

Your First Year of Teaching

It's 6:50 when you enter your dark classroom and flip the light switch. Students won't be arriving for one hundred minutes, but you know the success and ease of your day is predicated on you being there now. Carrying a heavy bag, you can see your breath as you lumber to the blackboard and write the date in the upper right corner **February 18, 2002**. One week until the school science fair, you think, and a half-hour until the heat comes on. Built in 1895, the building is heated by an old furnace that often breaks down. The building engineer turns it on when he arrives at 6:30, but it takes a long time before the heat reaches the fourth floor radiators and can begin to slowly warm up the room. You drop your bag to the floor with a THUD and drag it past the chalkboard, through an adjoining room that you call a "lab" (but is actually a vacant room with some tables and chairs) and into a closet. Sixty pounds of sand. You'll use it for forty minutes after lunch.

Next, you visit a terrarium that sits on the windowsill of the lab. Luckily, the sun has been shining for the past several weeks and the aquarium temperature has remained high enough to keep the plants and iguana living inside of it alive. You reach in your pocket and pull out a scrap of lettuce to feed the iguana. As you switch on a desk lamp to warm the terrarium, you look down at the dark parking lot, which is partially illuminated by an orange floodlight. With the exception of the custodian's station wagon, there is only one car in the lot, a red SUV, belonging to an autistic-support teacher that lives in the suburbs.

It's Wednesday morning at Carpenter Elementary School, and you've already worked thirty hours this week (you'll work forty more before the week's over). Your job description reads Middle School Science Teacher, but this title falls far short of your duties. You also teach an English and Writing class every day as well as music once a week. Still, none of this is your major concern right now. At the beginning of the year, the principal told you that you were in charge of organizing a science fair in which every student – 273 to be exact – hands in an individual project. The science fair will be held in a week and you've only received two. Normally, someone with your job description would have a science background. You do not. Science was always your worst subject, you haven't attended a science fair since you were in first grade, and you don't even really like the subject. However, you had a wonderful experience student teaching here last year and when the science position opened up last summer, you took the job without hesitation.

You sit down at your desk to review your notes from the night before, knowing that the next two minutes is the last you'll be sitting for another eight-and-a-half hours. There's a reminder to talk to the principal about an eighth grader named Jason. Five school days have passed since he refused to work where you asked him to, and he has yet to serve a respectful detention. You remove the scrap of paper from the clipboard, stuff it in your pocket, and notice an indirect object homework sheet. There are ten sentences single-spaced under the heading and instructions, with a duplicate copy underneath. Each teacher has an allotment of paper, which they cannot exceed, so squeezing two assignments on a piece of paper is wise, if possible. Of course, English textbooks would

remedy this entire problem, but you've only been given ten (eight have a cover) and there are twenty-six seventh graders.

There's a simple reason you chose to run off copies now instead of setting up the lab, which is a more significant priority at this point. Last week, while printing copies at 8:00 a.m., the principal dismissed you from the copier in front of four colleagues, saying, "You're done here" with no explanation. It would've been nice to run off copies before leaving last night, but by the time you typed up the homework sheet the office was dark and locked like every other room in the school.

Back in your room, you're writing notes about indirect objects as diligently and neatly as possible. Directly out of the textbook, you copy a definition, instructions on how to identify it, two example problems, and how to diagram them. You flip to the chapter review and begin copying sentences, being sure to change names and content when needed to make them ethnically appropriate. **My dad gave Roger a golf Club.** becomes **My mom gave Kaideen a basketball.** .

When you finally finish at 7:30, the chalkboards are covered, hot air has slowly begun to purr out of the radiator, and faint streaks of light have started painting the horizon to the west. You can't believe how quickly the last forty minutes have passed and, wondering how you'll have the lab prepared in time, you find yourself running to the lab closet. As you organize materials, you don't mind the stress of having to set the lab up quickly. The fifth graders are your favorite group to work with, so you want to create the best lab possible. Spaced across the table are a bag of seventeen plastic cars, stack of seventeen short pieces of wood, seventeen rolls of tape, and seventeen rulers, each in a separate stack. Preparing seventeen of each item allows all thirty-four fifth grade

students to work with a partner. Facing this many students with no assistance leaves no room for lack of organization on your part.

The students will be learning why cars are streamlined as part of their wind resistance unit. To do this, they must measure the distance a car travels down a ramp with cardboard taped to the front bumper and sticking straight up in the air. Then, they will tape the top of the cardboard to the hood, roll it down the ramp again, and take another measurement. You grab a large scrap of cardboard from a reserve heap kept beneath a table. You'd like the students to cut out their own pieces of cardboard during class. This would save you time and help them learn to follow directions from a scientific procedure. However, you only have ten pairs of old, weak scissors, so you grab your pair of left-handed shears and begin cutting with your right hand.

The sun has risen, you are warm (the furnace has pumped too much heat into the room and you'll soon have to open some windows to cool it off), and only two more pieces of cardboard need to be cut when you hear Social Studies teacher and thirty-year School District of Philadelphia veteran, Deborah Smith, laughing and wishing the elevator lady a good day. She always arrives at the same time. You don't need to look at the clock to know that it's 8:05 – twenty-four minutes until you need to pick up students.

After the cardboard strips have been cut, you look at the lab to make sure there's nothing that you might have forgotten. There are four tables spaced across the room. The fifth graders will need as much floor space as possible to conduct this experiment, so the tables will need to be stacked on top of each other in a corner. Remembering that you forgot to check your e-mail, you rush over to the classroom, turn the computer on and hurry back to the lab.

You're sweating when you return to the computers. The tables are old, heavy, and required every ounce of your energy to lift alone. As you punch in the password, you hear Randy Goldman – the Reading teacher – wishing you a “Good morning.” Eight-eleven, you think to yourself, as you return his greeting. Mr. Goldman is the fifth grade teacher and a very good man. The thirty-four students in his homeroom exceed the legal limit by one. He started the year with thirty-two, but two students were transferred into the school for disciplinary reasons – one in November and one just two weeks earlier. When the principal gave him the choice between teaching the illegally-sized class, or moving one of his more advanced students to sixth grade in the middle of the year, he chose the former rather than the latter, not wanting to stunt anyone's academic and/or social progress. Les Stoddard, the math teacher who you student taught under last year, hasn't arrived yet, and you hope that he's caught in traffic. If he is, he'll arrive soon after 8:30, at the latest. If he's sick, you'll probably lose your second period prep (Carpenter rarely receives substitute teachers), which you desperately need in order to prepare for the eighth graders who come in right after the fifth grade lab.

