

Substitute Teaching?

Everything you need to get the students on your side and teach them too!
Ready-to-use tools, tips, and lesson ideas for every grade from K-8

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Introduction

Substitute teaching can be a great job where both you and the students really enjoy the day and look forward to the next time you can be together. Of course, some days it seems like you are simply surviving. Or barely surviving (I think I need some chocolate!). This can be especially true when you first start substitute teaching, because it is very different from being a permanent teacher. You need to be excellent at classroom management, without the benefit of having an ongoing relationship with the students and without the benefit of being able to enforce consequences. Students know you will not be marking their work or writing their report cards, calling their parents, or—heaven forbid—moving their desks away from their friends!

Despite these difficulties, you do not have to simply survive the days. You can make it fun—get silly or get the kids laughing. They also will give you plenty of stories to keep you and your friends amused and entertained! Students can have fun while they learn. You can have a fulfilling career. Your attitude and your approach make all the difference. It takes practice and you will get better at it as you work on it. But you can have really successful days from the moment you decide to have fun.

Substitute teaching can be simple. You don't have to carry around a big bag of supplies, or have half a dozen premade lesson plans, or take copious amounts of notes. It doesn't have to be difficult or take up a lot of your time before or after school. A few items in your bag and an emergency plan for when the teacher is unable to leave a day plan is all you need. This is one of the great things about substitute teaching—it is neither as complicated nor as much work as a permanent teaching job. It is pretty simple: you go to school about 15 minutes before it starts and leave about 15 minutes after it ends. No fuss, no muss, no planning, no meetings, no headaches because you're in the room beside instrumental music all year!

Admittedly, there are things that are difficult in substitute teaching. But these things can be made simple. Having strategies in place to handle students who won't do their work or who won't listen makes things a lot easier.

You got into teaching because you wanted to make a difference in kids' lives, right? You wanted to make a difference in the world. You wanted to help kids know who they are and who they want to be. You wanted to encourage them to

be their best and help them learn and overcome difficulties. And just maybe you wanted to be like that teacher who really affected your life.

This can seem difficult when you see different students every day. But you can still make a difference—a big difference—in students' lives. In the past, students have seen bad substitute teachers. How do you think we got the reputation we have? Those teachers yelled—a lot—and didn't care about the students. Students can tell if someone cares about them or not. When you go in and you actually care, it makes a difference. You have a whole day to influence the students. It is stressful for students to have a substitute teacher, and you can make their day better by being a great one—or just one who doesn't completely suck! When you have fun and help students learn, it makes a huge difference in their day. You never know—something you say to encourage them might be the thing they needed that day, or that year. It might be the thing they will remember years from now as a turning point in their lives. You just don't know what effect you have.

This book answers the questions: How do I teach students and enjoy it? (Isn't that what we all want? Besides winning the lottery, I mean.) How do I deal with typical problems; e.g., when all 20 Grade 1 students need the bathroom at the same time? What do I need to take with me in my bag and in my attitude? What should I expect—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and what should I do about it?

Just in case you were trained in primary grades and you are substituting for a Grade 8 teacher (or vice-versa), there are tips on teaching students from Kindergarten to Grade 8, including what the average student is like physically, socially, and academically. Also included are complete day plans in case the teacher was called away on an emergency, along with reproducible pages and extra activities. If you find you are teaching one subject for all or part of a day (e.g., Music or Physical Education), there are lesson plans that can be used with all grades for a variety of subjects.

And finally, there is help with ideas about how to have the job you want—whether that's being a career substitute teacher or a permanent teacher—or simply to enjoy the job you have. And how to do that before going broke.

Whether you are a new graduate and want all the help you can get, a retired teacher making the transition from having your own classroom to teaching in a different classroom every day, a career substitute teacher looking to steal some good ideas, or a permanent teacher looking for emergency lesson plans to leave in case you are ever called away without time to plan for the substitute, this book offers help. And (hopefully) a few laughs to go with it.

1

Toolkit for Substitute Teaching

Robin Williams, as Peter Pan in the movie *Hook*, uses “Chemistry Substitute Teacher” as an insult. This is funny because, in part, it is true! In the past, substitute teachers have had a bad reputation; however, our generation of substitute teachers is able to change this. By being excellent substitute teachers, by having a positive and creative attitude, and by the way we talk about our profession, we can change the perception of the profession of substitute teaching. It is time!

First, we need to be excellent. We need to do our job so that students enjoy their day and learn. Next, we need to talk about our profession with respect, so that others do too. We need to let people know that we have an excellent profession in which we get to make a difference in the lives of many children, helping them when their teacher is away. It’s time to give ourselves the respect we deserve and to expect it from others. It’s time to change the cultural norm around the noble profession of substitute teaching.

The First Ten Minutes: Getting Their Attention

Substitute teaching is fun. At least, it can be fun! It can also be the absolute worst job ever. Of course, you want to make it as much fun as possible. How do you do that? It’s all about the first ten minutes. The first ten minutes pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the class or the rest of the day. It’s important to get the kids on your side right away. Then, the rest of the day is a lot easier and more enjoyable.

You want to build a good relationship with the students as fast as possible. This is what they respond to—seeing you as a real person and being treated like real people. When you tell them about yourself, when you tell a good story, it helps build that relationship. When you start with a great first ten minutes, you are quickly building a good relationship so that they will want to listen to you. They will want to do what you ask. By handing out incentives and telling gross stories, you get the students on your side. Many substitute teachers yell in the first ten minutes of the day. This sets an adversarial tone—which the students love to take advantage of. You know, it’s fun to try to get the substitute teacher mad enough not to come back! This is what you should try to avoid.

