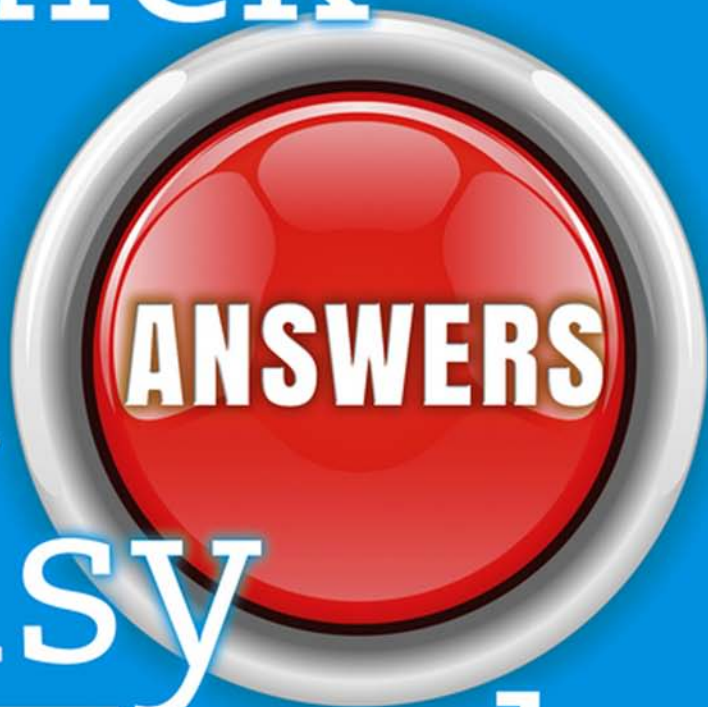


Annette Breaux | Todd Whitaker

Quick

for
Busy

Teachers



Solutions to
60 COMMON CHALLENGES

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ANSWERS

for **Busy Teachers**

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Solutions to 60 Common Challenges

Annette Breaux | Todd Whitaker

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Annette Breaux is one of the most entertaining and informative authors and speakers in education today. She leaves her audiences with practical techniques to implement in their classrooms immediately. Administrators agree that they see results from teachers the next day.

Annette is a former classroom teacher, curriculum coordinator, and author of Louisiana FIRST, a statewide induction program for new teachers. Annette also served as the teacher induction coordinator for Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. She coauthored a book with Dr. Harry K. Wong on new teacher induction.

Her other writings include *101 Answers for New Teachers and Their Mentors; Real Teachers, Real Challenges, Real Solutions; 101 Poems for Teachers; Seven Simple Secrets: What the Best Teachers Know and Do; 50 Ways to Improve Student Behavior; Making Good Teaching Great; and The Ten-Minute Inservice.*

Teachers who have read Annette's writings or heard her speak agree that they come away with user-friendly information, heartfelt inspiration, and a much-needed reminder that theirs is the most noble of all professions.

Dr. Todd Whitaker has been fortunate to be able to blend his passion with his career. He is recognized as a leading presenter in the field of education, and his message about the importance of teaching has resonated with hundreds of thousands of educators around the world. Todd is a professor of educational leadership at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana, and he has spent his life pursuing his love of education by researching and studying effective teachers and principals.

Prior to moving into higher education, Todd was a math teacher and basketball coach in Missouri. He then served as a principal at the middle school, junior high, and high school levels. He was also a middle school

coordinator in charge of staffing, curriculum, and technology for the opening of new middle schools.

One of the nation's leading authorities on staff motivation, teacher leadership, and principal effectiveness, Todd has written thirty books, including the national best seller *What Great Teachers Do Differently*. Other titles include *Shifting the Monkey*; *Dealing with Difficult Teachers*; *Teaching Matters*; *Great Quotes for Great Educators*; *What Great Principals Do Differently*; *Motivating and Inspiring Teachers*; and *Dealing with Difficult Parents*.

Todd is married to Beth, also a former teacher and principal, who is a professor of elementary education at Indiana State University. They are the parents of three children: Katherine, Madeline, and Harrison.

