

WWW.ACHIEVERMCBEAVER.COM

299 Free Ideas to Improve Your School Year

Whether you are a veteran or a new school teacher, these 299 simple and cost effective ideas are sure to warm your heart and touch your inner being. Of course, not every idea is going to fit your needs, teaching style, or personality - but if you are willing to commit to finding and implementing just **one** of these ideas each and every school day - you will be well on your way to improving:

- * Your outlook on your career and your profession
- * Your teaching longevity
- * Your relationships with your colleagues
- * Your relationships with your students
- * Your emotional and educational impact on your students
- * Your views and feelings about yourself both as a person and a teacher
- * Your overall success as a teacher

FOR YOUR STUDENTS:

- 1) Dare your kids to have a good day.
- 2) Tell a student that you are proud of him or her.
- 3) E-mail pen pals in other countries to find out about their cultures.
- 4) Have each student do a short "book talk" to the class about their favorite book from home.
- 5) Sit the class in a circle. Whisper a fictional story to one student, then have each student pass it on from one student to the next. See how the story ends up and analyze how easily stories can change.
- 6) Each school day select one student to go around the room saying one nice thing about each of the other students.
- 7) Buy a toy punching/bop bag and let each student take a whack.

- 8) Plant a vegetable garden outside your school window.
- 9) Dare your kids to do something nice for each other.
- 10) Have students pat themselves on the back for a job well done.
- 11) Write down on individual slips of paper an emotional or academic gift that you would like to be able to give each student by the end of the year (e.g. motivation, desire, math skills, reading skills, self-confidence, perseverance) and then share them one on one with each of your students.
- 12) Have students make a special meal and invite the parents to join them for lunch.
- 13) Discuss with your students a current event from when you were their age.
- 14) Create a “secret handshake” with a student.
- 15) Allow your students to create their homework assignment once a week.
- 16) Have a child call their parent at home or at work for something **GOOD** that they have done.
- 17) Instead of “catching” a child doing something wrong, catch him/her doing something **right**.
- 18) Using the overhead or opaque projector have students trace their profiles and then write autobiographies.
- 19) Allow a child to make a mistake - and then help him or her learn from it.
- 20) Model for your students a behavior you’d like to see more of: e.g. saying “please” and “thank you.”
- 21) Develop a classroom slogan and then place it above the entrance to your room.
- 22) Tell your students that they are special.
- 23) E-mail pen pals in other schools.
- 24) Have a class meeting to resolve classroom problems/issues; be sure to focus on solutions.
- 25) Have students make personalized business cards.
- 26) Let kids decorate a section of the room.

- 27) Let students make their own flash cards using information that they've learned in school.
- 28) Let students make plans for a field trip.
- 29) Bring your pet to school (check with your principal first).
- 30) Allow a child to place his or her grade in the grade book.
- 31) Allow a child to grade his or her own paper.
- 32) Allow students to submit math questions/problems to be included on their weekly test.
- 33) Create a class mascot and make posters for the room.
- 34) Let a student sit at the teacher's desk for the day.
- 35) Call a student at home and mention that you enjoyed them in class today, and that you are looking forward to seeing him or her at school tomorrow.
- 36) For once - give a student a break.
- 37) Encourage your students to encourage others.
- 38) If your first impulse is ever to scold a child; walk away and do nothing instead.
- 39) After walking away, if you just can't seem to do nothing - then let both sides first cool-down before taking any type of action.
- 40) Use humor or a funny analogy to make a point with a student.
- 41) Give a student a "high-five" for a job well done.
- 42) Hand-out "get out of trouble free" cards - usable for a list of pre-set offenses only.
- 43) Don't just "hear" a child, be sure to "listen."
- 44) Once a week have a student that is responsible for demonstrating a "home-made" science experiment to the class.
- 45) Invite a child and his or her parent(s) to eat lunch with you.

