

TEACHING ENGLISH THAT STICKS

WITH TRISH MCCOY



And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. – Luke 4:16

I'm an English nerd, word nerd. When my girls were young and we were on vacation, they asked if they had to use good grammar while we were on vacation. Why, of course!

What do you teach: I teach life skills (punctuation, organization, time management, anger management.... aand POETRY - VOCAB – GRAMMAR – LITERATURE – COMPOSITION – BOOK REPORTS – RESEARCH PAPER (we juggle every day trying to keep all the balls in the air).

All teachers should have structure in their routine, but English (ELA) teachers have many books (sub-subjects) to get through on a daily basis. *Ill.: some do grammar one semester and literature another*

For a simple object lesson: Think of a sticky note and duct tape and Velcro.
"Why does one thing stick while another falls away?"

Students often forget what we tell them, but they remember what they discover, experience, laugh about, and connect with. (Ha, yes, I know better than to end a sentence in a preposition, formally speaking, of course.)

WE as teachers have to get “it” (whatever “it” is) right because lives depend on it.

We're training paramedics and doctors (I was always good to them in case they ended up being the ones saving my life one day on the side of the road or in a hospital! I've also taught air traffic controllers, Army Rangers, a Navy Seal, a Black Hawk pilot and instructor, a forensic detective, a bomb technician for the military—in addition to students across the globe who are preachers and teachers and missionaries and wives of men of God. What a privilege we have! What a responsibility we have!

Whatever the future looks like for our students, all jobs these days require reading and writing—and God uses us to equip them.

Making POETRY Stick

Major on the life-changing ones. Put the life-changing memory work on repeat. Examples:

“The Road Not Taken,” by Robert Frost • “I Saw God Wash the World Last Night,” by Dr. W. L. Stidger • “To Be or Not to Be,” by William Shakespeare • “Our Fathers Fought for Liberty,” by James Russell Lowell

Memorize the poem yourself. Students are watching to see if we have memorized it.

Can you think of some that you remember from way back when? I had an elementary teacher who rewrote the poem “Trees” by Alfred Joyce Kilmer, which begins “I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree.” My teacher's rewritten version was “I think that I shall never see a thing as ugly as a knee”

Making VOCABULARY Stick

Every word in the English language is made up of only 26 letters! How amazing is that!
Unabridged dictionary: 600,000 words in the 80's; now, that number has risen to 1,000,000+
Everybody expects English teachers to know every word . . . and we expect our students to know them well.

Use alliteration for retention.

Have students “picture” where the new word is located on the page.

That's how you find a verse in your Bible even when you can't remember the reference. You know it's in a particular book, on the right column, down near the bottom.

Have students *hear it, read it, say it, write it*.

Anytime a student comes across a vocab word while reading prose, have him say the vocab word and immediately say a synonym. Doing so helps students retain words that we teach them.

Teach students to notice patterns.

Greek and Latin roots

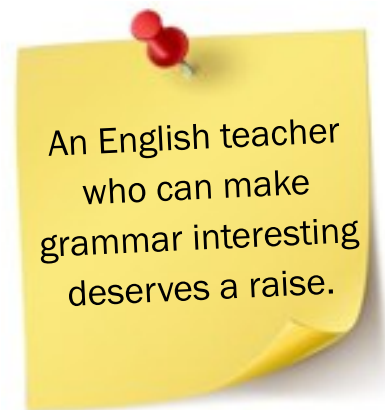
Ex.: “**ject**” (from the Latin *jacere*), which means “**to throw**.—**reject** (to throw back); **inject** (to throw or force into); **project** (to throw forward or outward); **subject** (to throw oneself under the power of another); **interject** (to throw in a remark between other words or a conversation) TRY YOUR HAND: bene- [benefit](#), [benevolent](#), [benefactor](#), [beneficial](#)

Good resource: *THE DAILY DEFINITION*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFi4vTr-M8A>

- Prefixes, suffixes
- Word families
- Memory associations
- Picture clues

Enjoy creative reviews.

- Vocabulary charades
- Baseball spelling
- Scrabble tiles
- Jeopardy
- Switch



Making GRAMMAR Stick

Use rubrics for composition grading.

