

# The joy of videos

Many times when a teacher's absence is planned he or she will plan something even the most brainless substitute can handle. Often this is a test or book assignment. Other times, like today, it's a video. Actually yesterday I showed a video in 5th grade, but that was only one half hour out of the entire day, so that doesn't count. You see, I am talking about middle school with its repeated lessons throughout the day. This is where videos can turn the most brainy into the one of those most brainless by the end of the day. Since it was social studies (not language arts as I said yesterday) the same lesson plan was done six times. That is six times showing the movie [Shenandoah](#), or at least the first 35 minutes of it. This movie stars the late [James Stewart](#) as a farmer and father of six boys and a girl in 1864 Virginia, during the Civil War (oxymoron: nothing civil about *that* war). His wife had died sixteen years ago and so he raised his family on his own. Though he is Virginian he is staunchly opposed to slavery, and will not support the war in any way, shape, or form. The part I saw has him at odds with a soldier trying to recruit his boys, a man who wants to buy a mule from him and pay him in Confederate dollars, and a buyer for the army who wants to buy or confiscate his horses for the army. Later on I understand his youngest gets kidnapped by one of the armies, but I didn't get that far yet. So thanks to this class, I now have to find the movie and watch the last hour fifteen of it. Just one time through though- six was a bit much ☐ .

At least this time the video was actually interesting. Previous videos in middle school included Al Gore's propagandistic global warming documentary and a 7th grade sex-ed film. Both made me feel dirty afterward.

Also interesting to note was today was another 5th grade tour day. It included 5th-graders from the school I was at the other day. The ones I had met were pleasantly surprised to

see me. One of the previous days this happened too with a different school I had subbed at. It's great to see their faces light up in recognition. Though it unfortunately reminds me of a time last year when I ran into a sixth-grader at a store who recognized me from a couple weeks before. I say unfortunately because he was so disappointed when I didn't recognize him. Names and faces have always been a weakness of mine, and this was exacerbated by memories of all the students I had seen since then pushing out memories from two weeks ago.

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## Bored

One thing about my life is that I don't easily form relational ties, as in friends. This does make it easier to live on a substitute teacher salary since I don't go to social events, but it does make for a boring life. I have strong ties with my church, particularly children's ministry, but outside of that I don't do much. I occasionally visit with friends I have made, particularly those now in Ohio, but making new friends? Really just acquaintances I only see at church and usually nowhere else. Is it any surprise then that I am still unmarried? Anyway, when I'm not teaching I am usually on the internet or watching TV. Tonight I came home, surfed the net, watched a few episodes of [Everybody Hates Chris](#), a hilarious weekly comedy loosely based on the teenage life of Chris Rock, and am using the internet again to write this. Unfortunately this is how just about every night looks. I have filled nights in the past with more schooling and musical theatre, but it has been awhile since either one so now I am just reflecting. I pray to meet someone I could eventually call my wife, but that requires social work on my part which just doesn't seem to happen. I really should make sure to get out tomorrow night to singles group at my church. It is a prayer

and worship night, but it is followed by fellowship. Unfortunately I am in my mid-thirties and still socially-challenged. I often say really stupid things among people I don't know (and sometimes with people I do!). Also, after this month the singles ministry is breaking for a month to revamp the ministry somehow. I do know I filled out a questionnaire on this about a month ago so I guess this shouldn't come as a surprise. Well, enough about this.

Today I had 5th grade again, only this time it was an ELL (English language learner) class. Mostly Hispanic, but other nationalities were represented as well. This was at a school where I have had problems before, so I wasn't expecting it to go as well as in my home district, though I tried to not act as if that were true. Expectations are important. I don't know if this is a true story or not, but in one of my classes in college we learned about a new teacher who was hired to teach a class, and one of the first things she noticed were numbers by their names. These numbers were in the lower to mid 100's, but all starting somewhat above 100 (120 maybe? I don't remember). She assumed these to be IQs of the students, so knowing that smart kids would easily get bored with a standard curriculum she prepared a challenging and engaging curriculum which over the length of the school year tremendously grew her students. She ended up with a very successful class with top grades. After it was over her principal (I think) asked her how she was so successful and she pointed out to him the IQ numbers for the students which made her try hard to keep them challenged so they would better learn. To this the principal replied that he was very happy with her teaching, but those were their locker numbers not their IQs.

