

# TEACHING TIPS



Prestwick House

Favorite tips, tricks, and advice on life in the classroom from teachers around the country

Tips for...



First-Year Teachers



Teaching Vocabulary



Teaching Reading



Teaching Writing



Teaching Literature



and more!





# TEACHING TIPS



WE ASKED SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST TEACHERS we know (you, our customers!) for their favorite tips, tricks, and advice on life in the classroom. This compilation comes from over 80 amazing teachers around the country. If you have a favorite tip or classroom trick that you think other teachers would love, share it with us on Facebook, Twitter, or our Blog with the hashtag #TeacherTips.

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# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips for a First-Year Teacher:*



“Remain calm! Don’t talk down to the students. Remember that everyone was once new to this and you are going to make mistakes. You too, are learning.”

JOE SYLVESTER  
OLD FORGE HS

“Structure is your friend. Have an arc to the lesson and an arc to the unit. You are your student’s teacher from the first day. Their friends are elsewhere. Be firm. Be warm. Understand but do not excuse. The best thing about this first year is that while it is incredibly difficult, it will end and you will learn. The second year is easier. Remember that good teachers are not created overnight. It takes five years to become a teacher. Learn. Give yourself some time for reflection. Take care of yourself.”

NORMA MORTIMER  
MILWAUKEE MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL

“Learn to say no to administrators and colleagues. Spend the first three weeks teaching rituals and routines. Call every parent the first week of school.”

LEIGH WILLMANN  
RIVER RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL





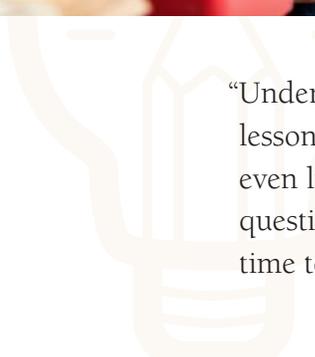
# TEACHING TIPS

*Tips for a First-Year Teacher:*



“Don’t be upset with yourself if you feel upset or frustrated! Allow yourself to feel your natural emotions. Then, pull yourself together, and don’t focus on what you can’t do -- do everything you can! Your students will appreciate your work more than you know.”

LISA BERTRAND  
LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL



“Understand classroom management first. Then create engaging lessons. Understand that teens think differently from you and may not even like your subject. You do not have to entertain, but consider this question: Would you want to sit in your class? Take time to explain, time to do, and time to regroup. That is a full lesson.”

PAULA SINGLETON  
WEST JOHNSTON HIGH SCHOOL



“Set up a grading process that works for you. Don’t try to grade everything - it can’t be done without making yourself crazy.”

LYNN BRADEN  
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP MIDDLE SCHOOL WEST



# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips for a First-Year Teacher:*



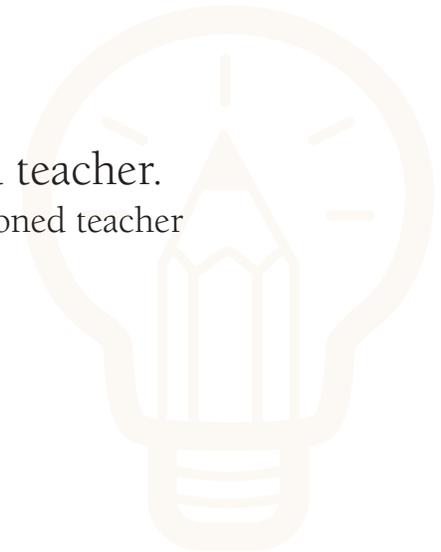
“Become a part of a mentorship with a seasoned teacher. As a new teacher, one can bring the latest practices to a seasoned teacher and a seasoned teacher can share years of experience.”

PATRICIA W. EUBANKS  
EAST ENGLISH VILLAGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY



“Plan lots of work. Always be over-prepared rather than under. Busy students are good students. When something is not working, go to plan B.”

MARY PERRY  
MARTIN MIDDLE SCHOOL



“My tip would to expect the unexpected. Your first year is the guinea pig year. Expect mistakes and always aim to be a reflective practitioner.”

KRISTIN ROBAIR  
BROADMOOR MIDDLE SCHOOL





# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips on Teaching Vocabulary:*

“Vocabulary: three thoughts -- People judge you by how you speak. Never use a word worth ten cents when you can use a word worth twenty-five cents. You do not own a word until you speak it in conversation or write it in an assigned writing assignment.”

