

Guess What? He's Coming Back!

Why didn't the principal fix little Matthew for me?



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A **traffic cop pulls** you over and asks for your registration and license. “You were going thirty mph over the speed limit,” she informs you.

What do you expect next? A ticket, right?

But no! She says, “If I could, I would write you a ticket. You better watch out! Next time I’m going to send you to the Chief of Police!”

I don't know what you are thinking in this situation, but I know what I'm thinking. "What kind of a cop can't write a speeding ticket? Is she a cop-in-training? Does she write too many tickets, so they took her ticket book away? Maybe she can't write? Lost her pen?"

I'm thinking, "Whew, I'm off the hook! I hope a real cop doesn't pull me over next time." And also "Is this the kind of person protecting my community from the bad guys?"

Now let's take a look at me in my first year of teaching. Matthew, one of my little darlings, throws a paper airplane and it actually hits me in the head. Collective gasp (and a few giggles) from the class. All eyes are on me. Calculating eyes. Watching eyes. Challenging eyes (in the case of Matthew the Plane-Hurler.)

What do I do? I send him to the office, of course. Airplane-flinging is clearly defiant behavior! He needs to see the principal. That'll solve it!

I'm sure you can see the problem. What is the principal going to do that I couldn't do? Will the

principal really suspend little Matthew for throwing a paper airplane? Of course not! In fact, in half an hour Matthew will return to class. Maybe he'll miss a recess. And guess what? He's going to tell all his friends the funny story about how he made the teacher all mad and got out of math by throwing a paper airplane. What fun!

Matthew missed class but he definitely learned a few things at school today. So did the rest of the class. Matthew and the class learned that the teacher turns a really funny color of pink and gets spots on her neck when she gets mad. They learned paper airplanes are not only fun to throw, but are a powerful tool for getting out of class. Above all, they learned the teacher is powerless to "write the ticket." She calls in the principal, who may or may not think it's worth doing anything about. Misbehaving is suddenly a pretty good deal.

Of course, sometimes it's necessary to remove students from class but please, please don't give away your personal power! Try these suggestions instead.



Give students access only to the materials they need for the assignment. Desks should be clear of everything except what they are actually using. If Matthew doesn't have extra paper, it will be harder for him to make a paper airplane. If he does start to fold a piece of paper, look at him and say, "Matthew, please give me the paper." If he doesn't, send him to time out and have him fill out a reflection form (which he hopefully won't turn into a paper airplane.)

If Matthew is somehow able to create a stealth paper airplane and hits you in the head with it, take a deep breath. Anger and emotionalism add drama, spice, and entertainment. If you lose it, you will lose. After your deep breath, calmly do the time out thing and keep on teaching until you cool down. After time out, assign Matthew a consequence, such as picking paper off the floor after class. Do not talk to him about his paper airplane during class. Let him sweat it out and pay the consequences on his own

time.

If Matthew refuses to go to time out, fill out his reflection form, or pick up papers after class, call the office and say this: “Matthew needs to take a time out in the office. Please send someone to get him. No, he doesn’t need to see the principal. I’ll send some work with Matthew, and I’ll come get him at recess and talk to him myself.” When you do this you will keep your power. You will be the powerful supervisor, directing what is going to happen. All those watching eyes are going to get the message that their teacher is in charge of Matthew, his consequence, and the staff in the office.

As a teacher, you have the power. Don’t make the mistake I did. Don’t give your power away to anyone, even the principal.

From *All The Ways I Screwed Up My First Year of Teaching,
And How You Can Avoid Doing It, Too*