

15 Ideas to Engage Your Apathetic Students

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Finding something to engage your apathetic students can be like searching for a needle in a haystack! How do you motivate students that frankly do not care right now? Lack of motivation may have been more prevalent for our junior and senior high school students in the past. But this school year, apathy tops the list of concerns for teachers of the younger elementary students too.

And it is draining. I know that the students that I can't reach end up being the ones I am trying my hardest to engage. So, I have gone home tired AND defeated some days! Fortunately, I have found some success recently. So, now I am here to share my 15 Ideas to Engage Your Apathetic Students.

Priorities in Engaging

1 – Connections

Building relationships with your students is essential, but CONNECTION goes a little further. You probably have tons of 'relationships' with your co-workers, but the ones you have that connection with are the ones you would do the most for, correct?

Whether it comes about over a discussion on blue gym shoes or admiring the Star Wars backpack, make a connection with your apathetic students. Notice statements work great. Every day pick a few students to say, "I notice you like red juice." or "I notice you wear Nike a lot." Say nothing else. Just a notice statement daily. Eventually, you will hit a spark. First, that student will notice you care. Second, you will engage that student in a conversation. Try it!

2 – Interests

Find out what interests your students and USE the heck out of it! Student loves cars—cars are now our math counters. Student loves videos—let them watch a video on a device if they complete some work. Superheroes? Well, then find some superhero writing pages. Capitalize on their interests! Last year, my students were into dogs and pandas. This year, it is sports. Math Basketball has been a huge ice breaker to get one of my students willing to try math work!

Don't Forget...

3 – Check Your Maslows

We all learned Maslow's Hierarchy in college. It is now more essential than ever to focus on the needs of our students. It has been a rough couple of years, and then returning to in-person learning has not been easy for many of our students. We can't assume that the student shutdowns, the not caring, and the lack of interest is related to behaviors. Check to make sure

the basic needs are being met. We don't work well if we are hungry, thirsty, and tired. Our students don't either!



4 – Listen

When students feel that their ideas and opinions matter, they will be more likely to share them, which results in *more learning*! When your apathetic students share (I know sometimes this happens rarely!), latch on tightly! If our unengaged students finally speak up or join in, these are golden opportunities that we don't want to miss!

Next Steps to Engage Your Apathetic Students

5 – Baby Steps

OK, so engagement doesn't happen overnight for some students, so we have to exercise tremendous patience! And then we cherish every step in the right direction! Did you get them to sit as part of the group for a short time today? Bravo to you! Accept that baby step as encouragement!

6 – Accommodations

Many teachers make accommodations daily; they are not just for students with special needs! Are all the other students writing paragraphs right now? Great! Maybe adjust the work so that your apathetic student feels encouraged by dictating a section you write for them! Do your other students practice mental math? Perhaps some other students can have counting cubes. Think outside of the box sometimes. If it works and doesn't cause you or others problems, try it!

Plus...

7 – Realistic Milestones

This may be a hard one for us! We want all of our students to have outstanding achievements. But for our apathetic students, sometimes being present and not disruptive for a few lessons daily is the current milestone you need to aim for this week. Or, maybe demonstrating to you they understand the math concept without completing all of the math work is OK for a while. Do we want more? Absolutely. But, sometimes, we have to be realistic. Is that a failure? NO!

8 – Check Yourself

Before we can engage with any of our students, we need to ensure we are in our best spot not to take things personally, to maintain calm, to be at our best—this is not always going to be at every moment of every school day. So before I speak to my apathetic students, I take a few breaths to ensure my tone will not imply anger and frustration and that my words won't embarrass or shame someone. I check myself to ensure that I am in a good mental space to speak with kindness.

Actual Activities for You

9 – [Find Them A Class Job](#)

Using student jobs helps create a classroom community. It gives your students a purpose and responsibility in the classroom. Their job is something they can take pride in daily. What jobs should you include? Check some out in [35 Class Jobs to Create Community](#).

10 – Establish A Class Family

[Creating a learning community](#) where students feel a sense of belonging and connection is vital to maximize the learning within your classroom. Your classroom becomes like a family for you and your students. The importance of establishing a community among learners is at the top of the list for teachers! Why is that? Because students will learn more in an environment where they feel loved and cared about by others.

Also...

11 – Notice Everything

Having eyes wide open and in the back of your head can give you some great information about your apathetic students. Who will they engage with at times? What do they appear to watch in the classroom? What are they focused on when they aren't doing work? Not everything our students do daily requires a comment, but make those mental notes and USE THAT INFO!

12 – [Celebrate Success](#)

Let all your students celebrate each other's success—this grows that culture of success in the classroom! Some kids complete minimal work, don't engage with others, and shut down. These apathetic students may need these celebrations the most!

Activities to Engage Apathetic Students

13 – Hands-On

When students are engaged with their hands and minds simultaneously, they are rewiring their brains to accomplish learning! Allowing tons of hands-on activities build students' creativity, engagement, and confidence! Check out the following blogs jam-packed with ideas:

- [Literacy Centers Blog](#)—This blog highlights some quick and easy [literacy centers](#).
- [Hands-On Spelling Blog](#)

Click on the picture to check out our [Editable Spelling!](#)

- [Using Whiteboards Blog](#)—With this blog, find out how whiteboards can turn many activities into hands-on ones!
- [No Prep Math Blog](#)—[Bingo Daubers](#), Counters, Dice, Cards, and More!

- [Easy Hands-On Addition Blog](#)—You will love these activities like our [Roll It, Make It](#) worksheet with base ten blocks and dice.

14 – Short and Sweet

- [Time Fillers Blog](#) (hidden academic gems) for those moments where your lesson ends early or specials don't start for another five!

[I SPY Phonics](#) are so much fun!

- [Brain Breaks Blog](#)—get them moving!
- [Additional Strategies Blog](#)—more, more, more!

15 – Play-Based

- [Games for the end of the day](#)

[I Have, Who Has for Math and ELA!](#)

- [Games for teaching self-regulation](#)—Perfect for teaching emotions and self-regulation!

So hopefully, I have been able to get you thinking of some ways and ideas to help your apathetic students! We frequently beat ourselves up for the lack of engagement with these students, but with some tweaking of our expectations and finding joy in the baby steps, maybe we can relax knowing we give it our ALL. EVERY. DAY.

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