JAMES B. CARMICLE  
HOLLYWOOD HIGH SCHOOL



“Teach them strategies to attack longer words to read them and recognize roots and affixes.”

SHARON SCHWAB  
ROUSE HIGH SCHOOL

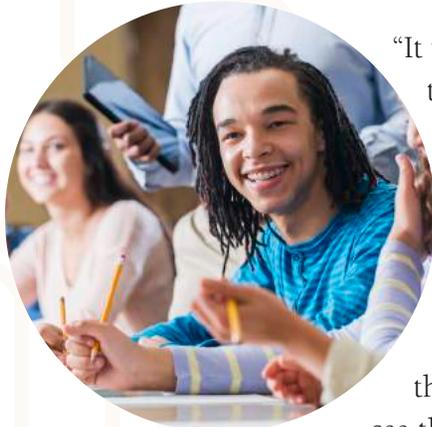


# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips on Teaching Reading:*

“I feel it is imperative to have guiding questions for my students to answer as they are reading. This helps them know what they should be looking for as they read, assists with comprehension, and helps keep them focused. When they are finished with the assigned reading, I can look at their answers for accountability, and they can use the questions and answers for discussion and for recalling information.”

DENISE SMITH  
 MARTHA LAYNE COLLINS HIGH SCHOOL



“It isn’t a ‘lesson’ so much as it is a way to encourage kids to widen their reading horizons. I have my students create ‘first line teasers’ of their novels for our classroom wall to give other students an idea of what to read next. They fold a 4x6 piece of card-stock in half and on the front/outside they write the first line of that novel (some do it ‘word art’ style - looks great!). Then on the inside they write the title/author. We put them on the boards so kids see the line and if they’re interested they can open the card and see what the novel is -- and hopefully add it to their list of books to read!”

KRISTIN THOMPSON  
 EL CAMINO FUNDAMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL





# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips on Teaching Reading:*

“I make my kids read outside of class a book of their choosing. I don’t care what they read (within reason - they are in high school so it needs to be young adult to adult level) as long as they are reading! I even let a boy read a John Deere Tractor repair manual because that is what he wanted to read. I gave him a quick quiz by flipping through some pages and moved him on to the next one. He read a small novel before the end of the year.”

JENNIFER GILLILAND  
KIONA-BENTON HIGH SCHOOL





# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips on Teaching Writing:*

“Students take ownership of their own writing when you gain their trust from reading and making positive comments about what they are doing RIGHT. Connecting with their writing can enable you to have insight of their situation.”

CANDYCE PHILLIPS  
BERRYVILLE MIDDLE

“Writing! I love teaching writing by having students write about whatever they want & then come back to it weeks later to edit. When they edit for the sake of editing (not for a ‘final draft grade’) they’re more likely to look critically at the writing. Plus, since they’re not ‘sharing’ it, they are also willing to be a bit critical of themselves.”

KARI  
NORTH FAYETTE  
VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL



“I enjoy teaching writing. In particular, I enjoy teaching thesis statements because they make or break an essay. In expository writing, I give several prompts and have students practice writing multiple theses so that they’ll easily have the ability to write them when they’re given an actual essay. If they write many and predict where the essay would go, then they don’t have to actually write the paper. Practice makes perfect....”

JENNIFER WHITEHEAD  
EAST VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

 **TEACHING TIPS*****Tips on Teaching Writing:***

“When I write in class, the students see the process. They see my mistakes and how I correct them. This engages them in following the writing process and gives them a plan for fixing their own mistakes.”

LINDA CALLIS  
BRUNSWICK ACADEMY



“In writing essays, I tell students they cannot use a pronoun as the first word in their sentences -- any of them. They panic at first, but the logic behind this is simple: it forces them to use more sophisticated sentence structure. I teach sentence structure and different ways to begin sentences, and by the time they submit the final draft of their essay, they’ve surprised themselves with the way their syntax has advanced.”