Occasionally check only for specific things.

Break it down: 'll be checking this paper for . . . (have students highlight so both they and you can easily spot it)
sentence structure . . . paragraph develop...spellings and word usage . . . content only

Major on cursive writing. *They'll be grateful for life!*

The reason students with good cursive writing fare better academically is that they can process thoughts more quickly.

Be picky, particular, persnickety about details.

Your best students probably have a nice cursive handwriting (as well as nice manuscript writing).

Give students a “cheat sheet” to keep in the front of their notebook or binder.

Mnemonics (EGBDF; HOMES; princiPAL; *i* before *e*)

-d -ed -t -en -n (past part.)	S	1— 0
-ing (present part.)	Cd	2+— 0
modifies n. or pro.	Cx	1— 1+
	Cd-Cx	2+— 1+

CONJ.

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

, ” and . ” (periods/commas **always** before ”)

: and ; (commas/semi-colons after “)

? and ! (depends on what’s inside the “ “)

Add “by zombies” to check passive voice verbs.

The store was overrun (by zombies).

It makes sense. It’s passive voice.



Organize a grammar scavenger hunt.

Grammar isn’t just in the grammar book. It’s hiding in plain sight.

Give students a pile of everyday items: cereal box, restaurant menu, magazine, advertisement, children’s book, newspaper, product label, school handbook

Challenge them to find examples of grammar **in the wild**.

Find a sentence with an adjective.

Find an imperative sentence.

Find a proper noun.

Find a possessive noun.

Find an adverb.

Find a compound sentence.

THINKING WE DON’T
NEED ALL THE PARTS
OF SPEECH IS LIKE SAY-
ING WE DON’T NEED
ALL OF *OUR* PARTS.

Teach the preposition list military style.

How many things have we learned in our life that were taught musically!

Investigate a grammar crime scene. (pair up with a lead investigator, strong student with weaker student)

Identify the error, correct it, and explain the rule. Here are some sample sentences for you to try.

1. Neither of the boys remembered to bring their permission slip to the office.
2. Having finished the assignment, the television was turned on by Sarah.
3. The teacher asked Michael and I to stay after class.
4. Everyone in the honors class brought their textbook to school, but neither of them remembered the workbook.
5. The book, along with several articles about the author, were placed on the teacher's desk.
6. If I would have known about the change in schedule, I would have arrived earlier.
7. After reading the novel, the symbolism became much clearer to me.
8. The reason I was late was because my car wouldn't start.
9. She is one of the students who always completes his assignments on time.
10. Between you and I, I don't think the committee has made it's final decision.
11. The principal spoke to the students about their behavior, which surprised several teachers.
12. He is one of the few politicians who listens to what we think.

COMPOSITION

Write an observation article using a picture or a grocery receipt.

Use crime-scene tape to tell a story. *What happened here?*

Consider an annotated bibliography for research. Example below:

Garrow, David J. *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King and the Voting Rights Act of 1965*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.

Garrow describes how the strategy of protest employed by Martin Luther King, Jr., and SCLC at Selma influenced the emergence of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He contends that the choice of Selma as a site for civil rights protests and the specific tactics that SCLC adopted in Selma were part of a plan to force the introduction and passage of national voting rights legislation. The foremost consideration in this campaign was the need to elicit "unprovoked white violence aimed at peaceful and unresisting civil rights demonstrators." Garrow argues that at Selma "a strategy that bordered on nonviolent provocation supplanted the earlier belief in nonviolent persuasion." SCLC correctly assumed that police violence would generate national media coverage and this, in turn, would stimulate reactions "throughout the country, and especially Washington," leading to pressure for federal voting rights legislation.

For a soft start on research, assign cities and give outline to follow.

Give multiple composition/essay options and allow students to choose.

Consider this for questions on a test. Have students answer one of three, or two of four. Doing so helps them *and* helps you. Allowing students to choose also works well for book genres and more!