- 46) Allow for your students to feel like they are significant, needed, and able to contribute by assigning each student a classroom job, chore, or responsibility.
- 47) Before school begins each morning, place a note of either appreciation, praise, support, or of encouragement on one of your student's desks.
- 48) Team teach a unit or activity across grade levels (e.g. pairing 1st or 2nd graders with 4th or 5th graders); the results will simply astound you.
- 49) Have an "international feast" where each student brings in food(s) from a specific nation.
- 50) Admit to a student a mistake you've made with them; they just might admit one back.
- 51) When a student asks you a question that you don't have the answer to, challenge them to see who can find the answer first - you or them.
- 52) Respect a child for who they are; not for who you **want** them to be.
- 53) Invite your school counselor to come to your class and teach the student a life or social skill.
- 54) Take a student interest inventory and incorporate their likes/interests into your lesson plans.
- 55) Give a child a great big hug (in the presence of another adult).
- 56) Have students write "thank you" notes to other students in the room (preferably not to a current friend).
- 57) Math skills build on each other so consider making your math tests cumulative; this way important skills from early in the year won't be forgotten or become rusty.
- 58) Always enter your room smiling.
- 59) Once a week, each lunch with a student.
- 60) Play classical music softly as your students do seat work.
- 61) Read a story to your class - no matter how old they are.
- 62) Find one positive trait in a most difficult student. As time goes on, build upon that trait.

- 63) Bring in a picture of yourself from when you were the same age as your students.
- 64) Share a story about your life when you were your students' age.
- 65) Bake cookies as a math/science lesson.
- 66) Learn fractions through class pizza parties.
- 67) Let a student tell a story that is important to him or her.
- 68) Ask the least popular students to captain teams for games.
- 69) Fill your room with books of all different interests.
- 70) Stop, drop, and read.
- 71) Have your students share their dreams and ambitions.
- 72) Let your students take turns teaching.
- 73) Let a student take attendance.
- 74) Have a monthly class lunch.
- 75) Use apples for math demonstrations and then make apple sauce.
- 76) Use jelly beans and M&M's for math manipulatives; then let the kids eat their math work.
- 77) Have a reading corner with a comfy chair and pillows to sit on.
- 78) Teach graphing skills by polling students on various issues such as favorite candy, favorite games, favorite books, and favorite sports.
- 79) Have a pet in the room. Let your students take turns feeding, watering, and caring for it.
- 80) Let each student have a day to tell a joke.
- 81) Have your students establish weekly, monthly, and annual goals.
- 82) Provide a means for the students to self-review their own goals.

- 83) Have the students help generate weekly spelling and vocabulary lists.
 - 84) Have spelling tests, but also hold students accountable for word definitions.
 - 85) Have a “secret word” each day from last month’s vocabulary words.
 - 86) Have students find out what countries their ancestors came from, and then graph the results.
 - 87) Encourage journal writing.
 - 88) Start a journal entry with, “When I grow up ...”
 - 89) Start a journal entry with, “I hate it when ...”
 - 90) Start a journal entry with, “I once saw a rainbow ...”
 - 91) Discuss current events.
 - 92) Give positive feedback to your children.
 - 93) Have weekly “office visits” with each child where you and the child work together to set goals, review goals, and create plans for attaining goals.
- JUST FOR YOU:**
- 94) Take a nap during your planning period.
 - 95) Call your significant other during your planning period.
 - 96) Learn something from your students.
 - 97) Order lunch-in for yourself.
 - 98) Be daring - invite a fellow teacher to see you teach a lesson and then to give you constructive feedback.
 - 99) Invite a significant other or close friend to come to school and help you teach your class.
 - 100) For once - give yourself a break.
 - 101) It might hurt at first, but volunteer for something at your school.

- 102) Share a personal story with a colleague.
- 103) Learn from your peers.
- 104) Invite another teacher over to your house for dinner on the weekend.
- 105) Register for a workshop on a subject/topic that **YOU** are interested in learning more about.
- 106) Call your old practicum supervisor or teaching mentor and thank them for getting you started in the profession.
- 107) Take a personal day - you've earned them - so you may as well **use** one!
- 108) Bring no work home tonight - nothing!!
- 109) Allow yourself to make a mistake.
- 110) Always say what you mean, and mean what you say.
- 111) Plan your work, work your plan.
- 112) Have fun today and remember **why** you started teaching in the first place.
- 113) Before dismissal for both lunch and going home, call upon each child to tell you one thing that they learned that day.
- 114) Laugh at something silly that you did today.
- 115) Remind yourself that your students aren't perfect; they never will or can be.
- 116) Make a list of the things you don't like about teaching, and then find a way to improve some or all of those things.
- 117) Set a personal goal for today - and then stick to it!
- 118) Do your nails during your planning period.
- 119) Remind yourself that you aren't perfect; nobody is or ever can be.