JANELL LUDWIG  
CALVARY MURRIETA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



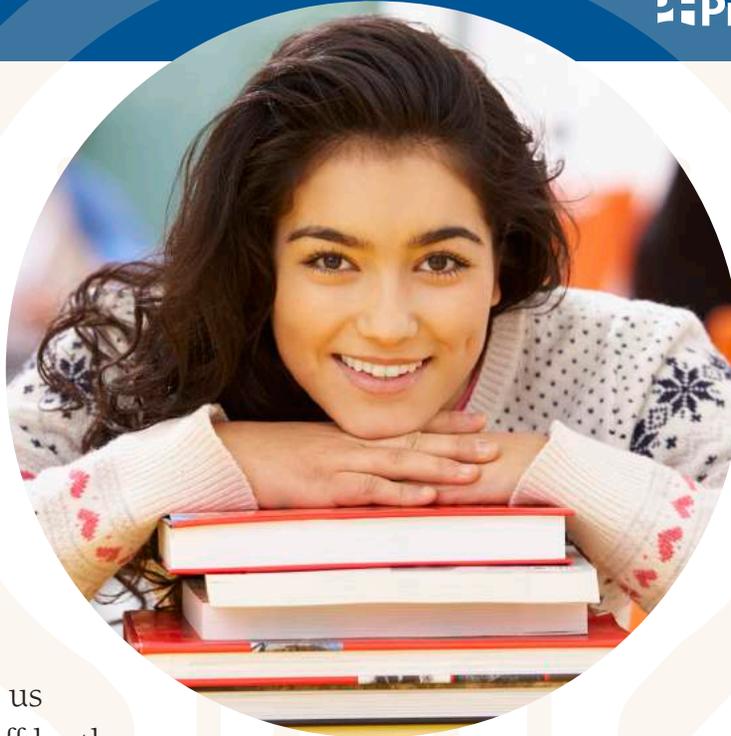


# TEACHING TIPS

## Tips on Teaching Writing:

“USE A THEME and GO ALL IN! We engage in a Writer’s Boot Camp. On the first day of the unit, I dress in military fatigues, complete with whistle, clipboard etc. I retype all lessons to have a military feeling as we work. Finally, when the state writing test arrives, my principal allows us all to ‘go to war.’ We get a sendoff by the student body as my 8th graders go to testing locations, and we all dress in military themed clothes (I let them have fun with it without breaking dress code rules). It seems like such a little thing to do to make writing more amenable to the students, but it makes a huge difference.”

COURTNEY GREEN  
PAULS VALLEY JUNIOR HIGH



“Grade as they work--I have different parts of their essays due at one time. These I take for daily grades, give them feedback, and allow them to improve them for the final essay grade. This way I have already seen their papers before the final, and they are able to have a constant stream of feedback to take back and revise their essays. They need the opportunity to see that a paper takes multiple rounds before it is final draft material.”

TACY GAMEL  
VEGA JR/SR HIGH SCHOOL



“Talk to other teachers and ask how they would score student writing; great insight is provided here.”

LORA PATE  
BENTONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL





# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips on Teaching Literature:*



“Literature—you teach everything through it. That’s where your vocab is, your writing stems from it in responses or analyses, and of course you teach reading strategies as you go. Lit is an all in one!”

DEBRA JACOBSON  
MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL

“Reading aloud is important for secondary students. It can be volunteer student readers, teacher reading, or use of professional audio books. Hearing great literature, speeches or even informational text can add to understanding and lead to better discussions and analysis.”

TASHA YOUNG  
HENDERSON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

“Do an interest survey to have an idea which book majority of students would enjoy.”

DR. JUDITH ROSE-SINGH  
HOMESTEAD MIDDLE





# TEACHING TIPS

## *My Most Successful Lesson:*

“My most successful lessons would be ones that incorporate real life elements, making them authentic for the students. I’ve taught literary theories through social media and that has been really effective.”

KATE MUIR  
CARLISLE HIGH SCHOOL

“My most successful lessons are the ones where the students do more work than I do. Seriously. I recommend getting out of the way and letting your students work, succeed, and sometimes fail--then reflect on their own choices. It is so easy for a teacher to want to get it perfect for her students--but this is not only NOT necessary, it is not effective.”

NIKI HOLMES  
ANNANDALE HIGH SCHOOL



“In general, successful lessons involve movement and getting students out of their comfort zone physically and mentally. One of the best so far is when we were doing a Shakespeare lesson which focuses on iambic pentameter, and they did a ‘cross the room’ activity with the guided questions, then the heartbeat activity to learn iambic pentameter. We ended with a Tedx Talk by Akala. It was AWESOME!”

