

Two of a kind

I keep meaning to mention this bit of info. Or maybe I already did but don't remember. In any event, I was at a middle school doing PE, but you already knew that. Unlike Thursday's PE, we actually got to go outside. Well, there were two periods of sixth grade health, but that's why I specified PE, didn't I? □ So, for PE 8th grade played kickball and 7th grade played soccer. We used the baseball diamonds to play kickball. The first class went fairly well. They chose to play boys versus girls which worked out about as well as you would expect, being the girls at that age are more, well, feminine than a few years ago. This of course is not meant to be sexist as there *are* many female athletes, most, if not all, of which can wipe the floor with me as I am a non-sports guy. However, when talking about eighteen girls, most of them react to sports like kickball as one might expect. It should be noted that they **wanted** to do boys versus girls. I was skeptical about it, but if even the girls wanted it than I wasn't going to stand in the way. They outnumbered the boys too, so I figured it wouldn't hurt. Except the boys still issued the girls a major defeat. The second class I didn't even let get to the point of suggesting boys vs girls. As soon as we were on the field I randomly picked two students as captains and had them pick teams, alternating boys and girls as long as possible. This class was the goofiest of the day, though not matching the two classes I mentioned Thursday. They just didn't take the game seriously. Well, I guess if I was going to be in high school in just a few weeks I might take advantage of a nice day outside with a sub too. I didn't let it bother me- I just wrote it down for the gym teacher to read when he gets back.

But where does the title come in? Well, it has to do with 7th grade soccer, which went quite well by the way, excepting the fact that the goals were not placed across from each other

which I only noticed after a student informed me that the point I was about to place the ball wasn't center. I looked back at the goal I was using to center the ball and it was centered as best as I could tell. I looked at the other goal and I was putting the ball at a point that wasn't even between the two goal cones. What the...? Unfortunately I couldn't move the goal because the teacher this morning had drawn goalie boxes. Oh well. There were no sidelines anyway so no big deal. The second 7th grade class is where the title *finally* comes into play. How often is it one finds two students at the same school, in the same grade, and on the same team with the same name? And by this I mean first and last name. I actually noticed this issue weeks ago. It was when in one class I noticed there was a boy named Peter who sounded like a student I knew from church. Once class started I looked at him and he wasn't the one. Another day I noticed the name again, and found it was attached to a different boy. Huh? This boy did look familiar. It took another couple times subbing for this grade before I realized the two were on the same team though rarely in the same class for some reason. At least the classes I subbed in. My guess is they were purposely given different schedules to aid the teachers. However, when it came to PE, there was only one time available per team so both Peters were in the same gym class, though different teachers. Well, for soccer the two classes combined and I took the boys out on one field while she took the girls out on another field. So, you guessed it: Peter vs Peter. They aren't really two of a kind other than their name. They look different, and in soccer one defended while the other played on offense.

Oh, and only one was the Peter I knew. He goes to a different church now, but he did attend mine a few years ago. □

They will not be missed...

I was in conversation with another teacher and he happened to say this about the current eighth grade class. After today I would agree on this for a few students with a wish that they would grow up soon. These students are the ones teachers have in mind when they say they will never teach middle school. One of the eighth grade PE classes had a several students that could fit this category. They would *not* settle down and listen to the rules of the game they were to play. By the time they finally got started, there was less than 15 minutes left until I had to bring them back up to get changed. Yes, we were inside even though it was a fairly nice day outside- the other two classes were outside and apparently there are only two fields to play softball. I can't say, unfortunately, that eighth grade was the only issue. One of the sixth grade classes also drove me nuts. It took awhile to start with them as well, and it took a lot of time to rotate teams between games as well. Fortunately the other four classes went well (6th, 8th, and two 7th).

What we played was scooter volleyball. Two nets were set up in the room downstairs (they call it the fitness room- apt because they do that there as well, like aerobics they had to do when I was there a couple of times last year). The teams sat on scooters (those squares on four wheels/castors you plant your butt on) and played volleyball that way, using a gator-skin ball probably because the court was so shallow and the ceiling low. Most volleyball rules applied, but some were a little different like you could catch and throw the ball, not just bump or set it. It was also played in two-minute games so the one team who was rotated out wouldn't have to wait long.

Well, that's about it. I should say I am fortunate there was still another guy teacher there with me today to take over most of the duties in the locker room. When you think of a

gym locker room you might think of a place that reeks of B0. You'd be half-right. It reeks all right- of Axe and other spray deodorant. Either way, something to stay out of. At least it's not like when I was in junior high when we had to take showers. Nude of course. I think I would have to just say no to subbing for PE if that were the case. I guarantee I would not bother with making sure they all took showers. It's interesting to note that many of these schools still have the showers, even if they are no longer used. Well, used for their intended purpose. Some schools use them as storage.