Anyway, the day actually did not go as badly as I had feared. Sure, there were a few incidents involving a desk falling on the floor and a couple of boys getting hurt by slapping and punching each other, and also some strong-willed kids, but

they did their work and they learned. In the end it wasn't a case where I just wanted to be done with it like some days.

Tomorrow: 7th grade language arts

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## Preparing students for middle school?

When subbing for a regular classroom teacher in an elementary school one would expect to have the same class for at least *most* of the day, granting of course switching for math which is common in the intermediate grades. Aside from the start of the day and a very short time in the morning for snack, I did not have the same class until after 2:30 PM! They had a special in the morning so that accounted for part of it, but then they came back, had snack time, and left just 15 minutes later to go to another classroom for science while another class came in for social studies. Following that was math, which of course all four 5th grade classes mixed up according to ability which as mentioned is pretty standard. After lunch they came up, I took afternoon attendance, and then they split for reading- and I don't mean a few students left for resource while the majority stayed. I mean just the opposite: most left while only a few stayed. The students were doing a [Roald Dahl](#) unit and the students who came in were reading [The BFG](#). Other classes were reading different books. Finally, after reading the class came back together again... and promptly left for recess. **Finally** I had the class together, working together for language arts. I don't know why I bothered making a seating chart when I came in. ☐

I have heard of preparing students for middle school, but I

have never seen it to this extent. The closest I had seen before was a school where they actually had a set of lockers which the fifth-graders would take turns using to practice for middle school, but even there I don't think they switched classes so much. I know I never did when I was in fifth grade. At least I don't remember doing so aside from specials. But that was the early eighties we're talking about, somewhat removed from today's teaching methods.

By the way, [The BFG](#) reading assignment included making a comic strip based on the chapters they read. So, to make a connection here I will give you a couple of links for your reading enjoyment. Of course since this blog is primarily about education these won't be your regular comics.com (hah! You thought I would give [a link](#), not just the name! Uh, whoops... ☹ ) newspaper comics. On both sites they have links to purchase their 'toons, but they are free to view on the web so you don't need to bother. Well, enjoy!

[Cartoons by Randy Glasbergen](#)

[EDUCATION CARTOONS](#)

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## Last couple days

My last post on my actual experiences with the kids was last week, so I guess it's past time to write about it again. I finished last week as a traveling social studies teacher on Friday. That's right, this district has a separate teacher do social studies for 1st-3rd grades. I'm not sure why. To get started, when I accepted the job online it showed what school the teacher works at of course. The school is located at the far end of one of the further districts from me (read: at least a half hour drive), but this was the school one of the

kids in my church group attends so I thought I might see him, and so I accepted it. As it turned out, the system I believe lists the school at which a traveling teacher works at the beginning of the week. However, this was Friday so all bets were off. I actually wasn't aware it was a traveling job when I signed up, so I didn't think anything about it. Now, I was at my Thursday job when I accepted this job (no, I wasn't looking when I was supposed to be teaching so just take those fingers off the keyboard and read on! ☹ ). By the time I got home there was a message waiting for me from the teacher telling me that I would be at a different school in the morning, and yet a *third* school in the afternoon. I wouldn't be at the listed school at all. I am glad I listened to the message and didn't go to the original school. We all know I have gone to the wrong school before...

To make things short to move on to this week, the day went okay. Second grade was working on tourist booklets for their town, with an attractive front, facts about the town on the first inside flap, and pictures on the rest. Being second grade, they needed help on the spelling of course. Also ideas for facts and pictures. Being the town that had the first store ever in a major restaurant chain, that was prominent on several projects. 1st grade listened to a story on safety. Dinosaur boys and girls were featured in this story. Hmm- so **that's** why dinosaurs became extinct- they broke all of the safety rules! ☹ 3rd grade were learning about Chicago history and we worked on a timeline of major events in Chicago history.