LEIONA BATJE  
UAF

 **TEACHING TIPS*****My Most Successful Lesson:***

“A lesson that I remember is one where I asked the students to be the experts. They rose to the occasion and worked cooperatively on the task at hand. They made connections to past lessons and really pushed themselves to think.”

CECILIA LEE  
HERRICKS MIDDLE SCHOOL

“Beginning sentence diagramming. An old way to teach sentence structure but it works.”

DEBBIE PACHECO  
DOLORES HUERTA  
PREP HIGH



“My most successful lesson has been student-led discussion--don't be afraid to give control over to them!”

CHRISTINE SLOAN-WARD  
JOHN W. LAVELLE PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL



# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips for Making a Teacher's Life Better:*



“I make a chart to mark off kids when they turn something in. Every child goes in a row, and I have columns for ‘name,’ ‘turned in,’ and ‘score.’ I put all like classes on the same page, so all of my AP Lang. score sheets are on the same page, and all of my American Lit. score sheets are on one page. I keep these instead of a paper grade book -- easy to carry around, easy to put into the computer.”

ELIZABETH WRIGHT  
HOUSTON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

“Ask veteran teachers for help and lesson plans, you don’t need to re-invent the wheel right off the bat!”

KAREN DAVY  
ELYRIA HIGH SCHOOL



“Get to know your fellow department members well. Do not hesitate to ask advice or ideas. Co-workers are your best resource.”

LYNNE O’NEAL  
CENTERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL



# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips for Making a Teacher's Life Better:*

“Take vitamins. Get enough sleep. Eat healthy. Exercise. Try not to take papers home to grade.”

YEVETT WORD  
OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL

“I rarely take work home. I try to get as much grading as I can get done during the day. Then when I go home, I have the opportunity to relax, read, spend time with my family. I have found that this decreases my stress level and allows me to let my mind wander in order to create more authentic and creative lessons and projects for my students.”

ASHLEY MONDALE  
LEECHBURG AREA HIGH SCHOOL

“Once I started to consistently post the plan of the day on the smartboard, my students were able to prepare themselves for class more consistently and I was able to stay on track more consistently, as well.”

KAREN COLLURA  
MONTICELLO HIGH SCHOOL



 **TEACHING TIPS**

*Tips for Making a Teacher's Life Better:*



“Have firm expectations with students on due dates. I used to be lenient and accept work well after the due date, which meant going back to the assignment in the grade book, helping students complete the assignment weeks after I taught the lesson, etc. Being firm has helped me streamline the way my classroom runs.”