PREFACE

Do you remember your first year of teaching? When you couldn't wait until your second year because surely you would be less busy? When you would have all of your lesson plans from the previous year already completed, ready to be implemented? When you would have this "teaching thing" mastered? It doesn't take any teacher very long to realize that teaching is time-consuming, no matter how many years you've been doing it. A teacher who's not busy is a teacher who's not effective! But please don't take that to mean that all busy teachers are effective teachers. They're not. In fact, some of the most effective teachers are not nearly as busy as their less effective coworkers. Effective teachers do work hard, of course, but they don't have to put in as many hours as some of their less effective counterparts. And they're not nearly as stressed.

These teachers often appear to lead a charmed life. They seem to get the "good" students every year. They walk the halls smiling. The administrators like them. The parents like them. And everything just seems to fall into place for them. The truth is that they do sort of lead a charmed life—at least at school. They're simply implementing basic techniques that less effective teachers don't yet know about. If that sounds overly simplified, it's not.

As educators, authors, and consultants, we have made it our lives' work to study the secrets of successful teachers. And it continues to be our privilege to share these secrets with teachers worldwide. We've learned that *all* teachers want to be better. We've learned that teachers are some of the most genuinely "good" people on the planet. We've learned that all teachers face common classroom challenges. But the best teachers handle these challenges much differently from all the rest—thus, their "charmed lives."

This book will address common challenges that many teachers face on a daily basis, regardless of grade level or subject area taught. The tips, suggestions,

and answers within the book come from studying what separates the best from the rest. Nothing in the book is difficult or time-consuming. (In fact, you might learn that what you're currently doing is much more difficult and time-consuming than it needs to be.) Reading it should help you reevaluate how you typically deal with common challenges at school. Implementing the strategies will help to increase your effectiveness as a teacher. Do you want to see increased student achievement and better student behavior, while experiencing more joy in teaching and less stress in your job? Then learn just what it is that the most successful teachers do.

We are highly aware that no two teachers are exactly alike and that no one solution fits all circumstances. Instead, our goal is to provide ideas and strategies for you to use exactly when you need them. Depending on your situation or career point, some of these may be revolutionary, while others may help provide a simple tweak or a friendly reminder. Oftentimes, due to your demanding and busy life, you may find yourself drifting away from past practices that had a positive impact on your students. Thus we have attempted to provide time-efficient ideas, tips, and strategies that apply to the most common challenges educators face. What you do as a teacher is tremendously important. With this book we hope to support the essential role you play in the lives of students.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Though this book can certainly be read cover to cover, it can also be read in no particular order. You might want to select topics from the Contents that address your immediate needs and read those sections first. If you're a *teacher* who does not struggle with classroom management issues, skip that part for now. But do come back to it later, because you might find a few new ideas to help you become even more effective in that area.

If you're a *mentor*, you might choose to use this book for ideas to help a new teacher you are mentoring deal more effectively with certain challenges he or she is facing.

Each of the book's topics can serve as stand-alone inservice material for *administrators* or *staff development trainers* to use at faculty meetings. Administrators may also choose to use ideas in the book for suggestions to share with individual teachers in need of assistance.

The book addresses sixty common challenges that most teachers face. It is written in a simple, easy-to-follow format. Each section is divided into three parts:

1. *If This Happens*, where the challenge is discussed
2. *Try This*, where suggestions for meeting and overcoming the challenge are provided
3. *Remember*, where a summary and a few reminders are provided for each challenge

Though we do not suggest that this book addresses every challenge teachers will ever face, we have attempted to include those that are most common to most educators. Each challenge is addressed in a straightforward, no-frills manner, providing quick, simple tips and suggestions for overcoming each.

These tips and suggestions come straight from the classrooms of highly effective teachers.