Monday was one of those days of subbing for a teacher who was still in the building. She is a resource teacher for grades 1-4. Of course this was just one day so for all I know she may have 5th and 6th grade students on other days. She had to do some testing so that's why I was subbing for her. There was one first grader who was pulled out three times for this this teacher, and apparently at least once more for another.

It would seem he doesn't spend much time in his classroom, at least on Mondays. He was pretty unhappy when I pulled him once right after the other teacher brought him back. I really hope this level of disruption is actually helping him. The morning was spent with three reading groups of different grades, and a push-in where I went to the classroom and worked with small groups of students. They were reading plays (leveled for their reading level of course). Drama can often be favorite moments in teaching and today was no different. In the afternoon I had one pull-out (the first-grader) for math and other than that I was helping out in classrooms as needed. They started the fourth-graders on algebra, using hands-on equations. This is a program using manipulatives on a "scale" to solve equations by balancing the two sides. I didn't have any algebra until I was in junior high...

Today as I mentioned last post was a half day for me. Fortunately it gave me time to get assignments for later in the week in my downtime. I had PE at a school that I have had many problems at. It's an all-year school that actually has classes from 8AM to 4PM. This long day probably contributes to the problems I have had. The first two classes were 4th/5th grade classes. The first class had a new teacher. Actually, the teacher started the year as a first grade teacher (had been one for at least the few years I have known of her). Apparently the 4th/5th grade teacher moved a couple months ago and the school switched the 1st grade teacher and hired a student teacher to replace the 1st grade teacher. I compared two class lists, and it looked like two of the more "lively" students were gone as well, but they might have been moved to another class for all I know. We played speedball in the three classes I had (40 min classes by the way, not 30 min). The two 4th/5th grade classes did very well. The 3rd grade class was a different story. They played like everyone wanted the ball rather than just wanting to play to win. Once one student had possession of the ball, most of the rest of the class surrounded him or her, pretty much preventing the

student from doing anything other than handing the ball off to a teammate. After awhile some students just quit playing- this wasn't a game of good sportsmanship. I actually had to stop the game and have the kids spend the last five minutes sitting down. The nurse came in and yelled at them too (one of the students had run out of the gym to her office toward the end- he had pulled a girl's hair and then she tried to get him back. Sigh. When I told the gym teacher about the morning (he arrived before I left) he knew right away who that student was...

So, that was my last few days. If you're still awake, now is the time to leave comments (hint, hint!). Until tomorrow then.

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## The half-day gamble

I am not really a gambling person, at least where money is concerned. I always tend to lose and it just seems like a waste of money to me. However, when it comes to subbing I do take some gambles. Unfortunately, it hasn't worked out well for me this year. In the past I have had a reasonable ratio of half days turned into full days compared with those I haven't. This year I am on the low side of things. Whenever I get a half day I always try to get a second job for the other half of the day if possible. I think this may have succeeded maybe once this year. To make matters worse, when it's too late to cancel an assignment only *then* do I see full-day assignments show up to mock me. Today was such a day. Think I saw no less than half a dozen such jobs show up this morning. I even saw a half-day assignment for the morning posted. Too bad this was the half of the day I was already assigned.



I tried a few times today even at work. Nothing. Then finally before I came home I came across an afternoon at a nearby school. Yes! Wait, no. It turned out to be a half day for Thursday. Sigh.

What was work today? Or yesterday for that matter since I didn't get around to posting... Well, that's something for another post. Stay tuned.

