



Giving It Your All! Even When You Don't Want To

By Emma McDonald

The life of a teacher is full of ups and downs. It's not all roses and sunshine, but it is sprinkled with inspiring moments—when excitement about our topic, our students, and teaching in general rushes through our blood. We can't wait to awaken the minds of our students. We're fired up and it shows.

Then there are the other times—when we have to drag ourselves out of bed because we graded papers late into the night and woke up before the crack of dawn. There are those days when we feel irritated by a student's slightest offense. Then what? How do you give your all when you're not feeling it? I don't know how you manage, but here's what I do.

Managing the Doldrums

First, I simply get up. Leaving my comfortable bed, taking a shower, and getting dressed at least move me to action.

Next, while getting ready, I count my blessings. I start with personal blessings, such as my health, family, and home. Then I express thankfulness for a principal who listens to me, a colleague who lets me cry on her shoulder, and a parent who is understanding and helpful. I focus on what I have rather than on what I wish I had—a bigger budget, more books, and compliant students.

Once at school, I say one nice thing to each person I pass. Whether or not I "feel" nice, I force myself to smile, say hello, and then make one kind, truthful comment. I've found that the more times I take this action, the more uplifted I feel. If I can't think of a positive comment to say, I might ask, "How was your weekend?" or "Did you enjoy your time at . . . ?" It's amazing how quickly my poor attitude improves simply by passing along positive vibes to others.

Tackling Unloved Lessons

When faced with a topic I'm just not feeling the love toward, I think about someone who does love it. If a teacher or a student comes to mind, I may ask that person for tips on the subject or fun facts to pass along to my students. If no one comes to mind, I pull out a fun activity and change it up to look at the topic in a different way.

For example, I hate teaching grammar but love Mad Libs™. When I can't stomach a grammar lesson, I pull out a Mad Lib sheet and have the kids complete it as a class. After reading the crazy story, we focus on the aspect that matches the required grammar lesson, such as "What would happen to the story (or sentence) if we changed everything to plural? How would the words look? How would they sound? Would the story be crazier or more normal?" Adding a fun game and using the outcome to teach the lesson makes it more fun for the kids—and a heck of a lot more exciting for me.

Inside-Out Inspiration

Last, but hardly least, watching an inspiring teacher movie fuels heartfelt motivation. *Mr. Holland's Opus* gets me every time. Talk about a reluctant teacher! Yet he pulled himself together and worked through each year until teaching became a passion. When I watch Michelle Pfeiffer turn hoodlums into kids with purpose and a love of learning, I think "I can be inspiring like that!" And then I watch it again!

The next time the doldrums plague you, work out with these mental exercises, thinking purposefully on positive aspects of all you do. At first it may be hard, but those positive thoughts will regenerate. You'll soon have a new attitude. 🍏

Emma McDonald is a veteran teacher from Dallas, TX and the cofounder of Inspiring Teachers, a company dedicated to empowering new teachers. A professional member of KDP, Emma is a regular columnist for New Teacher Advocate. Learn more at www.inspiringteachers.com.