Note that many sections in this book include material that can be displayed during a presentation or handed out to teachers during inservices. Those materials are available for free download from our publisher's website, at www.wiley.com/go/quickanswers, using the password 20626. Throughout the book, we'll remind you which materials can be downloaded by displaying the following icon:



Quick

ANSWERS

for **Busy Teachers**



*We dedicate this
book to the memory of
Amy Simon Breaux—
Annette's mother,
Todd's biggest fan, and
devoted teacher.*

PART ONE

Challenges with Students

1

THE CLASS CLOWN IS NOT HUMORING YOU

IF THIS HAPPENS

There's one in every class. He's known, not always affectionately, as the class clown. He loves the limelight and he seeks it out at all costs. He takes any situation, even serious ones, and tries to insinuate his humor. Though his antics can be annoying, he's often clever, and his jokes are sometimes funny. You can't dispute his creativity. He has a loyal following, his very own "groupies" who love to egg him on. Other students roll their eyes, finding him a nuisance. When he's in your classroom you often find yourself on edge, trying to anticipate his next wisecrack and prepare for how you'll handle it.

The bottom line is that the class clown is seeking attention. And he's getting it. (Research has shown that the vast majority of student misbehavior stems from attention seeking.) You, as the professional in the classroom, realize that there's a reason this student is craving attention. Maybe he is struggling with issues at home; maybe he's struggling with issues at school; and almost always he lacks maturity and/or self-respect.

So what can you do? First, realize that the class clown is not out to get you, so take care not to take his antics personally. Rather, he's attempting to feel important and to get attention. Knowing this will help you deal with the situation more mindfully and effectively, and less emotionally.

TRY THIS



The following are several ways to deal appropriately with a class clown:

- Occasionally, when it is appropriate, it's okay to laugh when the class clown says something funny. You never want to send the message that humor is not acceptable in your classroom. On the contrary, humor is an important part of any classroom—appropriate humor, that is.
- Make sure that you discuss with your entire class the difference between appropriate and inappropriate humor. Tell them that there is a time for work and a time for play. Give examples of appropriate and inappropriate humor.
- Be careful never to appear angry with or personally offended by the class clown. This will only serve to worsen an already tenuous situation. It will tell him that he is controlling your emotions, and that's the last message you want to send. No one repeats a behavior unless he's receiving some kind of "reward" for that behavior. Sometimes that reward is inadvertently coming from the teacher.
- Speak with the class clown privately. Explain that you appreciate his intellect, his creativity, and his quick wit. Add, however, that sometimes his humor is not appropriate. Give him specific examples of when his humor has been both appropriate and inappropriate. Tell him that you would like to help him act in a more responsible and mature way. Express your concern about the idea that something is bothering him and offer the opportunity for him to share what's bothering him. (Don't be surprised, however, if he denies that anything is bothering him. Don't push. Just let him know that you care and that you are always available if he needs to talk to someone.)
- Establish some kind of signal with the class clown. When his humor is inappropriate, simply use the signal to let him know that the behavior needs to stop. Try to make the signal as subtle as possible.
- Begin giving the class clown more and more positive attention when he is *not* clowning around. As often as possible, recognize any evidence of appropriate behavior on his part and comment on it.

- When you begin to notice a turnaround, small as it may be, speak with the class clown privately and say, “I’ve noticed you’re really making an effort to use your humor more appropriately. That takes maturity, and I’m proud of you. Keep up the good work!”

Using these techniques almost always yields immediate and positive results.

DON'T FORGET

- A class clown is seeking attention—and always for a reason. If possible, try to determine the reason.
- Never take the class clown’s inappropriate behavior personally.
- Laughter is a good thing—when it is appropriate. Make sure your students know this, and make sure that you share your humorous side with them also.
- Teach the class clown the difference between appropriate and inappropriate humor. Help him to use his humor more appropriately.
- Give the class clown positive attention when he is not clowning around.
- Be patient. Bad habits are never broken overnight.

