need to have a productive day. Together with the homeroom and support staff, the substitute teacher can provide a great learning environment, one in which the students do not see the substitute teacher as a substitute for

learning.