Something's a-Foote

Okay, I really want to know who someone is. Really. When I work in one of the two middle schools in this one school district, I am constantly mistakenly called Mr. Foote. It's usually the students, but about a month ago a teacher called me by that name too. Yes, today I was mistaken for him **again**. No, that isn't my name even if I do supposedly look like him, or he like me, or- oh, you know what I mean. ☐ Will it really be like looking in a mirror when I finally corner him? You know, I will really be depressed if this guy turns out to be a retired, elderly gentleman as many of the guy subs are. Well, women too, but obviously the "gentleman" part doesn't apply to them. ☐

Today I re-subbed for a class. That is, I had subbed for this teacher before (apparently our mystery sub did as well, sometime since my last time). It was just simple 7th grade science with a literacy class thrown in. Oh, a tutorial class with **seven students**. I hope this means most students are in academic courses since tutorial is more of a study hall- no learning there. For literacy they just worked on a book ([S.E.](#)

[Hinton's *The Outsiders*](#)) and group packet, while in science- drum roll please- a video. And a comic strip project where they are making a comic strip about the [states of matter](#). The video was about just that, the four states- solid, liquid, gas, plasma. There was a video quiz at the end that for some reason the kids thought was hilarious because it was fill-in-the-blank, but instead of saying "blank" when they read the question ("The *blank* state has both definite shape and definite volume") it played a long tone ("The **bee-e-e-e-e-e-ep** state has both definite shape and definite volume"). I gather they were imagining foul language being bleeped out.

By the way, they may say "there ain't no free lunch" but there was for me today. The PTO supplied sandwiches and sandwich sides for us because of teacher appreciation week. On Friday they will have a baked potato bar. Yum. I will be there for 6th grade. Now I just have to worry about tomorrow.

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.

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.

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.

Just a laid-back day

I was a substitute today, but hardly a teacher. As middle school science goes, all the classes were the same unlike a subject such as math where there are usually different levels taught or a foreign language where different grades are taught. I pretty much just announced a pending notebook check and then let them continue on their projects which they started yesterday. That is to say, they already knew what they were doing so I didn't even get to go over that. Ah, well. Mostly I just sat and watched them work, periodically cycling around the room to remind them of my presence and to help out if needed. Fortunately so I didn't expire from boredom, some did need my help from time to time.

This went on for six. long. periods. But it could have been worse. At least I was in a district where most of the kids had a work ethic. Some schools I have been in have had a large number of kids with a goof-off-while-the-teacher-is-away ethic instead.

Well, language arts tomorrow at another middle school. Until

then.

Great day today!

Today was possibly one of the best days I have had in a long time. It really reminded me why I am most comfortable with kids in 4th-6th grades. The class really went well. Remember the one fifth grade class I talked about in my music entry a few days ago? This was pretty much opposite, more like the two 4th grade classes I had that day. It is really unfortunate I am not so comfortable teaching things like reading and writing. What other career can place me with this age group but not involve standard teaching? Coaching is out of course as I am definitely not sports oriented- speaking of which, did you hear about what boys are doing now for sport in Missouri? Put it this way: it is *illegal* in most states. [Check it out at this link \(click\)](#). Actually, once I saw the video (there is a video at that link, but I'm not sure it's the same one I saw) it didn't seem so bad, which is why I am not telling you what it is and making you go to the link instead. ☐ The only reservations I have is that they are teaching this to boys as young as six.

Anyway, back to today. I didn't do much teaching this morning, what with computer lab time and art taking up an hour and a half, but what teaching I did I really enjoyed. Following art, they had spelling (still no teaching, but some preparation and study time for their test Friday) and reading. I got to read aloud a book that was actually pretty good, though I didn't like the ending **at all**. It was called [My Brother Sam is Dead](#). With what happened in the chapter I read to the class, one would hope for a miracle to happen in the next chapter, but what happens is really quite sad. I'll

leave it a little mysterious in case you want to read it- hopefully I didn't say too much. I don't think I did.

This led us to lunch. After lunch there was just math and science left. For math I got the advanced group with only around 15 students. This group was in the 6th grade book. I actually almost got through what the teacher expected me to get through. I only needed about five minutes more instead of the typical 15-30 minutes more... For science we talked about energy sources. They had read about fossil fuels and hydropower yesterday, and we picked up with solar, nuclear, and other forms of energy today. It was a good read and discussion. By the time we finished, I was a little disappointed it was time to go home, it was such a good day. Oh well, it couldn't last forever. And tomorrow I've got 7th grade... Well, 7th grade science! I just hope I don't have to show another video like that Al Gore one I showed at this school last time. That was not fun, though not as bad as 7th grade sex-ed I had to do at another school around that same time. ☐