The value of Les' presence stretches far beyond securing your prep period. The entire floor becomes chaotic when he's not there, because no other teacher is able to command the respect that the students grant him. Les is the backbone of the middle school, and the main reason you chose to teach here. Just a block away, there are housing projects, where some of the biggest drug dealers in America have been known to operate. Many Carpenter students are impoverished, neglected, sexually abused, and physically abused. While student teaching under Les, you knew all of this; you just didn't know how hard it was to do what he made look so simple. Last year, you rarely saw Les yell at

a student or be defied in anyway. The students loved and respected him and no one wanted to be on his bad side. The same is not true for you, however. You grew up eighty miles west of Philadelphia, surrounded by forests and farmland. Detention was rarely issued to any student in your middle school and hearing a shouting teacher made your ears perk up and curious about who had provoked him or her to such anger. No component of your background could have prepared you for this job.

Teaching in the city had never been a goal or interest of yours. You just sort of stumbled into it. You wanted to teach and the master's program that you were in required an urban, public placement. Les made it look easy and rewarding. He maintained a relaxed, yet serious class tone, masterfully balancing the role of teacher, friend, and occasionally guardian. As a result, many students, who would have caused problems and not worked hard, stayed out of trouble and became good students. When you took the job you hoped that you would achieve similar stature in the Carpenter community.

There are two messages in your Inbox, one from the School District of Philadelphia Teacher's Union President, which you delete without reading, and one from Keith's mother, who you correspond with two to three times a week. She feels that "you are taking advantage of the fact that you e-mail her by singling Keith out." Obviously, Keith - a student who commits at least a dozen offenses per day that would warrant suspension in any suburban school - has complained about you to his mother. You're angry and know that it's unwise to reply when feeling this way, but you do it anyway, politely assuring Keith's mother that you are not intentionally singling him out, but want her to know that he has been blatantly disrespectful everyday for the past week and if she

doesn't want to receive your e-mails, then you'd be happy to recommend suspensions to the principal instead. You click 'Send', forget what you've written, and, hoping to speak with the principal about Jason before having to pick up your students, run down the stairs because you fear that waiting for the elevator will leave you short on time.

In the office, the principal makes eye contact with you, nods briefly, and turns to go back in his office. "Mr. Fromm," you call out, hoping he has thirty seconds with which to listen. He does, and you explain to him that during detention yesterday Jason took four minutes to walk the two flights of stairs to your room, then continued playing with the Velcro strap of his watch after being asked to stop. Finally, he propped his feet up on a desk and tried to fall asleep before you dismissed him a half-hour early. "Send him to me, first thing," he says, and you feel your heart sink, because you can tell by his tone that the student, who preceded yesterday's antics by twice skipping detention altogether, will not be suspended like you think he should be.

Relief. Les walks into the office. There will be no lost prep.

Walking into the schoolyard, you hear your name being shouted from multiple directions. Students of ranging grade levels run towards you holding large poster boards. You ignore their cries and crouch down to receive a hug from the most beautiful first grader in the world, knowing this is your last moment of peace until 3:09. Standing, you collect a half-dozen boards, and it is clear that your ploy of offering extra credit to students who finish a week early has not worked.

The bell rings and eleven seventh graders are in line. Two boys who should be in line are throwing football by the gate. You call for them and they hear you, but continue

throwing. As you make your way to where your class is standing, you approach Jason, who is lining up with his class, and tell him that he is supposed to report to the principal's office. He continues walking as though you're not there. The boys are still throwing football, and you call for them again. They make sure to get a few more throws and catches in before moving towards the group. As they slowly traverse the asphalt, Mr. Stoddard guides his sixth graders into the school and up the fire tower, followed by Ms. Smith and the eighth graders. The boys still haven't completely joined the line when you decide that you've waited long enough and motion the class with your free hand to follow you inside.

Holding the 36-inch boards, you walk clumsily to the fourth floor, following the school rules. The seventh graders are divided into two lines – a boys, and a girls – and they stop at each landing until you say “pass,” at which time they walk to the next landing and wait until they hear their cue to continue walking. Your class is fairly quiet, but the fire tower is not. Profanity echoes up and down the tower. A few eighth graders have lagged behind their class, and are now holding up your line, because Ms. Smith doesn't follow the rules that you are adhering to. You tell them to continue walking and they ignore you, as though you're a fly on their hand – more of an annoyance than a threat. After being ignored several times, issuing detention seems like the logical recourse. However, you've tried this in the past, and the students probably won't show and there will be no consequences for not attending. Even if they do attend detention, it is only for ten minutes after school. Dozens of students serve four or five times a week and never receive the threat of suspension or expulsion.

A few more seventh graders joined the class on the walk up the stairs, so there are fifteen in all when they are seated in the classroom. You know more will trickle in any minute, but after propping the cumbersome boards next to a bookshelf you start the lesson anyway. “Indirect objects,” you say, “are who or what the direct object is referring to.” A knock on the door. Three well-behaved fifth graders are in the hallway, science fair projects in hand. Momentarily, you are excited, because the projects look incredible. A boy has balanced a toothpick on top of a bottle, with a potato and two forks; a girl has built a clay volcano; and, another girl built a racetrack. Your class has started talking, however, so there’s no time for compliments. “Back table,” you say, pointing to the lab. “Please leave through the lab door.” A boy in your class says something insulting to one of the girls as they pass in front of the class, so you make him stand next to a bookshelf. He mutters something under his breath as he walks to the perimeter of the classroom. Normally, you’d address this, but by doing so you’d raise the possibility of a confrontation and you don’t have time next period to call his mother or sit through a meeting with the principal, so you pretend that you didn’t hear it.

Two more students arrived during the delay, so you further postpone the lesson while they seat themselves. “Indirect objects,” you say, “are who or what the direct object is referring to.” Volunteers review what direct objects are and then you go over an indirect object example. The class seems to get it, so you go on to a second example. “Does anyone think they can give an example of a compound indirect object?” Three hands shoot up, as static from the television can be heard in the back of the room. On cue, the class stands for the pledge to the flag, then sits down to listen to the morning announcements. Students of the month are congratulated and the weather will be sunny

with a high of forty-five degrees, so recess will be outdoors today. Science fair projects are due a week from today.

When announcements are over the class has enlarged to nineteen. Five students who show up regularly are still missing. You ask again if anyone can give an example of a compound indirect object. Four hands shoot up this time. While the student you called on begins talking, you hear the door open and a pair of crutches click their way through the doorway. Chris, a student with an amputated leg has joined. At least his mother isn't here, you think, recalling an incident last week, in which she called you out of class at this exact same time to chastise you for not knowing why her son's lunch was stolen the day before. The sentence is volunteered and understood amid the chattering of Chris' crutches and you feel satisfied that the class is finally under control. You demonstrate how to diagram the sentences, and have the students begin diagramming the sentences on the board.

As the students work, you bounce around the room, helping as many students as quickly, yet thoroughly as you can. Each time you bend over to help a student, you hear talking and giggling and have to stop what you're doing to reestablish silence. You're lucky that they have gym next, because a few inquiries as to what their plans are for second period solves your problem. Three more students arrive during this time, including one who was out sick the past two days and wants his homework. You retrieve it from a folder behind your desk and return, tending to raised hands.

