

# Not so bad after all / Quiz show

When one thinks of 8th grade, it is often associated with hormonally-challenged, impossible to control young adolescents, and indeed I have found this to be the case in several classrooms. Add learning, or especially behavioral disabilities to the mix and... well, I'll leave it to the imagination. There is one school where I just refused to take any more positions last year for the older kids (7th and 8th in fact, this year just 8th so far at that school). The school district I was in today I consider to be the best of the local districts I work in. Besides the money spent on education from a funds-not-so-challenged village, the kids tend to be far better behaved than in other districts. I would place the reasons at better family life. In many areas there are low-income families which causes family struggles due to not enough money and parents who are always working and have no time for their kids and so pretty much leave the raising of the kids to the schools. This town really doesn't have any low-income families (it costs too much to live here!). Of course there are other factors influencing family life and behavior, but this I think is number one. In any event, these 8th graders were not so bad to deal with at all. Well, the fact that I always had an assistant helped more than a little as well. As with other special ed teacher situations in a middle school, I had many of the same students all day. I taught two language arts classes (4-6 students in each!) and watched over two tutorial (study hall) periods. Additionally I had two science "co-teaching" classes. Like one time last week, one of these "co-teach" classes had two subs! Fortunately the main teacher left the other sub clear plans.

Interestingly enough, the regular teachers for myself and the other teacher I mentioned were actually in the building, just

in meetings all day. Something that it somewhat common with special education actually. The teachers have many meetings throughout the year, so it is only logical that some of those meetings would be in the school rather than an administration building.

One of the neat things to see was one of the science classes created electric quiz machines- the type where you use a wire to complete a circuit with a correct answer (multiple choice or true/false) and light up a bulb. The quality and size of these quiz games greatly varied, and some were even quite creative. One student took a shortcut and used an Operation game as a starting point, but most did theirs from scratch. Some used one wire (true/false and multiple guess) and some used two (matching). One boy used a motor instead of a light bulb that would shoot up a spinning helicopter-disc. They were very interesting to try out. Actually, the class didn't get to try them out as other classes apparently did due to poor treatment of a substitute teacher yesterday. Yes, I got to watch the aftermath of a bad substitute report. Apparently they lost out on playing a review game yesterday as well as not getting to try each other's quiz games. Hey, just because it's a good town doesn't mean the kids are *always* good. I guess maybe I just lucked out today, but what I said about this district generally holds true.

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## Spread Some Sunshine

☒ Any family who sees themselves as dysfunctional needs to watch the movie *Little Miss Sunshine*. The Hoover clan gives new definition to the term. At the head of the household, we have the motivational speaker (played by Greg Kinnear) who is himself a total loser. The frazzled, chain smoking mother

(Toni Collette) whose idea of a home-cooked meal is a bucket of fast food chicken... cleverly disguised as NOT KFC. The clinically depressed, suicidal uncle (the brilliant Steve Carell) who lost the title of #1 Proust student to the new lover of his ex-boyfriend. The rebellious, teenage, Nietzsche follower who has taken a vow of silence (Paul Dano). **FINALLY**, we have the fun-loving, expletive shouting, drug addicted grandfather (Alan Arkin). They all pile into the family VW van in order to take little Olive (Abigail Breslin) from Albuquerque to Redondo Beach to compete in the Little Miss Sunshine beauty contest.

While on this road trip, the Hoover's learn some valuable lessons. You should never apologize for yourselves no matter how dysfunctional you are. Little girls who eat ice cream may or may not get fat. **AND** (strangest of all) pornography can be viewed as a sign from God; or at least be useful when pulled over by the police.

While the film contains a magnificent ensemble cast, one character in the movie deserves extra credit. The poor van that almost seemed to have a personality all its own. It should have been given a screen credit. Its broken horn gave voice to the pain it must have been feeling as it continued on the long journey with a bunch of kooks. Not since **THE ORIGINAL** Herbie the Love Bug has a Volkswagen been as memorable a character as any human.