- 120) Write down all of your troubles and frustrations on a piece of paper - then crumple it up and throw it away.
- 121) Ignore the curriculum and school's agenda; teach something that moves you today.
- 122) Encourage yourself to **continue** encouraging others.
- 123) Remember something that you disliked about going to school when you were growing up - and be sure to do the opposite in your classroom.
- 124) Seek out knowledge and advice from your peers; others have suffered the same trials and tribulations that you have and may in fact have a track proven solution.
- 125) Share an idea with your colleagues; inevitably this will give you license to "steal" theirs.
- 126) Join the PTA/PTO.
- 127) Join a professional organization such as Phi Delta Kappa.
- 128) Make time tonight for yourself and for your significant other.
- 129) Remind yourself that you were once your students' age.
- 130) Invite the school superintendent to come read a short book to your class; exposure couldn't hurt.
- 131) When things get out of hand and you feel like you want to scream, stop all of your kids and take them for a walk around the track.
- 132) Combine two classes together and do a special activity - this time it is your turn to teach the students - next month it's the other teacher's turn.
- 133) Lighten up, tell a joke.
- 134) Pick out one positive thing that happened today - no matter how small or trivial - and build upon it for tomorrow.

FOR THE SCHOOL/OTHERS

- 135) Send a note of support/encouragement to a colleague.

WWW.ACHIEVERMCBEAVER.COM

- 136) Decide to mentor a “rookie” teacher at your school and/or call your local teaching college to be a practicum mentor.
- 137) Write biographies of the teachers and other staff members at your school.
- 138) Seek out another teacher and praise him/her for a job well done.
- 139) Have monthly bagel breakfasts.
- 140) Teach the kids a neat dance step and ask the PTA/PTO if you can have the kids perform at the next general assembly meeting.
- 141) Go out of your way to praise a child for something special that they have done.
- 142) Encourage each child to have a parent or guardian join the PTA/PTO.
- 143) On Friday afternoon, invite the staff to join you at a local watering hole for “happy hour.”
- 144) Get involved with the PTA/PTO - they don’t bite.
- 145) Help your students to help others - run a food drive.
- 146) Decorate the principal’s door.
- 147) As the students outgrow their sneakers, collect them and give them to the Salvation Army.
- 148) Have the 5th or 6th graders challenge the staff to a volleyball or softball game.
- 149) Declare a “random-acts of kindness” day.
- 150) Have kids make up a song about their school and share it with the rest of the student body over the PA.
- 151) Have the students save their change from lunch and plant a class tree.
- 152) Invite a parent to come to class and teach a special lesson.
- 153) Give your principal a brief word of encouragement and/or thanks.

WWW.ACHIEVERMCBEAVER.COM

- 154) Walk up to a child that you don't even know and tell 'em that you are glad that he or she is part of your school.
- 155) Have each class in the school dedicate items for a time capsule to be opened twenty years from now.
- 156) Form a lunch time or after/before school "study club" for those students who are at-risk of not passing a certain subject or at-risk of not passing the state's standardized testing. Have other teachers join you and take turns monitoring the group.
- 157) Choose one thing that you don't like about your school - and set out to fix it!!
- 158) Share your wisdom with your peers.
- 159) Seek out a member of the faculty that you are not particularly fond of and give him or her a sincere compliment (it doesn't matter how trivial it may be).
- 160) Smile at a student; particularly one that needs it.
- 161) Let a lonely student take home the class pet/plant home for the holidays.
- 162) Support your PTA or PTO's major fund-raiser by making a purchase.
- 163) Sponsor an after-school activity.
- 164) Start a staff volleyball/softball team and play staff members from other schools/districts.
- 165) Do aerobics with your fellow staff members either before or after school.
- 166) Have students write a "thank you" note to their parents.
- 167) Tutor a child before or after school.
- 168) Have students help out and clean the school yard.
- 169) Order lunch-in for yourself; but also invite other staff members to piggyback on your order.
- 170) Find a "difficult" student and go out of your way today to make them laugh **with** you instead of **at** you, others, themselves, or the school.

