

**HFTFS 2019 PRIZE
APPLICATION ROUND 1
READING #1**

HARBOR FREIGHT
TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

25 Ways to Institute Passion-Based Learning in the Classroom

By Saga Briggs, *InformED*

Common sense tells us that students are more likely to learn if they are motivated by and engaged with the curriculum or project at hand. Now, hard science is telling us the same thing.

When students are passionately engaged in their learning – when they are mesmerized by their learning environment or activities – there are myriad responses in their brains making connections and building schema that simply would not occur without that passion or emotion.

Much of what we ask kids to memorize has little emotional charge to it. Emotions can significantly alter the creation and recall of memories. People are better at remembering information that is emotionally charged rather than information that is neutral or flat.

But aside from influencing emotion, passionate engagement can empower students to feel in control of their own learning. Whether you are talking about passion, inspiring passion, cultivating passion, or thinking passionately about your own interests, you can be the one to revolutionize learning.

On that note, here are a few ways to incite passion in your own students:

1. Share your own passions with your students. Passion is contagious. You aren't likely to ignite the excitement of learning in your students if you aren't excited yourself. Take

time to share what makes you passionate about a specific topic.

2. Indulge in your own passions when you are outside of the classroom. Whatever your personal hobby is outside the classroom – whether it's yoga, cooking, music, or gardening – be sure to make time for it. The energy you put into something you love outside the classroom will find its way into to your lessons.
3. Let students share their passions. It is important to let students pursue their own passions individually, but it is equally important to let them share their passions with others. Especially in the absence of feedback or judgment, the act of sharing something personally fulfilling enhances your excitement for it and motivates you to share it further.
4. Introduce students to resources that help them exercise their passions. If a student seems especially interested in art, ask her to see you after class and present her with a list of resources – books, gallery websites, virtual lessons, etc – that she might explore in her free time at home.
5. Help students find others who share the same passion. It is one thing to share your passion with a marginally interested classmate, but it is something entirely different – and enormously powerful – to share it with someone who

reciprocates that passion. Not only does it confirm that your passion is valued; it confirms that you, as a person, are valued. This is an especially useful tactic in a middle school setting, where, for students, fitting in can be an even higher priority than learning.

6. Connect students' passions to real-world scenarios. While students are preparing for their class-wide robotics competition, show them videos of engineering projects from universities and institutes across the world. Emphasize the real-life significance of machines that are built to help people, whether in life-threatening medical situations or in the kitchen at home.
7. Divorce practicality from the picture. While highlighting the practical value of a student's passion can be all it takes to keep that student interested for the long haul, sometimes it is best to let the passion flourish within the student organically, without much outside influence. Use your best judgment to decide what sort of support each student needs and when.
8. Trust that hard work follows naturally from passion. Students can certainly get distracted and carried away by their passions, and at times it is entirely appropriate to redirect them to the lesson at hand, but have faith that, as Sir Ken Robinson said, "When students are motivated to learn, they naturally acquire the skills they need to get the work done."
9. Value all passions equally. Try not to let any bias creep into the picture when it comes to student passions. Though you may harbor a secret fondness for the student who pores over Shakespeare during your 7th grade reading period, encourage the student who brings a fly-fishing guide to class as well.
10. Let students take control. When students believe they are in control of their own learning, they value it twice as much as they would otherwise. Allow twenty minutes for students to design their own school schedules – complete with periods devoted to video games and basketball, if they want – and see what interests you can identify and incorporate into your lessons.
11. Learn how to recognize passion in momentary obsessions. Some students may seem interested in anything and everything, flitting from one topic to another, one day to the next. While interest in something is certainly better than interest in nothing at all, see what patterns you can recognize over time. Are your student's interests all visual in nature? Is she simply trying to be different, reaching for the opposite of whatever topic is of current interest to the rest of the class? Chances are there's a constant to her inconsistency.
12. Get to know a student's passions through his parents and friends. Some students have trouble opening up and revealing their passions in class. See what you can learn

from parents, friends, and former teachers about a student's personal interests.

- 13.** Surround your students with passionate people. Call in guest speakers and show your class videos of people doing what they love. Even if a student isn't particularly interested in the topic, he will appreciate the enthusiasm and see that it's okay to express it openly.
- 14.** Allow for students' passions to develop and change. When your star math student decides to take advanced French instead of participate in the Math Bowl Competition, support her through and through. Express your faith in her value as a person, not just as a talented mathematician.
- 15.** Help connect students to a new subject through an existing passion. Be proactive when it comes to student interests. This may mean taking the time to talk to your math student's art teacher when that student proceeds to doodle all period long in algebra, rather than announcing that art has no place in the math room. See what you can do to use your students' individual passions to get your own subject across to them.
- 16.** Show students how learning about seemingly unrelated topics can help them learn more about their passion. The power of interdisciplinary learning should not be underestimated. The best way to help reinforce a student's passion is to show her that it can be applied to and enriched by multiple subjects. Not only will this help her confirm the significance of her passion; it will prove to her that previously unfamiliar and uninteresting subjects actually do have value.
- 17.** Set aside time to let passions flourish. When strict adherence to time tables makes it virtually impossible to set aside time for anything extra, it's understandable that passions often go unrecognized in the classroom. Just remember what's truly most important to you when it comes to the individual student, and stick by that.
- 18.** Help students create something with their passions. A passion unpracticed is better than no passion at all, but a passion that yields results makes a student feel confident, accomplished, and smart.
- 19.** Weave standards into passion-based learning. One way to cover all your responsibilities as an educator is to incorporate assessment standards into passion-based learning, or vice versa. This tactic deserves an entire article to itself, but suffice it to say that it can be done.
- 20.** Become comfortable with the word "passion". Be prepared to talk about passion openly with students, parents, and other teachers. Be ready to define it, defend its place in the classroom, and help others throw all negative connotations of self-serving, reckless abandon out the window!
- 21.** Let yourself be inspired by other impassioned educators. Watch TED Talks, speak with other educators about

passion's place in the classroom, join an online forum to discuss techniques and share stories.

22. Understand what passion means for students of different age levels. Younger students require less direction when it comes to passion, since they can't be expected to have the maturity of focus that older students have. For younger students, aim wide; for older students, aim deep.
23. Understand what passion means for students with different backgrounds. While some students may have no trouble understanding what passion is, others may feel uncomfortable with the concept. Recognize that some students may have been raised by passionate parents and others may have been discouraged to do much self-reflecting.
24. Understand where passions come from. For some students, passion may be a way to hide from negative events at home or at school. For others, it may be a way to connect with a friend or to please a parent. Wherever the interest comes from, understanding its origins will help you to direct its growth.
25. Connect passions with intelligence, not talent. When a student creates an outstanding watercolor painting for the annual art show, don't just make him feel talented; make him feel smart. Say, "You have a keen eye for detail" or, "You really know how to paint!" This makes the student feel that the skill is in his control, something he earned because

of his intelligence, not because of some God-given talent. It is a confidence he will take with him into other subjects as well.

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