At 9:10, you are standing in front of the door, waiting for the class to become quiet. The students like gym, so it's not difficult preparing them to leave. Just as you're about to dismiss the class, you hear laughing and someone yell, "Shut up, Keith!" Keith

has snuck into the closet and you call for him to come out. When Keith is back in line and stops laughing and talking you walk down the stairs – two lines, stopping at every landing. It’s much easier when there’s only one class on the steps at a time.

You arrive in the basement cafeteria/gym, having only stopped the class twice for getting too loud. Keith, both times, was the main culprit. Your only real problem came when the class was quiet. Rachel, a fourteen year-old who is waiting to be disciplinarily transferred out of the school, screamed “Fuck you!” at one of the boys. Long ago, you stopped addressing her outbursts. It only makes her more volatile. She knows that she has been expelled and, while her paper work is being processed downtown, has chosen to cause as many problems for the school as possible. Every teacher, including Les who no students cross, has been the recipient of Rachel’s disrespect and defiance. All in all, you think, it’s been a smooth day.

As you write up Rachel’s latest offense in the office, you wish the principal was nearby. Then, Rachel would be removed from the class. He’s in a meeting, however, so you clip the pink slip to a clipboard that he may or may not look at today and hustle back to your room.

It’s 9:25 when you begin water-sponging the blackboards. Where did the first ten minutes of your prep go? It’s 9:30 when you’re done and you trot over to the lab to move the science fair projects that you received today into the closet, so that no one will be tempted to steal or sabotage them.

While the water on the chalkboard dries, you grab an eighth grade textbook off of a shelf and begin reading so that you can plan today’s lesson. The eighth graders finished

early yesterday and, knowing they wouldn't sit quietly for fifteen minutes, you crammed in the follow-up lesson. Today's lesson should've been planned last night, but after eating and shopping for sand you succumbed to exhaustion, only reading two paragraphs before falling asleep.

After noticing the board has dried, you start scribbling down notes about the solstices and equinox's. You push the eighth grade work aside, pick up your clipboard, and begin copying down the Problem, Research, Hypothesis, and Experiment on the board, as well as Collect Data, Analyze Data, and Conclusion questions. It's 9:40. If you write quickly, you have a chance of getting it all down.

At 9:50, you've just finished writing the experiment when Ms. Adams walks through the door. Her title reads Small Learning Community Leader, meaning she governs the upper floor, helping all teachers create a better learning environment for the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. But, you haven't seen it. For the nearly six months you've been working with her, you've seen her cut out letters in her office, sit in meetings with the principal, and look the other way when you've had disciplinary problems. She asks you if you've collected money for next week's museum field trip. You haven't. She also wants to know if you've written a blurb for the March newsletter. You say that you have not, but will have it done by tomorrow morning. Lastly, she wants to know if the class has decided if they'd rather see a butterfly or Birds of the Amazon video on next week's field trip. You promise that you will ask later in the day, and you wonder to yourself why she can't take care of these chores herself.

Ms. Adams leaves and you complete the outline of a chart for the fifth graders' Collect Data lab report section. You will need to write Analyze Data and Conclusion

questions during class, after they have conducted their experiments. The eighth grade worksheet hasn't been finished either. That, too, will have to be "winged" during the class.

The fifth graders are waiting with their teacher outside your room when you return with your class, which now has ballooned to twenty-four students. You hurry the students along, telling them to quickly get everything they will need for Reading and Social Studies, because they won't be returning until lunchtime and they won't be allowed to come back in the room once they leave. Slowly, the students filter out of your classroom to Reading. The fifth grade teacher has joined them, leaving you caught in your doorway, monitoring thirty-four fifth graders (no one is absent today) in the hallway and a half-dozen in your room. The fifth graders are loud, and you tell them to quiet down when you're not telling the seventh graders in your room to hurry up.

Within a few minutes, the seventh graders have all left the room, except for Rachel. She's standing next to her seat, jacket on, telling you that someone put gum in her desk. "Rachel," you say, "you're going to have to take your jacket off and go to Reading." The School District of Philadelphia has a no jacket policy, fearing students might conceal weapons. You'd like to ignore it, but you will hear from Mr. Fromm if he sees her wearing it.

"No," she says. "Someone put gum in my desk."

If you'd stop to think about Rachel, you'd sympathize with her. She's been through more in fourteen years than her classmates have combined. Her psychological file is thick and horrifying. Mother died when she was two. Father sexually abused her

until she was ten when her cousins moved her to Kentucky. She tried to set fire to her school in Kentucky, and was expelled before her grandmother moved her back to Philadelphia. Her life has been miserable and you'd like to help her, tell her that you care about her, but your sad reality is that you have thirty-four fifth graders in the hallway who need to learn and Rachel is suspending their education right now.

By now, the fifth graders have been waiting in the hallway for over seven minutes and they're antsy. "Rachel," you say, raising your voice. "Jacket off. Go to reading."

She continues to stand, shrugging her shoulders. You pick up the phone to call the office. As you begin to dial, you see Kent throw a pencil from the back of the fifth grade line at a girl in the front, hitting her in the head. The girl screams that she's going to kill Kent. Technically, Kent and the girl should both be suspended at this point, but you know you won't have time to report the incident. You pause a moment, ignoring both problems. What can you do?

You dial the office and tell them that Rachel won't take her jacket off, won't leave the room, and that you'd like to begin class, so could they please send someone up to get her out of the room? Ms. Adams would be the logical person, but she never seems to be close by when classes pass. Rachel leaves (still wearing her jacket) before you hang up the phone and when you do, the fifth graders have reached a nearly deafening tone. As loud as you can, you yell, "Fifth grade." All but a half-dozen stop talking. You call these students' names out individually, at which time they stop talking and one or two begin. You repeat this process two more times before earning total silence and a hoarse voice.

At 11:10, cars and boards are scattered across the lab, and cardboard pieces and masking tape are strewn about the floor. Amanda's sitting by herself in the lab. Kent, Isaiah, Tami, and Julie are each standing in a separate corner, and two others have been sent across the hall to Les, who you lean on, because the students hate going there more than the accommodation room. There's twenty minutes left in their marathon class. They are quietly working and they, at most, have done fifteen minutes of work. Although the class has twenty-five of the smartest, most well-behaved students that you could ever find in any school – private or public, urban or suburban – they also have nine students with severe emotional/behavioral disorders. Class only began at 10:15 and after that it continued to be interrupted by the students who are no longer in their seats. These well-behaved students, you think, must be robbed of three to four hours of education a day.

As they work, you write down the Analyze Data and Conclusion questions, peaking over your shoulder every other second to make sure everyone remains on task. You finish with ten minutes left in class, and you'd like to begin cleaning up, but you can't, because you need to prepare for the eighth graders who will be arriving in less than ten minutes. You have a girl that you know will finish the lab report for homework gather the cars, boards, and tape rolls to make sure there are seventeen of each, while you scribble down problems in your notes.