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## Interesting Day

Well, I really have to get to bed as I will be working at a middle school tomorrow and they start over an hour earlier than their elementary counterparts. 8th grade special ed- so

I am sure to have something to write tomorrow. As for today, I was in a multiage room, 4th and 5th grades specifically. This is the second time I have subbed for this class and there is one thing a bit unusual. There are not one, not two, but **three** students in that class who are really big for their age. They are fifth-graders, but they look like they would physically fit right in in seventh grade. So were they held back a year? Well, that was what I was wondering, but nope! The teacher just happened to have a list with their birthdays (well one wasn't on the list- she must have transferred in after the start of the year) and the two boys at least are the right age for fifth grade. Now of course I have encountered the occasional large or small student for their age, but three in one room is just pushing the odds. I would have to check if they live near power lines or some such situation affecting their growth. They drink the same water as I do so I know that isn't the reason...

On another note, the classroom is in a new section of the school and so is one of the few rooms that are air conditioned (no big deal this time of year of course) though the district has finally approved air conditioning for all the schools now starting next year. The classroom was also quite large and had a widescreen LCD TV. Nice. Of course the LCD TV is wasted on them as they have the DVD player/VCR connected only through ordinary video- someone give them some component cables, please!

The last abnormal thing for this class I was in was they have a special foreign-language program there- they were learning Japanese! This made for an easy morning for me since before Japanese they had music and gym. I even learned how to write my name in Japanese (Katakana I believe it was called). Pretty neat.

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# This town SMELLS

You think you know where I'm going with this, but it's actually not a complaint. A lot of places have their own smell. I've driven through towns in Georgia that smell like peaches. Gary, Indiana smells like what I can only describe as "burning rubber french fries" – a term I invented as a kid, and I haven't been able to think of a suitable replacement description that doesn't involve a 4-letter word. A place in Idaho I visited one time smelled like mint – there was a mint field nearby...

In the town where I live, we have a number of factories. You might think because of this, our noses would meet the same fate every morning as the poor residents of Gary Indiana, but fortunately for us, one of our largest factories manufactures **CANDY!** So, our town literally smells like candy almost every day. Chocolate some days, unidentified sweetness on the others... it is wonderful and really puts a spring in your step! Ahh, now there's a post that's short and sweet! ☐

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# Ohio VS. Illinois – weather

From time to time, I will be talking about what it's like to live in various places throughout the midwest because I have a lot of experience in that area. We've lived in central Illinois, northern Illinois, and various suburbs of Chicago. We also lived in Lincoln, Nebraska and rural Ohio. Of all these, I love rural Ohio the best! But it is really interesting how different things like dialect and attitudes

can vary from place to place, even places that are only hundreds of miles apart and in virtually the same climate. One thing I'm still getting used to in rural Ohio is their attitude about weather. I spent my childhood in Illinois, specifically the suburbs of Chicago, so I am used to the attitude of snow days being a rarity. I wonder what the average is there, but I would guess it's one per season or even less – they will not cancel school unless the schools are buried. There was one time when my mom's car was snowed in, she couldn't get it out of the driveway, and so she wanted to take the school bus with me to school – she worked at the same school I attended. So I did what any mature 12-year-old would do – I cried. Foolish, maybe yes, but I figured I had suffered enough with her working at my school – why should I have to face the humiliation and ridicule of her riding my bus? It had nothing to do with how cool I thought I was; it was more about how MEAN kids can be... I was so afraid of what the kids would say or do once they found out my mom was riding the bus! So anyway, lucky for me, she got her car out, and I was saved. But my point is, her car was stuck in the snow, yet they hadn't cancelled school. Here in Ohio things are MUCH different. We are on our 6th snow day already this season! And I've lost count of how many 2 hour delays we've had – which luckily (for them, not me) the kids don't have to make up. Coming from Chicagoland, I had never even heard of a 2 hour delay before we moved here – they don't exist there. But in Ohio – they are quite common, most of the time because of fog – FOG! We actually have fog days! School has been CANCELLED because of fog... it was really hard for me to get used to at first... you'd think we live in a swamp or something! Oh, wait, – that's just it... this area used to be the Great Black Swamp before it was turned into farmland a few hundred years ago. So I guess that explains it... but I would be willing to bet that if Illinois had a fog problem, they still wouldn't cancel school. I don't know anything about Nebraska's attitudes about weather and school since we didn't have a school-aged child while we lived there. I don't really