WWW.ACHIEVERMCBEAVER.COM

- 171) Make a list of the things you enjoy about teaching, and then share it with another teacher who may be either down or frustrated.
- 172) At lunch time, have the students save the tops of soda cans for dialysis testing.
- 173) Let students make a plan of how to help out other students or teachers in the school.
- 174) Call the school superintendent and make mention that you enjoy working in his or her schools.
- 175) Do your principal a favor without expecting anything in return.
- 176) Have students thank the lunch personnel for making their lunches.
- 177) Photocopy an outline of your best or favorite lesson of the year and share it with the rest of the staff.
- 178) Give a struggling parent a note of encouragement or support.
- 179) Have your students make sandwiches for a shelter.
- 180) Put together and/or coach an Odyssey of the Mind team.
- 181) Collect pennies from the children in the school, and then buy books for the school library.
- 182) Mentor a child from a different classroom and/or grade level than your own.
- 183) Have your children collect gently used toys for shelters and homeless children.
- 184) When passing a child in the hallway, give him or her a heartfelt "wink."
- 185) Run a tag sale to help those that are less fortunate.
- 186) Organize or be a part of a staff "talent-show" for all of the students the last day of school.
- 187) Have your students throw their loose change from lunch into a pail, and give it to a public food pantry (ask your childrens' parents first).
- 188) Take-up clothing donations and start a school-wide "clothes closet" for needy children.
- 189) Thank the school custodian and lunch staff for being an important part of the school team.

- 190) Have your students write letters to people who reside in nursing homes.
- 191) Take a class field trip to visit the above mentioned nursing home pen pals.
- 192) Adopt a nursing home resident to remember throughout the year for holidays and visits.
- 193) Have your students make get well cards for hospitalized children.

JUST FOR THE HECK OF IT:

- 194) Go outside with all of your students and have everyone scream the loudest they can.
- 195) Go to the gym and play volleyball or dodge ball with your students.
- 196) Do the Funky Chicken.
- 197) Finger-paint with your students.
- 198) Play with silly string in the cafeteria.
- 199) Play at recess with your students.
- 200) Make root beer floats.
- 201) Have a three legged sack race.
- 202) Ask students to record their family's history and share it with their classmates.
- 203) Have a lip-sync contest.
- 204) Have the students make up a game - and then play it!
- 205) Do the Hokey Pokey.
- 206) Have a "no shoes" day.
- 207) Build a card house.
- 208) Have a pillow fight with your students at recess.

- 209) Have the students - from their seats - play basketball with wadded-up pieces of paper.
- 210) Have a class picnic.
- 211) Have a "favorite hat" day.
- 212) Do the Macarena.
- 213) Write a class letter to the President of the United States; see if you get a response.
- 214) Declare a "no homework" night once a month.
- 215) Bring in a lamp - turn off the fluorescent lights - spend the day in soothing lamp light.
- 216) Have students act out a book or a scene from a short story.
- 217) Have the students write a letter to their favorite author that is currently alive; see if you get any responses.
- 218) Play charades.
- 219) Give out "no homework" cards to deserving students.
- 220) Have a spelling bee.
- 221) Have a "dress up" day.
- 222) Have a "dress down" day.
- 223) Teach a new vocabulary word each day.
- 224) Be a rebel, extend recess a few minutes.
- 225) For short work breaks, play current music for your students to dance to.
- 226) Have students make a TV commercial and video tape them doing it.
- 227) Play Hangman.
- 228) Bring in a jar of rainbows.

229) Have your students draw self-portraits.

230) Invite a parent to talk about his or her profession.

231) Ask the principal to visit your classroom and tell a story about when he or she was in the same grade.

232) Play a game.

233) Have the students devise different and unique ways to collect and recycle goods.

234) Color a mural of the class.

235) Make a shadow box of the class.

236) Have a five minute aerobics session in between class periods.

237) Have each of your students say one nice thing about the school.

238) Make a missing tooth chart.

