

Commercials of Humour

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When you go to the zoo, what animals attract you most? Is it the funny animals that do crazy antics like the monkeys, polar bears or seals, or is it the bizarre animals that seem to confound the imagination like the giraffe, the kangaroo or the ostrich? Being relatively new to the teaching profession, I am beginning to appreciate the difficulty teachers had maintaining my interest and keeping me focused in class. And when I think back to the classes that I gained the most from, it was frequently the classes that were filled with humour and laughter. Taking a page from these great visionaries before me, I've tried it...and so far it seems to work.

The health benefits of humour are undeniable. Notable research has been conducted by Dr. Berk and Dr. Tan at Loma Linda University indicating that laughing lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, boosts the immune system by raising fighter T-cells and B-cells while triggering release of endorphins and giving you a good workout. By adding laughter to your classroom, you can increase students' attention and motivation as well as allow them to be more creative. According to Kathleen McNally "Taking humor seriously: the comic side of the classroom", students are willing to take risks in the learning process since mistakes are more acceptable in this atmosphere. A 1999 Athens State University School of Education column stated, "Teachers who have a strong humor orientation and are 'immediate' tend to have students who learn more in the classroom."

I can think back to situations where in an effort to keep up with the curriculum, I droned on endlessly lecturing as fast as I could. I would look up to see the glazed eyes of students fighting to stay awake and comprehend the biology I was talking about. Something was needed to bring the students back, rejuvenate and excite them...what better than a commercial break? Today's TV generation are used to them, why not use them. So I started inserting funny stories that tie into lecture every now and again. When the concepts were tough, I'd use crazy demonstrations that make them laugh. Things like singing with helium balloons when showing how the respiratory system works immediately brought student interest alive. I find questions come fast and furious and learning happens. Currently, I go so far as to insert slides into my PowerPoint at the end of sections that just let students have a good laugh, and allow them to relax (finding clean humorous sites is not always easy; one of the better ones is www.ebaumsworld.com although heavy censorship is still required). In all, when humor is present I find the students are alive. They think, ask questions and seem to process information more effectively because they are interested. This year in your classroom incorporate time to laugh. If nothing else, you will improve everyone's health.

There is no doubt in my mind that God has a great sense of humour, just look around at nature and think of your favorite animals at the zoo. I bet you'll find the ones that maintain your interest and you learn about the weird or funny ones.

Unable to end this Teachers Talk without a smile, I'll leave you with a few of the winners of the "worst analogies used in high school essays" contest. Enjoy :)

His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.

The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't.

From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and "Jeopardy" comes on at 7 p.m. instead of 7:30.

Her eyes were like two brown circles with big black dots in the center.

Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.

He was as tall as a six-foot-three-inch tree.

Long separated by cruel fate, the star-crossed lovers raced across the grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left Cleveland at 6:36 p.m. traveling at 55 mph, the other from Topeka at 4:19 p.m. at a speed of 35 mph.

John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.

Resources:

- http://www.education.umd.edu/College_Bulletin/newtechnotes/edhumor299.html)