2

A STUDENT IS REFUSING TO DO WORK

IF THIS HAPPENS

We've all been there. You give an assignment and everyone gets busy on the assignment. Everyone, that is, but one student. This has become a pattern with the student. You've reached a point where you can predict, before you give the assignment, that she will either put her head down or look around as if to say, "Why are you all bothering to do this? I'm not doing this. This is stupid." On occasion, she has actually gone beyond thinking those thoughts and verbalized them. You've tried telling her to get busy, and she ignores you. You've resorted to threatening her. "If you don't get busy, then . . .," and you promise some type of consequence. Her attitude is "I don't care what you say or do. I'm not doing this assignment." You may even have resorted to sending her to the principal's office. Each time, you've gotten upset about the situation. And the student knows that. You don't want to engage in yet another power struggle with this student, but you don't know what else to do. Her grades are suffering, but it doesn't seem to bother her.

TRY THIS

First, understand that when a student is refusing to do her work, there is always a reason. And before you can solve the problem, you have to identify what's causing it.

Here are a few of the most common reasons that students refuse to do their work:

- The student is dealing with a personal problem either at home or at school.
- The student is seeking attention from her peers.
- The student is trying to control you. (Sometimes behavior problems stem from a student's need for power.)
- The student is afraid to fail, so she's taking control of that failure. In other words, "It's better not to try and be in control of the failure than to give it my best and fail because I just can't do the work."

Your first priority is to uncover the reason behind the behavior. Then you'll be better equipped to solve the problem.

A teacher was speaking about a problem with a student who was refusing to do her work. "She hardly does anything in class. And the sad fact is that she's capable. She could make As if she wanted to. But she won't apply herself." We asked the teacher what she thought the reason was behind the behavior. "I have no idea," she said. "I think she's just lazy." We then asked the teacher if the student knew that she cared about her. She answered, "How can I care about a student who doesn't care about herself?" Aha! We had an answer. You see, this teacher was taking the student's behavior personally. She was angry with her for not doing her work. Though she didn't realize it, her actions toward this student were speaking volumes. And the student was picking up on this. The student was determined to "get her," even if it meant failing. If this student felt that her teacher didn't care about her, she was right.

We spoke with another teacher facing a very similar problem. She was a teacher who definitely cared about her students—all of them. She said, "I couldn't figure out what was going on with one of my students. He suddenly wouldn't do any work in class. He just sat there and sulked. When I asked

him to get busy, he said he wasn't going to do his work because he didn't care about it. I was worried about him and I was determined to help him. I pulled him aside and told him as much. I told him I really wanted to help him, but he had to help me to understand what was going on first. He burst into tears and told me that his father had recently been sent to prison. I wanted to cry. Instead, I told him I was here for him, no matter what. If he wanted to talk, I would listen. If he wanted to cry, his tears were safe with me. I told him if he needed extra help at recess, I would give my own time to sit and help him. He was so appreciative of my caring and understanding that he immediately began doing all of his work in class. And I was sure to give him special attention and a warm smile every day. I didn't solve his problems at home, but I did provide a safe, welcoming environment at school where he could feel loved and successful."

There's always a reason when a student is refusing to do his work. Always. And your job is to try to determine that reason and then help the student to overcome whatever problems he is facing. If he doesn't understand the material, provide some remediation. If he is having a problem and is willing to discuss it, listen. If he's trying to engage you in a power struggle, don't participate. As the saying goes, "You can attract more bees with honey than with vinegar." Approach the student with compassion and calmly ask, "Would you like some help getting started on your work?" And then do just that—help him. But at all costs, avoid appearing angry or frustrated with the student, because that approach is never successful.

DON'T FORGET

- When a student is refusing to do his work, try to determine the reason first.
- If a student is overwhelmed with material he does not understand, provide remediation.
- If a student is struggling with a problem at home (or at school) and wants to talk about it, then listen. There will be times when the

problem requires the help of a parent, an administrator, or a school counselor. Seek that help if necessary.

- Make every effort to ensure that the student knows you care about him and are willing to help.
- Don't ever allow yourself to engage in a struggle for power with a student. You'll lose every time. Instead, talk to the student calmly and offer to help. Act out of concern, not frustration.
- Remember that students work harder and behave better with teachers who care about them. Express your caring and concern on a daily basis.