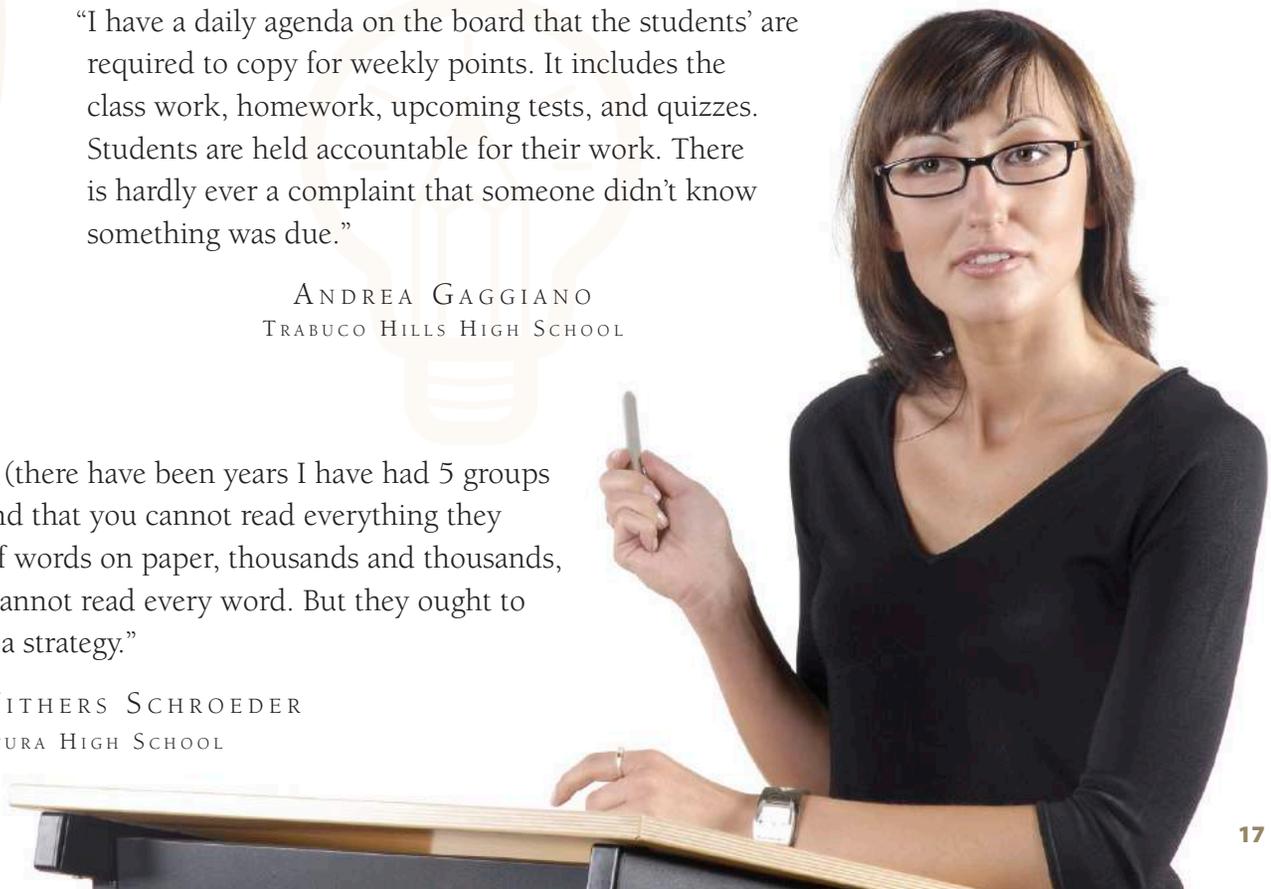
MATTHEW GORGANS  
NORCROSS HIGH SCHOOL

“I have a daily agenda on the board that the students’ are required to copy for weekly points. It includes the class work, homework, upcoming tests, and quizzes. Students are held accountable for their work. There is hardly ever a complaint that someone didn’t know something was due.”

ANDREA GAGGIANO  
TRABUCO HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

“If you have a big student load, (there have been years I have had 5 groups of 40 tenth graders), understand that you cannot read everything they write. They need to put a lot of words on paper, thousands and thousands, and sometimes you humanly cannot read every word. But they ought to still do the writing. Figure out a strategy.”

TERRI WITHERS SCHROEDER  
VENTURA HIGH SCHOOL





# TEACHING TIPS

## *Tips for Connecting with Students:*



“Remember that all your students aren’t starting their day with good cheer. Some, if not most, of our students have heavy baggage walking in the door. So please remember that EMPATHY goes a long way. Don’t ever not listen to what they are saying or not saying—keep an ear, heart, and mind open!”

JOAN DEBES  
HELEN FORT MIDDLE SCHOOL

“Make opportunities to listen to student voices and opinions. Take their pulse. They need to be heard, the same as you. It will transform your teaching.”

MARGARET LUDLAM  
SOUTH LAKES HIGH SCHOOL

“Try to make meaningful connections with your students. Talk to them about things that they have an interest in.”

LAURA FOSTER  
NORTH COBB HIGH SCHOOL



## **TEACHING TIPS**

*Tips for Connecting with Students:*



“Greeting students at the door by name on a regular basis makes a huge difference in my rapport with them. While I may not always be there daily, I make a concerted effort to greet each of them individually. This eliminates so many issues in my classroom.”

KIRSTEN MAIN  
ROSS HIGH SCHOOL

“Share your life with the kids. Make them yours. They will make you a part of their life and then they will trust you and take academic and behavioral risks. Then you have a learning community.”

LYNN GUILLIAMS  
FRED J. CARNAGE MIDDLE SCHOOL



 **TEACHING TIPS*****Tips for Connecting with Students:***

“Keep your eyes open for updating your material with ripped-from-the-headlines kind of examples to further interest your students and relate them to the piece you are teaching. Short documentaries and film clips really add to the teaching/learning experience, but use them sparingly.”

ANN VAZQUEZ

EAST PENNSBORO AREA HIGH SCHOOL

“Get involved with extracurriculars in some way. It allows you to see students from a new perspective, and vice-versa.”

RICHARD HOADLEY

EDWARD C. REED HIGH SCHOOL

“Ask for student input and critique after projects are completed. They may offer great ideas for the next class.”

