

Motivating Class Participation and Cooperation Through Pop Culture

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Disclaimer

This talk will outline how I use pop culture to accomplish this goal. These techniques have not been measured in any formal way, and most of what I will talk about will be anecdotal.

Problem

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Pop Culture Ice-Breaker

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Solution

Reality TV!

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- In the beginning of the semester, these conversations are fact-gathering in nature. I will ask questions about major, hometown, etc. Students typically enjoy sharing information with me, and I will share information about me as well.

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- At a point in the semester, these conversations turn to TV programs or movies. Students are fascinated that someone of my “age” watches programs such as Glee or Project Runway, or enjoys movies like Inception or Airbender.

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- Distracting students from being in a classroom actually helps them get settled for the lecture. They aren't focused on the unpleasantness of being in class; they have just discovered something interesting about their professor.
- The students also feel more at ease to visit me in office hours. On average, I have 10 to 15 students in office hours on any given day. At least 25% of these students will come to chat about how things are going with their other classes, or ask for advice about their major.

Problem

How do I get students to want to participate in class?

Pop Culture Motivation

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Solution

Bribe them!

Harry Potter Point System

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- On the last day of class I provide cake and drinks to the class as the prize.

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- The students enjoy the cake and soda at the end of the semester, and do not feel tricked by the outcome.

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Pop Culture Consequences

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Solution



Double Stuf Oreo Cookies

Phone Infraction

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- I present examples of ring tones that might be considered fierce and those that might be considered fabulous. All of these songs are current “hits”. I do not however give them an example of a fierce and fabulous ring tone.

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- I present examples of ring tones that might be considered fierce and those that might be considered fabulous. All of these songs are current “hits”. I do not however give them an example of a fierce and fabulous ring tone.
- I am the judge of what is fierce and fabulous and I tell my students that I like cookies a lot more than I like ring tones.

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Story

Last semester a group of students wanted to see if they could find a ring tone that would qualify as both fierce and fabulous. On a test-review day, the students hid a phone in the classroom and called it. The guilty students came up to the front to retrieve the phone, as well as deposit cookies on the desk for the class.

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- At times, the students are either tricked or bribed into this participation or cooperation.
- These techniques in the classroom increase the frequency of office hour visits amongst the students.
- They also increases student referral and repeat business. Students talk about the crazy math professor that loves Glee and makes you bring cookies in if your phone goes off.