A plane leaves Omaha at 6 p.m. and arrives in LA at 7 p.m. How long was the flight? You write this down and eleven other problems like it, just before it is time to line up. The noise level has risen, so you shout "Fifth grade" and eventually quiet the class down and ask your volunteer if there were seventeen boards, cars, and rolls of tape. She says there were seventeen boards, but only fourteen cars and fifteen rolls of tape. You

ask the class to look around and say they're not going anywhere until the missing items turn up. The eighth graders, however, are outside your room making lots of noise, which means the math teacher is waiting for the fifth graders. Giving in, you tell them to line up and regret making a blank threat, because this is a loss and you feel that every time you lose, you look weaker in the students' eyes.

In the hall, facing the eighth grade, it is apparent that this will not be an easy day. As you suspected, Jason is in class, which means that he received neither an in-school, nor out-of-school suspension. He is quiet and you know he won't give you trouble today, but you know that others will and part of you thinks that if he had been suspended this might have changed the entire classes tone. The eighth grade is your toughest class to teach. They are the oldest group in the school, with a history of being out-of-control, and you are a first-year teacher, a natural target for their disobedient energies. You needed Jason disciplined severely for treating you the way he did. Now, you feel, any discipline you try to implement will be ridiculed by the students and you will be powerless to back it up.

They were loud coming into the room and now that they're finally seated, you still can't begin class. Erasing the board is imperative to delivering your lesson, but it is also essential to not take your eyes off the class. You withstand a wave of noise as you wipe the chalk away, creating a faded, yellow dust film on the board. Turning to face the class, you realize your lesson will be postponed several more minutes. Five students are wearing jackets and at least that many are chewing gum.

“Jackets off, gum in the trash,” you say, looking at a girl who is guilty of both offenses. You don’t really care that she’s wearing a jacket or chewing gum, but it does bother you that you’re being tested. School rules are being broken, and the principal held a meeting last week, in which he berated you, and the other teachers on your floor for doing a poor job of enforcing them. Les said that he thought their responsibilities were great enough, without having to enforce no gum chewing, a rule that the students resist with their greatest, most defiant efforts. The principal’s response: “That’s teaching one-oh-one.” Right now, you’re breaking school rules by not giving each student wearing a jacket or chewing gum detention. However, doing so would be futile. If the students would attend, they would come back tomorrow chewing gum again, and if they didn’t attend, nothing would happen anyway.

Slowly, the girl begins unzipping her jacket and makes her way to the trash can to spit out her gum, staring you down the entire time, as if to say “Fuck you.” You glance at the other side of the room and tell three more students to take their jackets off, and two others to spit out their gum. You look at them until they begin to peel their garments, or slowly walk to the trashcan. In the meantime, the class has gotten loud again – talking, yelling at one another, and laughing at you. You are their toy, the subject of their play and taunts.

“Yesterday,” you say, beginning your lesson amid loud talking. “Owen, up here. Kari, turn around. Yesterday, we talked about how to convert kilometers to miles. Tony, eyes up here. Tiffaney, face front. Owen, stop talking.” You begin writing *10 kilometers* on the board. “Can someone tell me how I can convert ten...Tony, stop talking...kilometers...Tony...to miles?” Two hands shoot up and three answers are

called out. “One at a time. Gerry, turn around. Yes, Cassie. How do you convert ten kilometers to miles? Tony, last warning,” you say as Cassie begins to say something.

Tony erupts in laughter. “You’re gonna have to leave,” you say, looking at Tony.

“I didn’t do nothing.”

“Let’s go. Mr. Stoddard’s room,” you say, grabbing a pass that you’ve written in anticipation of an incident such as this, and handing it to him. Your decision to send Tony to Mr. Stoddard’s room was calculated. The students hate going there. Stoddard is respected, and they don’t want to lose his favor. The accommodation room can turn into a playground and they know that if more than two or three students are sent there, then the woman in charge will refuse to take more students and complain to the principal that you can’t manage a classroom. Fully capable of managing forty or more students at once, Mr. Stoddard, graciously, will accept as many students as you send him.

“I didn’t do nothing,” he says, leaning back on his chair – his arms folded, his voice rising.

“Leave or I’m calling security.”

Students laugh, but you ignore their taunts. Tony stands as other students resume laughing and talking. He slowly, defiantly picks up his books and walks slowly and defiantly to the door. “I’ll go to accommodation, but I ain’t going to Mr. Stoddard’s room.”

“Then you’re wondering the halls and I’ll have to call security.”

Tony walks out in the hallway as slowly as possible, and makes his way towards the adjacent room. You’d like to shut the door and continue your lesson, but you fear Tony might turn the corner and ditch the rest of class. It shouldn’t matter what he does.

You should be able to hand him a pass and if he doesn't go where he's told, then he'll be punished by the administration. You told the principal your feelings a few months ago and he said that if the student leaves the building and gets hit by a car, then the school is liable. In this meeting you said that if this is the case, then why are we allowed to send students to the bathroom with a pass? His response: "Stop being argumentative." So, you wait for close to thirty seconds as he walks ten feet and the rest of the class becomes loud. Technically, you're breaking the law, because you can't see every student in the class right now. The principal's suggestion to remedy this problem was to call Les before sending him a student. Then, if the student doesn't show up within a minute, he calls you back, at which time you call the office to let them know a student is roaming the halls. You refuse to do this. The logistics are too many to pull off effectively. Furthermore, you hate receiving calls while teaching and you won't allow Tony to disrupt two classes. One would think that sending the student to accommodation would be less time consuming, but it's more. To do this, you need to fill out a pink slip, which would take several minutes to write, and then you'd receive a call from the woman in charge, confirming that the student had arrived.

Tony eventually makes his way into the room and you return to a noisy class. "Alright," you say, loudly, cutting the noise in half. "Sorry, Cassie. Laura, be quiet. Owen keep it down. Gerry, sit up and face front. Cassie, could you tell us how to convert ten kilometers into miles?" She begins answering. "Gerry, Cassie's talking. Sorry, Cassie...go ahead." Cassie correctly answers that you multiply kilometers by six tenths to get six miles. Three minutes to get a simple answer and more energy than one of your middle school teachers had to expend in a class period.

The class begins to get noisy again, and you'd like to give them a textbook assignment. Your voice is becoming more hoarse, and by doing so you wouldn't have to struggle so much to get through a lesson. They work well this way – you've seen them do so in other classes and even this class when the assignment is straightforward and involves independent work with direct instruction. But you pan across the room and see eight or nine students that are trying to concentrate, to learn amidst the chaos of their classroom environment. They've shared a classroom with these students since they were in kindergarten and, you feel, they've missed too much education, because teachers simply gave up on educating a class this rambunctious.

You take a deep breath and continue. "If you turn – Owen - to page four-twenty-four – Kevin - and look at the map, you'll see – Gerry – Laura - that the continental United States is separated into – Owen - it is separated into four time zones. Does anyone know what time zone we live in? Kevin, stop talking - Gerry, turn around - Laura, eyes up here. Yes, Cheryl. What time zone do we live in? Correct – Owen - we live in the Eastern Time zone. Do you want to join Tony, Owen?... Then sit there and shut your mouth. If it's four o'clock in Philadelphia, what time is it in Los Angeles? Don't call out. Hand raised. Cassie...Right. Nine o'clock."