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## **I feel stupid...**

Well, today I was a floater at a middle school, meaning that I would sub for different teachers throughout the day as they went to meetings. When I arrived they gave me a list. Four classes. Were they serious? I thought I had it fairly easy yesterday with five classes (in middle school six is typical, with a planning period, team meeting- subs not invited, and lunch). In this district one period is homeroom, making a total of ten periods of which a sub usually works seven when homeroom is added in. This meant that I had **three** extra periods off! A half-day of work for a full day's pay! Then again, this is me we're talking about. I didn't feel quite right about this so I asked at the office a few times if I was needed elsewhere during these breaks. They didn't have anything as was typical, so it would seem that I would get all the time off after all. However, in the afternoon the teacher I was subbing for for 7th and 10th periods decided she could use me after all to help out while she tried to get some other work done. I stress *tried* because in fact since she was in the room her students still came up to her and asked questions. By the way, they were doing research in the LMC so I mostly babysat as I couldn't answer a lot of the questions since I didn't know all the expectations of the project.

Still not bad- a very easy day.

Now, some may think the title of this post applies to the above paragraph since I asked for extra work instead of just saying nothing and sitting in the lounge all day. Well, it always pays to not get on their bad side- I already don't take TA positions which pay about \$30 less per day- and besides, I would have missed the situation I am about to write on. □ Well, what happened was during one of the periods a couple of students came in who weren't a part of the class. Remember, this was the LMC and not a classroom. That would be very strange if random students just came into a classroom where they were not a part of the class... Anyway, I wasn't aware of this at first and so questioned them when I saw they were not doing the research with the rest of the class. They told me they were here while their class was on a field trip. Were they being punished? Nope. They were seventh graders in an eighth grade math class, and all the eighth grade was on the field trip. Now I thought I was pretty good at math being in algebra in eighth grade, but here they were, two seventh graders in the eighth grade class. And to make matters worse, this seemed to be the top eighth grade math course, algebra 2. That's right, 2. I didn't take algebra 2 until my sophomore year (they split the two courses with geometry in the middle, which I took as a freshman). These two seventh graders were *two* years ahead of where I was when I was in middle school. They expect to be bused to high school next year for math as they apparently were bused to the middle school when they were in 5th grade... I guess if this keeps up they will be taking calculus in their junior year instead of in college, unless they bring themselves even further ahead in the next three years. Definitely two top engineers in the making.

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# Lounge talk

This is going to be short (sandman is calling) but I just wanted to say something about talk in the lounge. Teachers talk about many things of course, like family, current events, the weather, etc. A favorite topic, also of course, is students. How did such and such student behave today? What students are failing miserably? Oh, let me tell you of the cavity searches I had to do today. Wait- what?!? *Cavity searches??* One of the gym teachers came down to lunch and started talking about this. I have no idea what was being searched for, and didn't get any other details in fact. Fortunately. This was just so off the wall I had to mention it even without complete information. There was also mention of a student who ran out the front door and a teacher who almost ran after her. The secretary told her to let it go and she would call the police. From what I understand she didn't get very far hobbling along in an ankle brace...

Ahh, middle school. And I have another day of it tomorrow, different school fortunately, and it's getting late so goodnight.

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# Boy saves bus from major accident

No license? Who cares? Usually this would be a bad conversation, such as an underage child taking dad's car for a spin (my brother has done this before, so has my nephew...). This time however this boy was saving everyone on the bus from experiencing the sudden effects of being hit by a truck. He

didn't really drive it, just steered it out of the way. The driver had left to answer the call of nature, but somehow this bus came out of gear and started rolling downhill. This 11-year-old, thinking only of his older brother also on board, chose not to jump off like some others, but instead to save both him and his brother by stopping the bus. Click link to read on...

## [Boy, 11, steered bus to avoid semi](#)

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## Another half day

It happens from time to time that I will only get a half day. Due to the advent of online systems though, it is relatively easy to accept a job and then later cancel when a better one comes up. I don't do that too often, but a half day is one reason I try. Since this half day was for the afternoon I could try even the day of, as long as it's early enough in the morning that they can get another sub easily. As it worked out though no other job was to be found. I was up until about 11 and then woke up just after 6 to try again. Nothing. Finally, at around 7 I decided to give up and go back to bed, mostly due to not sleeping well the last couple of nights. As I write this I am exhausted *again*. I don't know why I usually wait until the end of the evening to write. Oh, well.