THERESSA HAWKINS

WEST ST. MARY HIGH SCHOOL





# TEACHING TIPS

*Tips for Connecting with Students:*



“When I am working with a student one-on-one, I strive to never make them wrong. At times when I might want to say, ‘How COULD you have skipped class again?’, I might instead say, ‘Let’s look at the number of unexcused class periods this semester compared to last semester. What do you notice? How is it working? Let’s count and measure this each week.’ ANYTHING we count and measure WILL change one way or the other.”

Laurie Kagan MS CCC-SLP  
Wheat Ridge High School

“Give students two to three minutes at the beginning of class to take a deep breath, settle in and focus their mind on the day’s learning. It quickly decreases anxiety and helps make the rest of class productive. I also have a meaningful bellringer/entry task posted on the Smartboard for students to then focus on.”

Jodi Hoisington  
Bedford Middle School





# TEACHING TIPS

## *Inspiration:*



“Always remember that you are making a difference in the lives of the children you teach. You may be drained and exhausted each day but that is a sign of your success.”



ERIN SCHOEPFLIN  
EASTON AREA ACADEMY

“Be genuine. Listen even if you can’t provide a solution. Show you care but set High expectations.”

TINA SORENSEN  
WEST HIGH SCHOOL

“Be creative, have a variety of choices so the students can pick, and never be afraid to be wrong or ‘forget’ and have your students help you out.”

COLLEEN PEPPER  
HENDRICKSON HS

“Try to let it go when school is out. The students will still have needs tomorrow, so have family time, fun time, and hobby time.”

CANDYCE PHILLIPS  
BERRYVILLE MIDDLE

 **TEACHING TIPS****Inspiration:**

“I’m in my 28th year and no 2 years have ever been the same. Hearing my name in the stadium being announced by a senior who wanted to say thanks just this Friday reminds me why I teach. You go with the flow.”

MICHELLE ESTOCK  
GOLDEN GATE HIGH SCHOOL

“Celebrate students’ creativity and authentic voice. Reading, writing, and literature are grouped with the humanities because they touch on the things that make life human--humor, tragic mistakes, love, friendship, anxieties about the future, death, etc.”

SISTER MIRIAM KOPENHAFFER  
BISHOP MACHEBEUF HIGH SCHOOL

“The best lessons I have ever had were ones that allowed some time for exploration, sometimes even off topic. Thinking is not always linear. Build in some time for thoughtful discovery.”