After going over several more example problems, you begin writing problems on the board. You withstand the noise, stopping only occasionally, telling the class that they've become too loud, as you write fifteen problems on the board. You finish at twelve o'clock and by this time the class has become somewhat pacified. You know that at least a half-dozen students deserve detention, but you choose not to give any. They won't mind serving it, and nothing will change anyway. You sat through countless

meetings with the principal and these same students for the first five months of the year. Each time, he'd explain that if their behavior didn't change, they would be suspended and eventually expelled. But this never happened, so you decided recently that attempting to discipline them only wasted what little free time you had, because although the principal verbally supports you, his actions are saying, "You're stuck with these kids for the rest of the year. Do the best you can."

You grab a push broom and start sweeping up the mess that the fifth graders made. Occasionally, the talking grows too loud, at which time you quiet them down, which works for a minute or two before growing loud again. You hate yourself for settling for mediocrity, but there's still three hours left in the day, three classes to teach, you're voice is weakening, and you can feel a head ache in its incipient stages of development.

Classes pass and the seventh graders are back in the room, grabbing their coats and lunches, and lining up. They're wound up. It's been a long morning for them as well, and they're eager to get to the lunchroom. You tell them twice that we'll leave when it's quiet, but there is still talking. You grab your lunch bag and sit down, exhausted. It's 12:15. The other teachers have already walked their classes downstairs, some in a frenzied state. You take out your sandwich and begin eating, not to send the students a subtle message, but because you can't afford to waste this time, or more of your energy. The class gets quiet as you shove the last of the sandwich in your mouth at 12:18.

Returning to your room, you grab a bucket and sponge and begin wiping off the chalkboard for the afternoon. The walk to the lunchroom went smoothly, probably because Rachel was in accommodation for a run-in during Reading class. You grab an apple to eat as you wash the boards and when you're done you finish sweeping the mess that the fifth graders made. You find two rolls of tape by the windowsill, a car beneath a table, and another car hidden behind some books. You're still missing one car, and this bothers you for several reasons. You used your own money to buy the car, and even though it only cost fifty-nine cents at Wal-Mart, you still feel robbed. It bothers you more, though, that you used your own time to purchase the materials. Every Saturday and Sunday you spend several hours shopping for Science supplies. You're happy to do this, except when something like this happens. But what bothers you the most is the blatant disrespect you're receiving. You asked the class to return the cars and by one not being accounted for you know that some student is fighting back at you in one of the only ways they can. You try to remind yourself that the students you're teaching come from the toughest of neighborhoods, with the worst of home lives.

It's 12:35 when the tape and car is put away, and you hurry to the closet to get the sixty pounds of sand that you carried to work that morning. You grab a bucket and carefully fill it with sand, and place it on a small table in the lab. You open a cabinet, grab a box of coffee filters and stack of Styrofoam cups, and put them next to the bucket. When you're done, you fill another empty bucket with potting soil. Almost done. After grabbing a third bucket, you walk briskly down the hall to the janitor's closet. You're lucky that the door is open, because normally it's not and you would have to track down

the building engineer for a key. You fill the bucket with water and, being careful not to spill any, walk it back down the hall to your room.

Any other middle school teacher in the city would not have to set up the lab during their lunch. They would have preparation time. They would also only have one curriculum to teach, which they would instruct to three or four classes. This means that by teaching four different grades of science you plan four times as many lessons as someone with the same job description somewhere else in the city. This doesn't even include English and Writing, which are filler classes, because your middle school is part of a K-8 elementary school. Contractually, as an elementary school teacher, you're only entitled six preps a week – one per day and two one of the days. In district wide meetings, you've discussed this roster with other middle school teachers. Their responses are mostly the same – head shakes and smirks, as though you're naïve for accepting this job.

Les told you that Mr. Fromm developed this rigorous roster because of pressure from cluster leaders, his superiors that in a bureaucracy as large as the School District of Philadelphia serve as a type of superintendent for several dozen schools. The other teachers (all veteran's of the Philadelphia public school system) in your team grudgingly accepted the roster, anticipating the potential problems of facing one hundred and twenty students a day. As hard as this is, Mr. Goldman and Ms. Smith who teach Reading and Social Studies, respectively, benefit from teaching universal curriculums to grades five through eight, varying difficulty levels slightly in accordance with the grade level. Les, the math teacher, and you don't have this luxury. In math and science there are separate textbooks for each grade and benchmarks that need to be met. You feel a little more

cheated than Les, because at least he benefits from not having to gather, set up, and clean up labs every day, not to mention coordinating a science fair. The inevitable affects of this roster are inferior instruction, loosened discipline, and you working through your preps and lunches, as well as extensive hours before and after school.

The chalkboard has dried and you begin writing:

Problem: Does sand or potting soil have greater permeability?

Research: Plants living in the desert don't need as much water as plants living in temperate zones.

Hypothesis: (State which type soil you think is the most permeable)

Experiment:

1. Punch a hole in the bottom of two cups.
2. Fill one of these cups with sand and one with soil.
3. Hold the sand-filled cup above an empty cup.
4. Fill another cup with water. Start timing as you pour the water into the cup. Finish timing when no more water drains from the cup. Record the time on your chart.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 with the soil-filled cup.
6. Compare the water levels of the two cups.

When you've finished writing the experiment the clock reads 12:55. You grab a large stack of homework papers – probably fifty or sixty papers thick – from a bookshelf, regret that you didn't have time to begin correcting them, and place them on your desk.

It will need to be done after school, and you still have another classes homework to collect.

The bell of the elevator chimes. “Hold up!” you shout, joining Les and Ms. Smith, the yell intensifying your growing headache.

At 1:35 you’re happy that, after taking five minutes to settle the seventh graders, they worked well and completed the lab. Finally, you think, the class as a whole is starting to settle down and view you as their teacher. This probably would’ve been accomplished three or four months ago, if they saw more of you, which the roster does not allow. As they answer questions pertaining to the experiment out of their textbook, you look at the lab, relieved that it’s not that messy. Spilled water here and there, and some loose sand and soil, but most wound up in buckets that will be emptied after school. The soaked filters all found their way into a garbage bag, which rests in the lab doorway and will be disposed of after school.

You line the class up at 1:40 – five minutes early – to prepare for the most difficult transition of the week. The sixth grade went directly from lunch to Art, which means that even the students who aren’t wound up, because it’s the end of the day and their brains are fried, will be wearing jackets and not have pencils.

