

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-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 PT0 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.

Kids do stupid things...

Just a quick third post of the day. I just read this one- kids do really stupid things in school. Here is the latest:

[Student Accused Of High-Fiving Teachers With Tacks](#)

I think I will skip giving middle-school students high-fives for awhile...

Choices

When I got home from small group last night, I did a check again for jobs, and came up with one district that had two postings. One was closer, one was one of the furthest schools from me. People who know me know my love for driving, or rather how much I love to **not** have to drive much in traffic. So the choice was obvious of course- I took the second one. Say what? You're thinking, "Didn't he just get through saying...?" Well, yes, but I mentioned in one of my comments a couple of days ago that there is a position I vowed never to take again. This was for one of those teachers. ELL at that one middle school is a nightmare I wish never to repeat, err, again. I actually subbed for these teachers (two ELL teachers on the team) a few times but I finally had enough last year. My theory is that discipline is far more strict in Mexico

(these were primarily Hispanic kids) and so when they come to the US and enter our education system, we are far more limited on what we can do for punishment and so it's like a cake-walk to them. Our worst is no problem to them as long as they only break rules and not laws in which case they finally have justice meted toward them. In any event, coupled with typical low-income for this area they are very difficult to work with. There is another middle school in the district, but oddly enough I have never actively chosen to not sub for ELL there. Maybe the difference is the grades are separated over there but all combined at the first school. 6th-graders learn how to play the system sooner from the 8th-graders since they spend a lot of time in the same room. In any event, as possible proof of this theory one of the days a student actually threw his binder at another student's head (in retribution). In front of me while I started to deal with the initial problem. Besides this, there was just a constant lack of respect overall.

Never again.

So of course that same position just showed up for tomorrow, but no alternative assignment. I am still looking for something for tomorrow...

Of course there are even worse positions. A nearby district actually has a lot of gang activity at their middle schools, though it is really not as bad as what I hear of from the city. I no longer sub in that district.

Science Court

Back to middle school, thankfully. Not many would actually say middle school is an improvement over younger grades, but

it is over yesterday's special needs preschool classroom. In any event, I mostly enjoy middle school though there are **those days** of course. Science was the subject, and will be tomorrow as well since this is a two-day assignment. Today's repeated middle school lesson, only four times at least instead of six, was a video (surprise, surprise). This video was one of several [Squigglevision/Science Court](#) episodes. This series uses the really bad (in my opinion) [Squigglevision](#) method of animation and is about two lawyers who battle against each other over some science fact, one science-challenged and one who basically does the teaching and (you guessed it) always wins the case. There were some funny moments, and it was entertaining. However for education it seems like they could have put more content in there. For a half-hour show (commercials were included, yikes!) it really could have said much more about the topic at hand, which by the way was work. Not that one episode necessarily defines the series, mind you- I haven't seen any other episodes. The students just started a unit on simple machines and this video taught the [scientific definition of work](#). In it they also talked about a few simple machines that would make the work seem easier by increasing the distance moved (work = force × distance, so increasing distance will decrease force if the work the same). We wrapped up after the video with a short discussion and a few minutes of silent ball.

If Squigglevision sounds familiar, it may be because of one of the other shows produced using this patented method. I specifically remember a show called [Home Movies](#) back in 1999. I'll tell you, I watched one episode of this show and that was enough for me. One of the drawbacks of Squigglevision animation is the lack of fluid, well, animation. Squiggly outlines are in abundance but the animation of the characters and whatnot is just lacking. Case in point is the entrance of a character. Rather than appearing a little at a time to show fluid motion, the character will just all of a sudden just be there. One frame not there at all, next frame, **bam** there he

is. This is part of the reason I really disliked the show. The other was I just didn't care for the premise. All in all I found the show to be quite a snooze. So, when the show creators switched to [Flash animation](#) for the second season I still did not switch back.

Anyway, back to school. You may have noticed I wrote that I only had to do this lesson four times. The reason for this is: 1) this is the school that has tutorial for one of the periods (some students do a foreign language instead of tutorial), and 2) at this school each core teacher does one social studies class. Why they don't have a dedicated social studies teacher is a mystery, probably budgeting. So for social studies they just colored pictures of African masks. All period. Well, you wanted to know, right? ☐

There's a guy in the preschool classroom!

People who know me know that my preference for teaching is about 3rd-7th grades. Stretch a year in either direction, and those are pretty much the jobs I gravitate toward when I have a choice. Of course specials are an exception; I do take those no problem though they may include kindergarten or 1st grade. Since you are an observant reader, you will have noticed the words *when I have a choice*. Well, I was unable to procure an assignment yesterday leaving me at the mercy of what's available in the morning. First call came in at about 5:40 and was for kindergarten. I thought about it and foolishly chose not to do it. I figured I would take a chance and check the web since I was awake. I did find a couple of half-day jobs which I also skipped. Then came the full-day preschool

assignment. I didn't think I would see anything younger than the one I rejected, but here it was. Being about 5:50 I decided to gamble again and keep hoping for a better assignment to show up. Nope. Oddly enough though, no one was picking up this full-day assignment for some reason. Finally, the system called me for the assignment so I gave in and took it. At least it was a lot closer to me than the kindergarten job. Then I went back to sleep for an hour.