NIKI HOLMES  
ANNANDALE HIGH SCHOOL

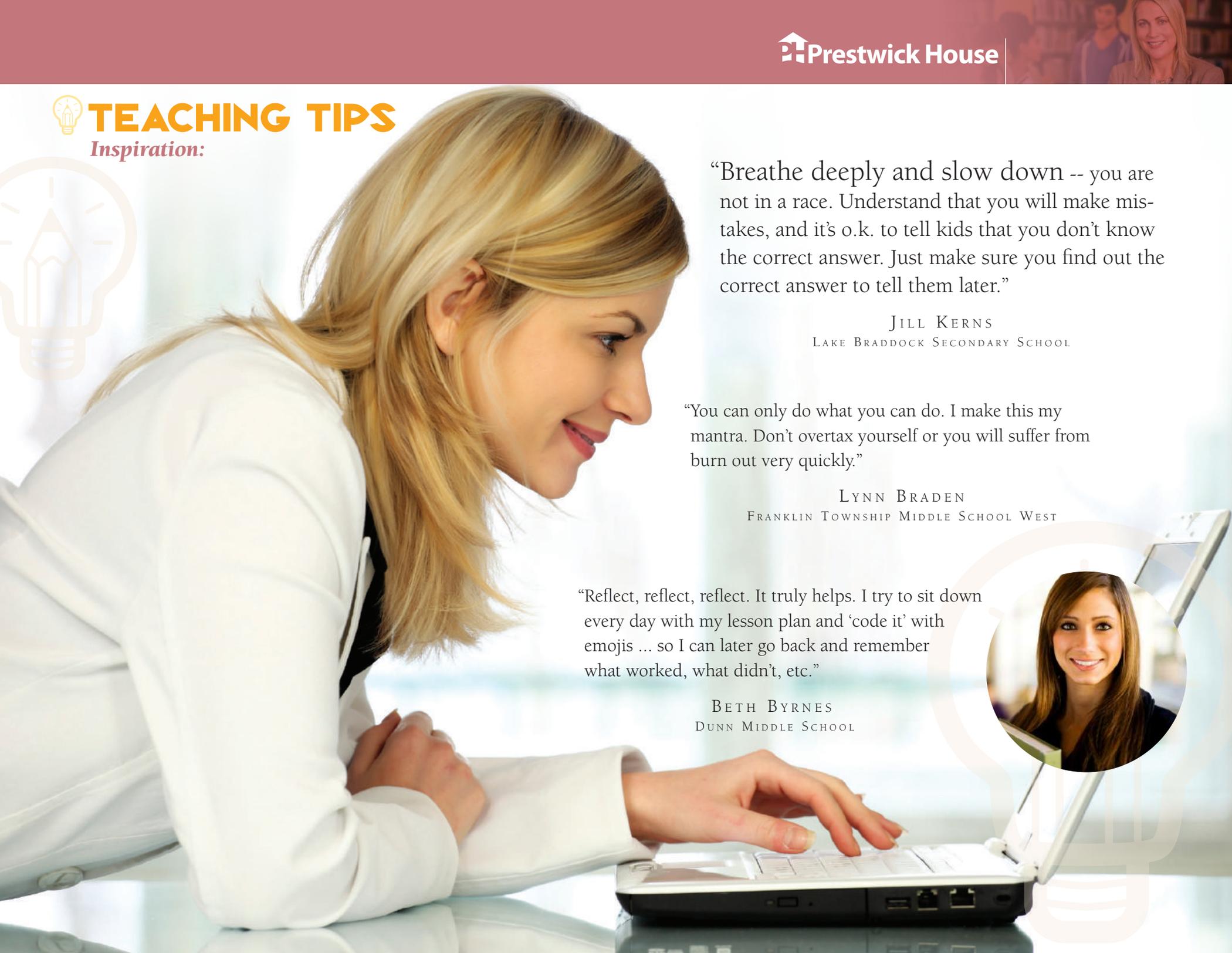
“Try to remember that you are teaching students, not content.”

TRACY S. LORD  
FRANKFORT HIGH SCHOOL



 **TEACHING TIPS**

*Inspiration:*



“Breathe deeply and slow down -- you are not in a race. Understand that you will make mistakes, and it’s o.k. to tell kids that you don’t know the correct answer. Just make sure you find out the correct answer to tell them later.”

JILL KERNS  
LAKE BRADDOCK SECONDARY SCHOOL

“You can only do what you can do. I make this my mantra. Don’t overtax yourself or you will suffer from burn out very quickly.”

LYNN BRADEN  
FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP MIDDLE SCHOOL WEST

“Reflect, reflect, reflect. It truly helps. I try to sit down every day with my lesson plan and ‘code it’ with emojis ... so I can later go back and remember what worked, what didn’t, etc.”

BETH BYRNES  
DUNN MIDDLE SCHOOL



 **TEACHING TIPS**

*Inspiration:*



“Create opportunities for your students to wrestle with questions and problems.

Don’t rescue them. Encourage them to persist. One of the best predictors of success is perseverance. It isn’t just the answer that counts but the process to get to an answer. A wrong answer isn’t bad. It’s a sign post pointing to what is needed.”

LAURIE KAGAN MS CCC-SLP  
WHEAT RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL



“Have fun in the classroom. Don’t be afraid to smile. Let the students see your enthusiasm for the subject.”

RUTH BIRNBAUM  
FRISCH





## About Prestwick House

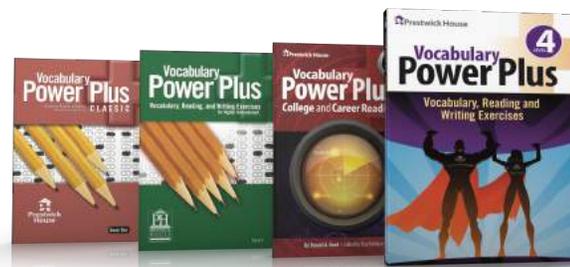
At Prestwick House, our mission is to help you inspire students to use English language arts to become better readers and writers, learn to love literature, and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We're a tight-knit team of educators and language enthusiasts who are passionate about English—about literature, writing, vocabulary, and the power that English language arts has to change students' lives for the better.

Our goal is to help teachers like motivate and engage your students with products like:



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Christine Lawson, Customer Service Manager—18 years

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