239) The next time your principal visits the room, call upon each student and have each child mention one thing that they've learned that day.

240) Have the class decorate your door.

241) Sit the class in a circle - start a story and have each student add on to it.

242) Have the students put on a fashion show for the school.

243) Go on a field trip to a local bakery or supermarket.

244) Have a "No Television" week.

245) Have a "No Nintendo" week.

246) Have a class talent show.

247) Shut down your class 20 minutes before the end of school and give the students an "extra recess."

248) Have each student bring in 4 tennis balls. Slice an "X" in one side and place them on the feet of the desk chairs. This way the room looks festive and the chairs will slide quietly.

249) Ask the principal to come read to your class.

250) Play "20 Questions" with your students (have one student give you the name of the person that you are to be questioning about, and have the rest of students try to figure out who it is).

251) Have a class pajama party (until 9:00 PM).

252) Have the principal read a story at the pajama party.

253) Pair-up your students - have them interview each other for a few minutes - then each student reports back to the class about the other person's interests, hobbies, likes, dislikes, etc.

254) Have a smiling contest with your students.

255) Share students' recipes for happiness.

256) Play music over the PA and have a class parade in the hallways of the school.

257) Invite a firefighter to come talk to the class.

258) Switch classrooms with another teacher for the day.

259) To get the kids' blood flowing and pumped for the next lesson, do the "wave" as a segway to the next activity.

260) Have the kids measure the school hallways using inches, feet, and yards.

261) Read a poem aloud.

262) Publish a book of your students' poems.

263) Have the students make a class cookbook with their favorite recipes from home.

264) Using a general theme (e.g. trees, famous people, animals) have the students name each of the buildings hallways and make street signs for each one.

WWW.ACHIEVERMCBEAVER.COM

- 265) Call the local newspaper and ask if they'll cover a special project that your class is working on; a little PR couldn't ever hurt.
- 266) Just prior to going in from recess, have the students burn-off extra energy by walking a few laps around the track with you.
- 267) When the students form a line to walk in the hallways, have them walk backwards today.
- 268) Join your students in physical education, art, or music and participate in the activity.
- 269) Have your students make their own crossword puzzles using vocabulary from their history and science; then pass out the best puzzles as review sheets for the rest of the students.
- 270) Have the students make a new invention (it could be fictional and/or non-working) - have students make corresponding advertising for their new product or invention - then display their work at a PTA meeting.
- 271) Have a rap contest.
- 272) Have a staring contest.
- 273) Thumb wrestle with a student; if the student wins the class get 5 minutes of extra recess.
- 274) Designed around a specific theme, make mobiles using yarn and wire hangers.
- 275) It doesn't matter how old the kids are - a "show and tell" day is always a cool idea!!
- 276) Have the students bring in baby pictures of themselves and have a "guess who this is" contest.
- 277) Teach the students cross-stitching.
- 278) Have a snowball throwing contest.
- 279) Invite a police officer to talk to the class.
- 280) Ask older children to read to younger children.
- 281) See who can read the most books in a month.
- 282) Bring fortune cookies to class; have students keep track of the results.

- 283) Have a puppet show.
- 284) Show your students the video of your favorite movie from when you were their age.
- 285) Dress like a character from your favorite book.
- 286) Dress like a historical figure from your history lessons.
- 287) Review class material playing “Jeopardy” or “Hollywood Squares.”
- 288) Ask the students to bring in newspaper articles that pertain to their interests.
- 289) Bring in popcorn and a video - let the students do a movie review!!
- 290) Have the students make travel brochures for their favorite vacation spot (it can be a fictional place).
- 291) Have the students make a comic book.
- 292) Set up a day long “read-a-thon” with lots of munchies.
- 293) Have a “mock trial” for an infamous historical, nursery rhyme, cartoon, or Disney figure.
- 294) Have the students write a jingle about something that they’ve learned in class.
- 295) Have all of your students give the principal a great, big class hug!!
- 296) Have the students draw a picture of a fictional animal.
- 297) Have the students design their own license plates for their own fictional country.
- 298) Have a watermelon eating contest - save the leftover seeds from each participant - then graph the results.
- 299) Make a pretend campfire and tell ghost stories using the names, dates, and places from their history lessons.