As it turns out, this district as far as I know does not offer normal preschool. It does however offer special education preschool for the "developmentally delayed." The morning had eight of ten students there, and was actually kind of a breeze. This kind of classroom has teaching assistants (three!), and today the speech teacher actually came in to take over the class! I had absolutely no problem with this as this age is really out of my comfort zone anyway. I just acted as another T.A. The most I did teachingwise was running a center where they matched patterns and did a connect-the-dots worksheet. Other than that it was keeping kids focused and helping as needed.

The afternoon was a little different. There were slightly fewer students (seven), but this was a more challenging group. One was very autistic and needed special attention, and as a whole the group was lower than the morning group and like the one autistic boy, required more attention. The title of this post refers to me, but in actuality one of the part-time T.A.s in the afternoon was a guy! I would guess he really likes kids to do this, because he is a retired principal from the school I was at and retirement packages for top school administrators tend to be very generous. Either that or some bad investments, but his actions during the afternoon clearly showed the former. He was very good with the kids- unlike a T.A. from another school I worked with recently. That T.A. really yelled at the kids, sometimes for very minor things. To be fair, that school was a middle school, but I really felt for those kids.

Aside from that she did a pretty good job, doing things for the students she didn't have to. If not for this I would have thought she was in the wrong profession entirely.

I was somewhat relieved to go home a little early- preschool ends 15 minutes before the regular grades- partly due to the afternoon class and partly due to the relative inactivity of my job. This is one reason, aside from the very low pay, that I would not want to be a teaching assistant full time. The absolute worst times I have had subbing were as teaching assistants, particularly one-one-one assignments. Never again on those, though I would sub (at regular pay) for other types of teaching assistants, like those with multiple kids or general classroom helpers.

Small classes and early starts

7:15. That's what time a sub has to be at the junior high schools (still called that even though they are on a middle-school system- I guess they didn't want to change the letterheads ☐) in the district I was in today. That means being up before six. At least I had a solid night's sleep instead of constantly waking up like I often do. Once I got there, it turned out this teacher had a class that started ten minutes before the regular classes. Say what? Fortunately the plans said another teacher was asked to run this class so no problem not being able to completely go over the plans. The one I was subbing for was also a traveling teacher, which in this case could be called class-on-a-cart. This teacher had a class in a different room every period. One class even had two different rooms- more on that below.

So I got to the room with my cart and the teacher who was supposed to take over (surprise to him!) just said that I could handle this and just ask if I had any questions since he would be in and out of the room. Well then, I had to look at the plans again after all. It really wasn't hard like he said. All I had to do was pass out quizzes they had to complete, inform them of their class/homework assignment once finished, and then monitor them. Fortunately I had second period off to look at the rest of the day.

The next period was communications, basically a speech class. Well, they were good at speaking all right- to each other in conversation that is. They were completing an assignment as well, so again no teaching- just monitoring. The next two classes actually lasted for a period plus another half-period. Being math classes this was a bit odd. This is actually why one of the classes was in two different rooms. They spent one period in one room, then had to move for the next period. I would gather the regular teacher in that room doesn't have two periods off in a row to allow us to be there for the full time. To get the half-period the students actually sacrificed their study hall half of lunch to have the longer math period.

Where does the small classes part come into play? Well, you three who actually read this blog (☹) already know special education classes can be smaller. Well, two of the math classes were such classes- the first had about eight students in it. Most of them worked well, but there were two girls who thought they were in that communications class and chatted pretty much the entire time, sometimes with others across the room. At least they did *some* work so I was able to put up with it without sending anyone to the office. I left a note about this of course. This was the first of the two special-ed math classes. The second, get this, had **two students**. That's right, just two. They pay for a teacher to teach a class of two students?? I would really like to know more

about this but as a sub for just the day I really only know what's in the notes- nothing about it there!- and from what I might pick up from other teachers, but I didn't want to be nosy. Oh well, some things just remain mysteries.

Until tomorrow then. Time for me to sleep...

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.

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](#)

Another couple

One day in heaven, the Lord decided He would visit the earth and take a stroll. Walking down the road, He encountered a man who was crying. The Lord asked the man, "Why are you crying, my son?" The man said that he was blind and had never seen a sunset. The Lord touched the man who could then see and was happy.

As the Lord walked further, He met another man crying and asked, "Why are you crying, my son?" The man was born a cripple and was never able to walk. The Lord touched him and he could walk and he was happy.

Farther down the road, the Lord met another man who was crying and asked, "Why are you crying, my son?" The man said, "Lord, I work for the school system."

And the Lord sat down and cried with him.

According to a radio report, a middle school in Oregon was faced with a unique problem. A number of girls were beginning to use lipstick and would put it on in the bathroom. That was fine, but after they put on their lipstick they would press their lips to the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints.

Finally the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls into the bathroom and met them there with the maintenance man. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a major problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every night. To demonstrate how difficult it was to clean the mirrors, she asked the maintenance man to clean one of the mirrors. He took out a long-handled squeegee,

dipped it into the toilet and then cleaned the mirror.

Since then there have been no lip prints on the mirror. There are teachers and then there are TEACHERS.

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.