We’ve all had days of substitute teaching where the kids didn’t tell us their own names, sat in someone else’s seat, changed the time on the clock, set off a stink

The way you deal with chatty (or rebellious) students is another make or break point; see page 16.

Of course, you can have a great first ten minutes and then have the tone change part way through the day. Students are often more difficult to handle in the afternoon, after going to the store and buying sugar for lunch.

bomb in the class, wouldn't listen at all, and in general were plain bad. (Oh, sorry. The kids were not bad; their behavior was bad. I am, of course, not making a moral judgment about the students themselves.) You know, the days when you really have to control yourself to keep from just losing it. Instead, I do something to get them on my side, like tell a ghost story or a gross fact. I find the students quiet down and are more likely to work quietly after I'm done, especially if I say I will tell another one when everyone finishes their work!

When students first enter the classroom, I give incentives to the first couple of students who sit down quietly. I loudly announce I have given an incentive to these students because they sat down quickly and quietly and soon all students are sitting down quietly.

This is when I give my speech. I introduce myself. I point out my name written on the board to avoid the question, "What is your name again?" for the one-hundredth time that day (not that this always works) and tell them I am an excellent substitute teacher. I tell students that I give out incentives, tell gross, scary, and funny stories, and that I rarely raise my voice. Then I ask if they want to hear a gross fact.

Bears don't go to the bathroom during the winter. They sleep, right? Actually, they do go to the bathroom during the winter. But the poop just stays inside them and forms a kind of plug inside their bottoms called a fecal plug! That's why they're so angry in the spring—not only are they hungry, but also a bit constipated. That's not the gross fact though. The gross fact is that bear cubs (baby bears) also go to the bathroom during the winter. However, they don't go on the cave floor because it would get dirty and they could get sick. Does anyone have a guess what happens to the bear cubs' poop?

I allow students to guess the answer, giving hints along the way. I give an incentive (e.g., a sticker or candy) to the student who answers correctly.

Answer: The mother bear licks it off them and eats it.

This gross fact is one of the ways I get students quiet, listening to me, and on my side.

Bag of Tools for Keeping Their Attention (and Staying Sane)

Humor can be there in your bag of tools. But even if you don't really have a sense of humor (of course, everyone thinks they have a sense of humor, so I'm sure you do too) you can still get the kids to like you.

Every substitute teacher needs a bag of tools. The more tools you have, the better chance you have of having fun and getting work done, no matter how challenging the students are. My favorite tools include incentives; gross, funny, and scary stories; and magic tricks. When one tool doesn't work, you just pull out another one. I save the hammer over the head for the end, after I threaten no more incentives for the day (this almost always works).

Incentives/Rewards

Edible

You might not want to, or may not be allowed to, hand out candy. There are other effective tools and incentives you can use—this is just the most fun one! You know, children’s love is for sale. You can buy it with sugar. You can be a pretty bad substitute teacher and, if you give them candy, they will love you.

When handing out candy, first and foremost, you need to make sure you buy candy that is peanut-free. This means making sure it doesn’t have *May have come into contact with nuts or nut products* or *May contain traces of nuts* on the package. I also recommend gelatin-free candy: gelatin is a meat byproduct, so children who can’t eat meat (or pork) for any reason can’t eat candy with gelatin.

I often tell the students that they are allowed to eat the candy right away (some of them are going to try to eat it anyway). I make sure to tell them that the first time I see a candy wrapper on the floor I will stop handing out candy. Then when I do see a wrapper on the floor, I say, “I’m sure I don’t see a wrapper on the floor because then I wouldn’t be handing out any more candy.” I keep going on and on about it until someone picks it up.

I do *not* give out candy to every kid—except maybe in Kindergarten, but I find in Kindergarten it is not needed. I give candy only to those who do what they are asked to do. Sometimes I hand out only two candies a day, or none; sometimes ten candies a class. I make sure the kids know that I am not going to be “fair” and hand one out to everyone. Why would they do what I want if they’re going to get one anyway? I tell them, “You can get two or three candies if you answer the questions, do your work, etc.” After a short while, the kids know that the first one sitting or finished gets a candy, so they sit quickly and get their work done quickly. I also sometimes give out candy if I see a student taking positive initiative; e.g., cleaning up without prompting or helping someone without being asked.

Non-Edible

In primary classes you can give out stickers instead of candy. This is particularly good for children with ADHD, as sugar does not usually help them focus! In junior and intermediate classes, I sometimes give out sticky notes with *Get out of trouble free* written on them. Then, if that student gets in trouble, they can give me their sticky and they are not in trouble anymore. Of course, I make sure they understand that the sticky note works only with me and not with other teachers. Stickers, pencils, and temporary tattoos also work for little kids. Fake teeth, eyes, fake spiders, fake poo, or anything gross works for older kids; these are a bit more expensive, so you have to make qualifying for them more difficult so you hand out fewer.

Free Time

Not all students want a sticker or a *get out of trouble free* card. But all students want free time! This is probably the most commonly used incentive among substitute teachers. Many teachers put a number on the board—for example, 10—and tell students that is how many minutes of free time they have at the end of the period. If students are noisy, the number is dropped to 9. If students are quiet, the number can be raised to 11. You need to have a stop watch to make sure you give them the exact number of minutes you said you would or it won’t work the next time you see that class.

I buy candy at the discount store and I only buy the packages that cost a dollar for about thirty candies. It’s definitely worth the money. I also make sure I only buy candies I don’t like so that I don’t eat them.