have an opinion about who is right or who is wrong – it's not that Ohio devalues education or anything like that... they are just over-sensitive about childrens' safety when it comes to weather (is there such a thing?), and the school days and curriculum are made up in the end so they're not behind. I'm just enjoying my role as an amused spectator observing the differences in weather attitude between different regions.

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## The Amazing Spider-Man

Returning to the genre of superhero franchise movies, one of the most successful series of movies in the last decade has been the three Spider-Man films. I believe that what has made these films so special is that they each retain the same core cast: Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker/Spider-Man), Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane Watson), and James Franco (Harry Osborne). Plus, Sam Raimi has been the director of each of the movies. So many times a franchise fails because it goes through multiple directors. The four main people involved in these films have each stated that if any of the others were to leave then they would also. I do not think a good Spider-Man movie could be made if any of them were to step aside.

Each of the films develops the three characters in new ways, primarily the main character. The original film shows how Peter becomes the webslinger and begins to accept the sage advice of his Uncle Ben: "With great power comes great responsibility." *Spider-Man 2* finds the hero attempting to find a balance between his life behind the mask and that of Peter Parker. *Spider-Man 3* takes Peter on a journey of his dark side and forces him to see how far his power can take him.

So many times action/adventure movies are just that: action, adventure but no character. With a director such as Sam Raimi who really cares about the characters he is putting on film, the three Spider-Man films thrived. Not only do audiences thrill to the escapades of “your friendly neighborhood superhero” but they also see into the life of Peter Parker and the characters around him.

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## Imagine

WOW... that is all I can say about the final singer on American Idol tonight (and I know that I am going off on another tangent here). When a 17 year old hopeful performs one of the most difficult songs from any era as if it were made for him then it deserves some acknowledgment. This is the first night I have actually had a chance to enjoy an episode with play practices going on and such. There were probably 3 of the top 10 guys whom I would even consider voting for (I do not vote). However when young David Archuleta came out and nailed John Lennon’s “Imagine,” I thought that he is sure to be one of the final contestants. Strangely, the performer chose to start on the final verse of the song. Randy Jackson even commented on the choice. Contestants are only allowed so much time to perform so David brilliantly chose to sing the verse that meant the most to him. The young man’s tone, range, and overall execution of the classic song just sent chills throughout my whole body. I find it totally flabbergasting how a 17 year old (who was not alive when John Lennon wrote and sang the classic) could even attempt such a remarkable, challenging piece. I’m not sure that I would even try to master such a memorable selection.

*Imagine no possessions*



*I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger  
A brotherhood of man  
Imagine all the people  
Sharing all the world*

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## **2nd Grade**

This will be a shorter post this time around I think. Today I worked in a second grade classroom. This is stretching my comfort zone a bit, but toward the end of the year they are becoming more like third-graders as they grow. Unlike yesterday I was the sole adult in this room, which is the norm for regular classrooms. The other second-grade teacher, a rare male primary teacher, was very helpful in making sure I knew what was going on and checking up on me when he could. As this was hardly my first time in a classroom I didn't need too much help, but he did make sure I knew about an assembly at the end of the day that for some reason didn't make it into the plans and gave me some tips about the class as well. Even though this was also a no-specials day (if you don't count the assembly) it was rather enjoyable. I had only a break a lunchtime, but was able to do an acceptable job with the plans. I didn't finish the reading plans, but typically a teacher writes more than can often be taught to make sure there is no time the students aren't engaged. The fact that the plans were well-written and detailed was a bonus. Not to pick on any gender, particularly mine, but I find that most often women leave more detailed plans than men. This is not

always the case of course but it is typical. The only real downer for the day was that I had to stay longer than normal because again there were no breaks other than lunch, so I didn't have time throughout the day to leave all the notes I wanted so I had to spend time after school instead. Fortunately this school was in my home town so I still got home at a reasonable time.