You dismiss your class and run down ten flights of stairs to the basement. The run invigorates you, which is good, because high energy is essential for this time of day. When you reach the art room, a class of eleven first graders are waiting to enter. You apologize to their teacher for being late and envy her. Like you, she’s a first-year teacher, but sees less than one-tenth of the students that you do, and the principal hasn’t

put her in charge of running a school science fair. That's not to say her job is easy. You wouldn't know where to begin teaching eleven first graders. However, the fact remains that you attempt to discipline and maintain accurate grades for 109 more students than she does. It also bothers you a little that she's getting paid more than you. She's earned a master's, and your certificate is still being processed, making you the lowest paid teacher in the school.

You receive a round of applause upon entering the room, and you feel flattered, because they're happy to see you, yet at the same time exasperated, because this really means that the art teacher hasn't allowed them to talk for the past forty-five minutes and they're eager to get away from her and do so.

The class is notorious for starting fights with each other, and the beginning of the journey up four floors to your room is not conducive to preventing this. To exit the room and ascend the stairs, thirty students must make their way through a single doorway, take a quick left, and then hook a right up a short flight of stairs. The architecture of the building does not allow a teacher to see all students at once.

The class is noisy as they line up. Normally, you'd settle them down before leaving, but the first graders are waiting and you can't keep them from their class, their teacher from their prep, or the art teacher from doing her job. "Go to the first landing and stop," you tell the front of the line. You allow students to walk by you until about half of the line has passed. Consciously, you begin walking next to Dwayne, who often talks loud and messes with his classmates.

At the first landing, the order of the class is in disarray. Several verbal confrontations have begun, one student is lying on the steps, and at least two-thirds of the

class is talking. You can barely be heard when you yell, “Sixth grade” as loud as you can. A few students look forward, but most continue as though nothing was said. One girl, who isn’t talking, is Ann. Her eyes are fixed on you and she’ll follow any instruction you give. You’d like to give her more attention, but her classmates consume so much of your energies that you find it extremely difficult. Again, you yell. “Sixth grade! Get quiet!” This time the noise is cut in half. “We’re not going anywhere until you’re quiet,” you continue, feeling the weight of Ann’s attention. You don’t have the courage to look her in the eye, because then you would reveal the shame you feel for not being able to control the class enough to not rob her of the education that she is entitled to. For a minute you wait, and the class has still not completely settled down. You start allowing quiet students to pass and this eventually calms the class down. Still, making your way up the stairs is a struggle. Students continue to talk and occasionally someone yells. It seems that each time you quiet one student, another begins and so on in an endless, disruptive cycle.

Stopped at the third floor, you hear footsteps above you. The kindergartners are returning to their room from computer class. They’re led by Mrs. Candiotti, a twenty-eight-year Carpenter veteran. You and her colleagues frequently liken her to a magician. Thirty-one kindergartners silently pass through the middle of your two lines, not one of them uttering a sound. They do smile and wave at you, however, and you can’t help but be endeared by their charm. This quickly changes, though, as they pass out of sight. You don’t hear the noise now, or if you do, it’s only a faint discord in the back of your mind. Instead, if only for a second, you’re caught in a depressing trance. Is this what the majority of the kindergartners will become? - reckless, apathetic, pre-teens on the border

of delinquency. Statistically, you know that the answer is ‘yes’ and as much as you’d like to think otherwise, you know you’re powerless to prevent it.

Eventually, you make your way to the fourth floor and when you do you glance at your watch. 1:50. Every other class has been in session for five minutes and it will be at least five more before you can begin. Still, before looking at your watch, you would’ve guessed that the walk upstairs took at least ten minutes.

You stop the sixth graders in front of their classroom, where a noisy class is in session. Their teacher is on prep, but the room is occupied by the seventh grade guidance class. This roster conflict is due to lack of classroom space. You send groups of five into the room to take off their jackets, grab their books, notebooks, and pencils, and line up outside your room as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, you do your best to maintain order, which you miserably fail to do. Inevitably, at least one out of every five students that enters the room becomes involved in some conflict with one of the seventh graders, and yelling ensues. As you pass more students into the room, those who’ve already retrieved their books and pencils are lined up at your classroom door, which you are shielded from by the corner of the hallway. Les told you that this scheduling is the product of fifty hours of planning by the principal and Ms. Adams last summer. There had to be a better way.

It’s 1:58 when the class is seated, you’ve erased the board, and you’re ready to begin class. But before you can begin, the phone rings. You grit your teeth and tell the secretary that the student who is supposed to go to her grandmother’s house after school is neither in your homeroom, nor in your room now, as the sixth graders again slip into chaos.

“Now,” you begin, “for the past week we’ve been discussing amphibians.”

Talking. “Greg, “ you say, pointing to a corner of the room. He says something back, which you ignore. “Are amphibians cold-blooded or warm-blooded?” More talking.

“Other side of the room,” you say, looking at Lucy. She, too, talks back, which you also ignore. “Shannon...correct, amphibians are warm-blooded. Brad, keep it down. Kirsten, eyes up here. Can someone tell me what cold-blooded means?” Answers are yelled out.

“Hands raised. Brad, stop talking. Shane, eyes up here.” Brad talks back to you. “Up here, James,” you say, pointing to the door. He yells at you and makes a face. You’d like to send him to Mr. Stoddard, but he’s on prep. Sending him to accommodation will take too long. As Brad sulks and slowly walks to where you said, muttering things under his breath the entire way, the class resumes a noisy level. You watch Brad until he reaches the place that you designated for him. As you turn, to again settle the class, you catch Ann’s eyes. Her pencil is gripped firmly, pointed just above her paper. She’s poised, listening to everything you teach and waiting patiently without a word as her thief-like classmates rob her of instructional time. You pause in her eyes. It is only for a split second, but it is still a moment the two of you are sharing. Together, you’re in a struggle to attain what you want – she, an education and you, a successfully presented lesson. You feel a trembling in your throat, an instinct to cry, not for yourself, but for her. You’d like to move her away from these students, away from the school, so that she would be assured “a fair and equal education,” the false promise of the U.S. Board of Education. But you can’t, so you look away from her, continue in vain to settle the class down, and do the best you can to teach your lesson.

By 2:10, you've assigned three detentions, your review is complete, and you begin preparing for tomorrow's lab. You like to have the students design their own experiments, but it normally takes a half-hour to do. Quickly, you field ideas from the class, asking what experiment they could conduct that relates to frogs. By 2:20, they've stated the Problem – *Does the size of frogs relate to how far they can jump?* They conduct a small amount of research in their textbooks and formulate a hypothesis before passing at 2:25 and you hate that you should be creating lesson plans that last for twenty-five minutes instead of the allotted forty-five. As they exit, you remind Greg, Lucy, and Brad to meet you in front of the auditorium after school for detention. If you issued detention to every student who deserved it, over half of the class would have received it. The class spent twenty-five minutes in the room, and maybe received ten minutes of instructional time.