Making LITERATURE Stick

"Students don't hate to read. They only hate to read what we assign them. English teachers, as a group, are responsible for ruining more great books than any other group in existence." (brighthubeducation.com)

This problem is easy to remedy. There are millions of books in print. Surely there is something that even the most reluctant reader could find interesting.

Allow them to choose their own book, at least one of the four during the year. There have been literally millions of books written; there's at least one for even the most resistant reader. Help him find it.

Read to them and with them, especially with some difficult classics. Maybe dim the lights. Read by lamp light. Alternate reading student/teacher/student/teacher to help momentum.

Good selections: Silas Marner (10th grade); The Scarlet Letter (11th grade); Pilgrim's Progress (12th grade)

Other reading suggestions: Stop in the middle of a sentence for someone else to start. They will have to keep up to be ready to pick right up. Have them stand and face each other and take turns.

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be chewed, some to be swallowed and digested."

Sir Francis Bacon

Engage them in interactive activities.

- Character interviews or diaries—*The Scarlet Letter*
- Dramatic readings—"The Tell-Tale Heart"
- Theme detectives—(sum it up)
- Story maps—draw Utopia
- Timeline activities—easy and beneficial

Consider hosting biblical allusion hunts.

Students often miss significant meaning in classic literature when they do not recognize biblical allusions, e.g., the writing on the wall, a good Samaritan, prodigal son, thorn in the flesh. The Bible's influence is seen in major authors:

- John Bunyan and *Pilgrim's Progress*
- John Milton and *Paradise Lost*
- C. L. Lewis and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Aslan)
- Charles Dickens and *A Christmas Carol*
- Shakespeare and *Macbeth's* Birnam wood coming to Dunsinane (reference to Judges 9)

Allow students to become detectives instead of passive readers.

III.: *Scarlet Letter* (it's a whodunit and it proves "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" - Pro, 28:13).

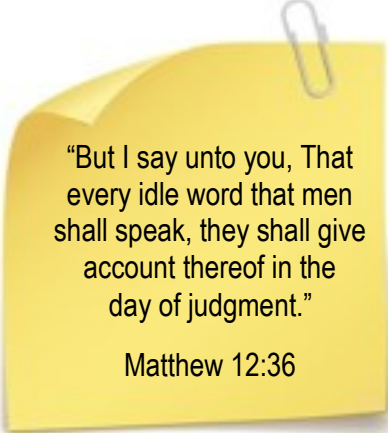
Encourage them to become part of the drama. At the least, it's comic relief.

III.: "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix."

Assign readers for any literature written as a play. Don't assign it for outside reading.

Don't underestimate the value of . . .

- A funny classroom story
- A clever memory trick
- A literary allusion
- A visual object lesson
- A game that worked unexpectedly well
- A moment of just being human (laugh with them)



"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

Matthew 12:36

GOOD RESOURCES

- Education.com – 5 min. worksheets (limited number of downloads each month without premium)
- Writingtips.org (Writing Tips Institute)
- SecondarySara.com – check out "Grammar in Literature" and more
- TeachersPayTeachers.com – good ELA documents at free or reasonable cost (*Scarlet Letter* bellringers by The Green Light recommended)
- Truthandgrace.net – "Education" tab; "Breaking up Boredom in the Classroom" and more

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- Connect with your students. Have fun with them.
Love on them. Treat them. (breakfast every Tuesdays)
Ill.: On my birthday: I give them cake and we do a Q&A. (Dave always gave ice cream and no HW on his)
They could ask me anything. They wanted to know how Dave and I met, where I went to college, what is the craziest thing that has ever happened in a class, my most memorable birthday
- Throw extra credit around like confetti.
Keep a 3x5 card of points over 105.
- Have a “Little, Friendly Competition” that is *ongoing*
(in two’s, groups, girls vs. guys; keep the tally on the board)
- At the end of the day, remember that their soul is what matters most.

Myth: English teachers spend their summers at home breaking down sentences and analyzing literature.

Truth: English teachers spend their summers in the Caribbean and on golf courses breaking down sentences and analyzing literature.

What do teachers make? They make a difference.

What Teachers Make: In Praise of the Greatest Job in the World

BY TAYLOR MALI