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## Student Teachers

One of the easiest types of jobs a substitute can take is a job that has a student teacher. Typically, the student teacher does all the teaching while the sub just helps as needed. I have even encountered positions in the past where the teacher leaves a special instruction on the website that says "bring a book." □ I actually subbed for this teacher a couple of weeks earlier and so I knew what to expect. It was a classroom with mentally impaired children, ranging from a boy in a wheelchair who could really only cry out (he spends much of the day listening to music) to a couple of students who are mainstreamed into some specials but still have pretty severe language problems (reading and writing, and in some cases, talking). Also on hand were two assistants, so between us there were two students per adult. As expected I spent much of the day helping rather than teaching, but that is actually expected in this type of class even when there is no student teacher. In that case the assistants take over because they know where each student is at, which really varies dramatically, and what to expect from each student. Without the people in the room who know this a sub can never know if the work the student is doing is really acceptable or if (s)he is just blowing off the work. For some reason I tend to get this sort of job often, whether mentally impaired or just

learning disabled, in this district. It may just be that these teachers have more meetings due to the nature of their job, or it may be that the preferred subs have the opportunity at the regular jobs first, or that the regular classroom teachers tend to create a preferred list while the special education teachers don't.

Actually, I should really explain what I mean by "preferred." In this district there are two types of preferred subs. The first is on a list made by each teacher of who to call first if a substitute is needed (conversely, I believe they also have a do-not-call list for teachers they never want to see back in their classrooms again). The other type of preferred sub is the 120-day (can work 120 days per school year in the district), or certified substitute. These subs are actual certified teachers either looking for a full-time position but subbing in the meantime or are retired. The system looks for the individual preferred teacher first, and if none are available calls on the 120-day subs, and finally resorts to the 90-day subs. I am a 90-day sub. This means I am not certified as a teacher, but have simple substitute certification for which anyone with any bachelor's degree can apply. I do not fault them for this system at all. In fact, they are completely up front as to the way it works. Yet, I do get calls and see the jobs posted online. The only thing that rubbed me the wrong way was when they applied for a waiver so they could use 120-day subs for more than 120 days. Essentially, some subs are liked so much by the various schools and teachers that they are pretty much called every day. Of course, the one year I know of when they *didn't* have the waiver I don't know if they had trouble getting subs- perhaps they did. Therefore I will withhold judgment on this.

In any event, this is just one district. Other districts have different rules of course.

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# Snow Day!

Yet another snow day is upon us... that makes #6 for us this year, and it's now officially time to start making them up in the summer. Which I guess is good news for me, because the kids now have at least 1 extra day to attend school in the summer, near the time when the baby is due and I wouldn't know how I'm going to handle all 3 of them alone anyway! But for today, we are stuck here, buried under about 6 inches of snow which is still falling. My gem of a husband had already shoveled twice – it's our "date night", and he says he wants nothing to stop the car from taking the kids to the babysitters later. But I feel badly for him cuz it just keeps snowing and burying our sidewalks yet again. And speaking of being buried, our garbage is no where to be seen – oops! Once a month where I live, we have big garbage day, when you can put all your garbage out for free, no special bags or stickers needed. So today was ours, and even though none of the neighbors had theirs out, we put ours out, like idiots... my idea. So now it's buried, and I don't know how they're going to pick it up. Don't think the neighbors would be too happy if we leave it there until next month!

So the kids are already fighting, and Dr. Phil isn't even over. I still have to make lunch, get my load of laundry in, finish this post, and make sure the kids pick up the mess they made all morning. If I get all that done and I can bundle the kids before it gets too cold and windy outside like they are forecasting, we might go sledding. I'm not a big fan of the snow days; it throws our whole schedule off, but at least they'll be going one more day in the summer – disappointing for them = freedom for me!