As you dismiss the sixth grade, the seventh graders are loud, but still lined up in the hallway outside your door, except for Keith and Ted, who are way down the hall by the fire tower. Keith is chasing Ted away from the line. The pain in your head has progressed to a mild headache and you feel devoid of energy, yet know you will somehow need to muster up enough vigor to keep the class focused for the next forty minutes. In previous years, the school day would be over now. The new CEO of the School District of Philadelphia implemented a longer school day, which sounds good politically, but fails to consider the attention spans of students with severe emotional and behavioral problems, much less their poor dietary habits. Lunch for most students, if anything, is Kool-Aid and a bag of chips. Over the summer, the principal decided to implement a school wide writing program during this time. There is a series of

guidelines that you have neglected to follow well for the past several months. Instead, you give the students a topic to write about everyday, then have them work quietly, so you can catch up on grading papers, or cleaning the lab.

You begin allowing the quiet students to enter the classroom, and slowly the noise level reduces. A phone call. Catching up on side work won't be in the cards today. The secretary wants to know if you're available to speak with Keith's mother. Remembering the heated e-mail exchange six hours earlier, you acquiesce. On cue, the class has become loud again. At this point in the day, only a small number of students will sit quietly without being monitored. You politely excuse yourself after being connected and quiet the class down. You erase a section of the board and write, *Write a letter to the School District of Philadelphia CEO and tell him why we should or should not have to wear uniforms.*

You return to the phone amid quiet talking. At this point, you really don't care what the students do as long as they don't disturb your conversation. "Hello," you say.

"Hello," she replies. Silence.

"Is everything o.k.?"

"You tell me." Her voice is stern and confrontational.

"It's hard to teach with your son in the room."

She doesn't want to discuss this, however. Keith told her that you were singling him out, and she knows when her son is telling the truth, so you're not doing your job correctly. Meanwhile, Keith's voice can be clearly heard behind you – giggling, joking, keeping others from their work. You want to tell his mom that you average seventy hours of work a week and, although you're happy to maintain frequent contact with her,

you don't like it so much that you'd solicit unnecessary phone calls. But instead, you remain quiet as she tells you about how other teachers handled him, his father's imprisonment traumatized him, and the recent death of his grandmother has saddened him, leaving him so emotionally scarred that he began therapy last week.

The class noise is well above a reasonable level, but you've given up trying to change this. "All I can tell you is this," you finally say when she's done. "I feel for Keith, but I have a class to run and during the fifteen minutes we've been talking, your son has had an assignment on the board. He is out of his seat, he has talked the entire time, and there is not a pencil or paper anywhere near him."

"Are there other students talking to him?"

"Yes, and I assure you that every time they are out of line, I contact their mothers as well."

She asks to talk to Keith. You hand him the phone and return to the front of the room, where you stand for five minutes to reestablish a learning environment. There are questions and bathroom requests. A few minutes later, while you're wiping down some lab tables, Keith quietly returns to his desk. At 3:00, you appoint two students who've been working well to be the sweeper and the board mopper. As they tidy the floors and wipe the chalkboard, you position yourself in the middle of the room to make sure the class stays on task. At 3:05, the girls grab their jackets and when they're lined up at the door, the boys get their coats and line up at the lab door.

It's time to go and you want to dismiss the class, but Keith is acting up again. He's not in line and he's the only one in the class who is talking. The conversation with his mother obviously did nothing. You'd keep him after school, but what good would it

do? His mother would again nail you to the wall for treating her son unfairly. “Keith,” you say as calmly and respectfully as you can, “we’re waiting for you.” He laughs and talks a little more, showing you that he won’t be told what to do, before joining the line – a place that he (not you) has chosen to be.

Making your way into the hallway, you and your class are the only people remaining on the floor. Fifth, sixth, and eighth grade have all made their way outside. You’re rigid with the class on the walk down the fire tower, doing your best to maintain a high level of energy for the final transition of the day. You stop the class at each landing, making sure that the noise level reaches a minimal tone before passing on. Although it would be easiest to loosen the reins at this point, it’s important to you to end the day organized and controlled. Little things make the big thing work and exiting the school calmly and quietly is one way for you to set a no nonsense tone for tomorrow.

The students exit into the schoolyard and you walk back up a flight of stairs, down a hallway, and take a left to the auditorium. You reach in your pocket and pull out a scrap of paper. Greg, Brad, Lucy, Gerry, and Michael should be waiting for you, but only Brad, Lucy, and Michael are there. You’ll have to address Greg and Gerry tomorrow. You lead Brad, Lucy, and Michael upstairs to the fourth floor, and walking down the hall to Ms. Adam’s office, you pass Les, who’s waiting at the elevator. You exchange ‘good-bye’s’ and when he has disappeared behind the elevator doors, you know that you and a custodian are the only adults left on the floor.

One-by-one, the students give you their home phone numbers and you call their mother, father, aunt, or grandmother and request their permission to let their children

serve a detention until four o'clock. Lucy's mother gives you permission, but no one's answering at Brad's house and Michael's line is busy, so you'll have to send them home at 3:25 and try calling again tonight.

Returning to your room, you direct Lucy, Brad, and Michael to separate corners of the room and remind them that they must sit up, stay awake, and not talk for the duration of their detention. For the next five minutes, you straighten out the room. There are textbooks on the floor that need to be placed in desks and homework on a shelf that needs to be stacked with the rest. Your desk, too, is messy. There are rulers, pencils, and a student's textbook scattered haphazardly across the top. You put these items away, restoring the order of your desk, so now you can begin the arduous task of correcting the work of five different classes – five through eight Science and seventh grade English.

As quickly as you can, you scan each homework paper, checking just enough to make sure that students aren't cheating and have completed the work with care. Like a librarian checking out books, you flip through each item, stamping *10/10* on each seventh grade English homework assignment that you deem an acceptable effort. You're lucky, now, that only fifty to sixty percent of your students do their homework. It's 3:26 when you're finished, so you write Michael and Brad a pass, allowing them to leave, and tell them that you'll be calling their parents tonight, requesting a four o'clock detention tomorrow. The seventh grade soil porosity mini-lab reports take much longer to correct. The questions require students to think critically, so the answers are open-ended and therefore require more work on your part. Because this assignment was class work, you get a report from every student.

You've corrected half of the assignments when the clock reads 4:00, and you walk Lucy down eight flights of steps to the front door. "I don't want to see you back here," you say to her, as she walks past you bitterly without saying a word. You glance at the elevator. Long ago, you decided that by riding the elevator up to the fourth floor, you were letting the students and treacherous job assignment beat you. So, you turn right, push the door open, and run back up the eight flights of steps to your room, where you return to your desk and finish correcting the soil porosity reports.

When you're finished with these reports, you grade the sixth and eighth grade homework as well as some fifth grade lab reports – about half of the students finished (the rest are due tomorrow – you guess that you'll receive three or four of them). It's 4:25 when your stack of ninety or so papers have been graded. You grab four separate bins of folders, which sit on a shelf behind your desks, and carry them over to your computer table.