So as it worked out, not only was it a half day but it was at probably the furthest school from me, at the opposite corner of one of the further districts. It took me about 25 minutes to get there. It was in one of the mentally impaired rooms,

but I knew this at the outset as I have subbed in this school many times. It was easy. Silent reading followed by computer time. Then they wrote a letter to a classmate that had transferred schools (moved I guess) a couple of weeks before. The writing varied, but generally the kids were pretty slow, letters not well-formed- but remember these are mentally impaired kids. One couldn't really write at all, but that didn't matter. It will get sent with the rest to the girl's new school. After that they went to language lab where it should have been a nice rest for me since it is run by another teacher. Nope- I was told I would be needed in another classroom while their teacher went to a meeting. It was another mentally impaired room. I had worked with several of the boys in that room before, but oddly enough I do not remember ever being in that room. Maybe from last year? I will have to go through my past positions to figure this out. I *do* remember subbing for that teacher in the past so maybe my memory is just bad. Anyway, they cooked some muffins. Well, the boys only got to stir a little, taking turns, but that could be considered a life skill for them anyway. One of the IAs brought them to the lounge to cook in the oven. In the meantime, we played some bingo while waiting for the muffins. The teacher still wasn't back from her meeting by the time the original class was back from the lab, which by the way is simply working with the kids on communication skills in case you were wondering, so the kids actually stayed in the lab a little longer since I couldn't be with both classes and a certified teacher or sub is required to always be in a classroom.

As it turned out the teacher never did come back so I stayed until the end in that one room. I'm thinking the language teacher came back with the other class after a while, but I'm not sure on that. I do know they came back eventually. I pushed one of the wheelchair-bound boys to the bus at the end of the day. It's interesting that at that school there are about a dozen short buses lined up at the end of the day, half

of them wheelchair-capable, as the kids come from all over the district. So that was it, end of the day. Until tomorrow folks!

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## **Middle school**

Middle school is an interesting age. Not quite child anymore, but not completely adolescent either. It is a transition state. Many teachers stay away from this age, but I don't mind it so much, depending on the class. They can range of course from not-a-problem to watch-your-back depending usually on the area. It is my belief that the family income has a lot to do with it, though really only because it leads to parental involvement. With low income families, kids are often left to their own devices much of the time when not in school, and I think we can all, by experience □, attest to the fact that young pre/adolescents don't always make the best choices in life, especially when they are starting to listen to their peers more and the parents become even less active in their kids' lives, meaning if they were already less active then that almost leaves it at, "Hello son/daughter" and little else. I am not saying this to blame these parents, as they are often just trying to make ends meet with sometimes two or three jobs and are often the sole parental figure doing it. I am merely trying to explain why sometimes students are very hard to handle.

Another group of kids that tend to be a problem are ELL kids. Often, but not always, low income is an issue here as well, but another factor causes these students to be a problem. That factor being that the school system they come from is far more disciplined and strict than our own. When they come here then, they see school as something to blow off. Detention has

no effect as they just see it as a break instead of a punishment. Some see getting in trouble as an opportunity to see the teacher get steamed because our options are limited compared to back where they came from. They learn, in other words, to play our system knowing serious consequences (as they would see it) can't happen because then the *teacher* would be in trouble for improperly discipline. Typically I just warn these students, maybe move them, but other than that just leave a note to let the regular teacher deal with the problem. There is actually a school where I no longer accept ELL jobs.

Anyway, I just bring this up because for the last two days I was at middle schools. Thursday was my unexciting science day I already wrote about, and yesterday I did language arts/life skills at another school. Apparently they were short a sub at that school because they gave me an extra class one period and I know they were doing that throughout the day for that one teacher- every class period had a different sub. I actually worked with all three grades as a result. This teacher's (the main one I subbed for) normal schedule had language arts with 7th grade and life skills (cooking, sewing, ironing, washing clothes...) was with 6th grade. My added class was with 8th grade. It was certainly more interesting than the day before.

Well this post is getting really long so I think I will just wrap it up now. I will probably post tomorrow about drama this week at church and how my teaching goes in the morning- I will be teaching about Saul. The king, not the pharisee turned Apostle.