Seated in front of your computer, you pull the seventh grade English folders out of their bin and place them on your lap. On top of your homework stack, you read the name **Staci Nicholson**, pick up the paper, flip through the folders until you find her name, and place it inside. Paper-by-paper, you do this for every assignment that you corrected. The principal insists that you maintain meticulous records, so that no parent will fault him for an illegitimate grade. Through much practice, you've mastered the dexterity of the process and it only takes you a little over ten minutes to finish the filing process.

Except for the seventh grade science folders, you return each bin to the shelf, grab your stapler, and return to your computer. You now need to calculate grades. Parents

complain when they're not informed about their child's low grades, so you send home an update once every two weeks for each class. As voluminous as this becomes, you feel that you owe it to the students and parents. It's not their fault that the principal gave you 120 students. Before you can begin, you're interrupted by Mr. Fromm. He spoke with one of the judges that you recruited for the science fair today and she said that the date doesn't suit her. You don't have to change the date, but you'll need to find a replacement. You sigh in exasperation and are noticeably exhausted mentally and physically. "Don't stress about it," he says, as you wonder how you can avoid doing so. He goes on to say what a wonderful job he thinks you're doing up here and to "keep up the good work." You nod and say a quiet "thank you" before he leaves your doorway and rides down the elevator.

Normally, you'd be grateful for the supportive words, but you're a little too bitter right now. He doesn't know if you're doing a good job or not. Twice, this year, he has seen you teach and both times the mandatory observations were announced. Like always, you prepared a thorough, interactive lab for the students and received a good assessment from him. This, however, does not mean you're doing a good job. He doesn't see you struggle everyday with discipline, organization, and attempting to gain a mastery of a subject that you know very little about. Even if you felt that you were doing a good job, Mr. Fromm's compliment would still be received caustically by you. If you work a mule in the fields from sun up to sun down, does it make the mule feel better if you pat it on the back at the end of the day, say "good job," and then work it to exhaustion again the next day?

After adjusting the settings of a spreadsheet to accommodate a new unit grade, you pick up the top folder belonging to Jared Alexander and hear Mr. Fromm's SUV purr out of the parking lot. Inside Jared's folder, you find that he has completed four of the five assignments, which total forty-five out of a possible sixty points. You staple the four pages together and log the grade into your computer. The forty-five raises Jared's grade from an eighty-eight percent to a ninety-one. Although the grade should lower an eighty-eight percent, the School District of Philadelphia doesn't allow it. Sixty-percent of the overall grade is devoted to assessment, thirty-percent to class work, and ten percent to homework. This is too complicated for you to keep track of legitimately, so you just grant the students forty percentage points and assess everything else. This means that a student need only record a thirty-three percent to pass with a sixty percent overall. You scribble *91% / A* in the top right corner of the top page and circle it. Folder-by-folder, you repeat this process until you're finished recording the grades at 5:02.

You open the *Parent Report* file from a different folder on your desktop and print ten copies of the form. Tomorrow, you will fill-out the form for each student, addressing their parent with their percentage and grade. Each student with a percentage lower than seventy will need to return them signed. This, you'll have to do at home tonight, so you print out ten copies of the grade sheet, run to Ms. Adam's office down the hall to get it, and stuff the forms and grade sheet in your bag.

By now, your legs feel heavy and tired and your feet ache. This reminds you of how you felt a few summers ago after a day of landscaping. Your head also aches and you can tell that in an hour you won't be able to sit up without wincing in pain. Your brain is fried, but there is still more work to be done. Tomorrow, you have a first period

prep, then teach the rest of the day with only a lunch break that you will again have to work through. Seventh grade English is at 9:15 and then you'll see the sixth graders from 10:00 to 11:30. The sixth graders will carry out the experiment that they designed in class today, but this will probably only take up about half of the double-period. It'd be nice to have a video to pop-in, but you don't have any that are curriculum suitable, so you make your way over to the lab.

Quickly, you grab one of the tables that you stacked ten hours ago, and then slowly drag it to a corner of the lab that has outlets. You pull down another and drag it to the outlets on the lab's opposite corner. A third table – a much smaller one – is picked up and carried to the classroom, thirty feet from the other two. You'll need to watch them like a hawk, you think, as you return to the lab and open a cabinet. There are ten microscopes, but only six outlets and no surge protector, so you grab six of them and place them on the tables before grabbing chairs to align behind them.

Flipping through slides, you find several pertinent to what you've been studying. There is a slide of insect wings, insect thorax, frog eggs, frog legs, a shed snakeskin, and snake eggs. It will have to do. You wish that you knew something about science, so that you could instruct the students about what to look for. But you just don't have the information and there won't be time to research, so you tell yourself that looking through the microscopes and seeing something will be an educational experience for the sixth graders, and quickly forget that you are settling, once again, for mediocrity.

It's 5:30. The students have now been home for over two hours and your colleagues are eating dinner with their families. School, no doubt, is far from most of their minds. You, however, still have one more class to prepare for. Opening the

students' grammar books to Predicate Nouns, you alternate glances between the notes the students will need to take and the bare chalkboard, trying to figure out how you can best economize the notes and chalkboard space in coordination with one another.

Ten minutes later, the notes have been written and you're writing down sentences for class work. Five minutes, you think, until the lights go out. The day care is open until 6:30, but the building engineer insists that you leave by 5:45, so that he can set the alarms and be out by 6:00. Last week, an hour of logged grades was lost when he cut your computer's power off from the fuse box three minutes early.

You won't be able to type the English homework tonight. That will have to wait until tomorrow morning, sometime between 6:50 and 7:30. Maybe tomorrow you'll get here earlier. An hour and forty minutes just isn't enough time to get ready. You never did get around to writing that blurb for the March newsletter, nor did you collect money for the field trip, contact a new science fair judge, or prepare for the eighth grade lesson. They will need to build sundials. Luckily, you already have the materials in the room and won't have to go shopping tonight. Still, you'll have to organize clay, straws, construction paper, and scissors. Rapidly and sloppily, you copy sentences word for word from the book to the board. Five more sentences to go. Thrusting the chalk into the board to etch out a 6 in yellow chalk, the piece breaks and shatters on the floor. As you bend down to pick up the wreckage, your world becomes dark. The son-of-a-bitch flipped the switch five minutes early.

You'll have to write the final five sentences tomorrow morning. Still, there is a certain peace that you feel, knowing that you have no choice, but to go home. Although you have hours of work left to prepare for tomorrow, there is solace in knowing that you

can do no more work, or at least not here. Your work for the day is not over, not by a long shot. You'll go home, eat, and then call the guardians of Greg, Brad, Michael, and Gerry. Then, you'll fill out the grade update forms, with the television on in the background. If you can still keep your eyes open, you'll work on next week's lesson plans, so that you'll know what materials you need to shop for this weekend. Carefully, you feel your way along the chalkboard and wall, stepping slowly, towards the doorway like a blind man. It's been a long day and you are weary, yet know that you can't relax, because tomorrow will yield a day similar to this one, maybe a little easier, maybe a little harder, but nonetheless exhausting and mediocre.