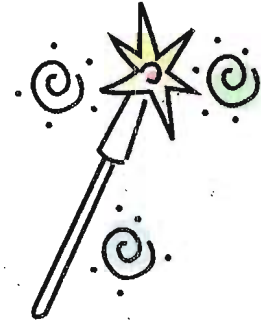




My Magical Classroom



A List Of How I Use Magic In My Classroom

I use magic as:

- ❖ A way to motivate children to listen and *want* to learn. Incorporating illusions are the proverbial pebble thrown into a still pool. Its repercussions are many; factors which appear to positively affect students' motivation as well as learning ability.
- ❖ A means of *edu-taining*. I want my students to have fun while learning. "Skilled techniques of presentation cater to the maximal arousal of curiosity in their youthful audiences, who find endless *delight* in their inexplicable feats." When children are having fun, it creates a better learning environment, things are more relaxed and learning is easier.
- ❖ An icebreaker.
Picture this:
 - It is the first day of school. Children are apprehensively standing around, eyes wide and bewildered, some filled with a glint of threatening tears.
 - Some are already full-blown bawling; body language is that of a cornered animal ready to bolt. I start talking to Merlin. He's our resident magical bear. No one can hear Merlin but me. A hush falls...
 - "Is this woman crazy?" "I don't hear the bear talking." "What? He's going to do a magic trick?" "Cool!" "This is fun. I think I'm gonna like school."
 - "Gotcha!" Merlin helps ease their fears, and magic takes their minds off missing mommy. It is an effective icebreaker and tear stopper.
- ❖ A way to reach out to a child who needs that special something. This is especially effective with shy students. "Withdrawn children suddenly become much more talkative after observing a magic trick."
- ❖ As a way to teach and reach, the hard to reach and teach child. "When the professional first meets with a resistant child, a magic trick may provide a key to open a door in this wall."
- ❖ A way to gain student acceptance. "[Magic] gains children's acceptance of, and interest in, the person who shows the magic tricks. Once children discover that you can perform a few magic tricks, they become impressed and attracted to you."
- ❖ An introduction to a new theme or lesson. Magic is a useful tool as an "anticipatory set." The adage, "*You only get one chance to make a first*

impression,” holds true in education as well. Excite a student from the start and you will hold their attention. We know that the first time students experience something new or in a different context, they form initial impressions that can have long-term effects (Tomlinson 1992). It is imperative that educators make special efforts to ensure that these first impressions are not only positive but also satisfying.

❖ A way to lace a lesson with humor and make my students and me laugh. *“If teacher is happy, everybody is happier.” “We really can learn better through laughter.”*

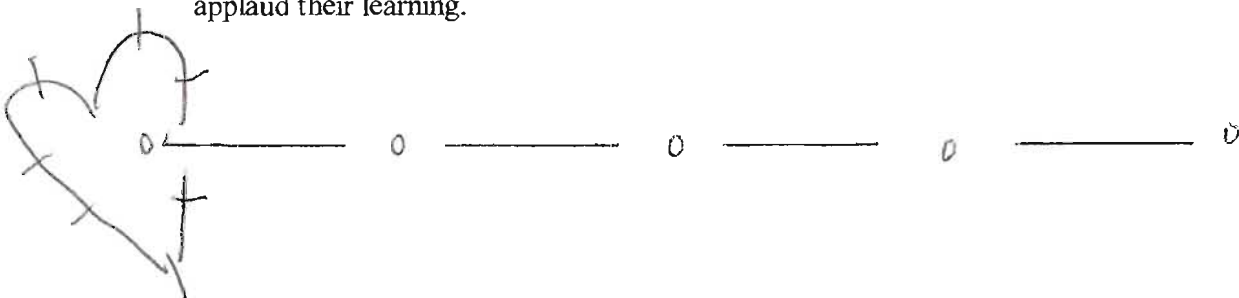
❖ A unique way to review and reinforce. There is growing recognition by educators that “less is more,” (Palardy, 1997), and that presenting less content to students and reviewing it frequently has significantly positive effects on their recall and retention.

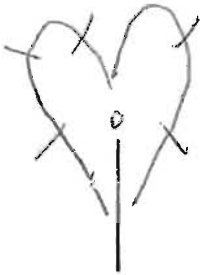
❖ A way to build teacher-student relationships. (Bowman, 2002).

❖ A way to show my students that I care about them. *“Showing a child that you care, plants a seed that will someday blossom.”* (Goodman & Furhman, 1985, p102). Because I do, I take the time to make things more interesting and fun for them. Scientific studies have shown that children are more motivated to learn if there is a rapport of trust, and the child feels cared about. *“A child doesn’t care about how much you know, until they know how much you care.”* Reciprocally, your children will care about you. You’ll go down in your school’s history as the magical teacher. (McCormack, 1990) They’ll remember you. Don’t you remember your favorites; the ones who showed they cared, loved their jobs and made you feel special? McCormack believes that *“...the use of magic by a teacher tends to raise the prestige of the teacher in the eyes of students. The teacher who has developed some skills in magic is likely to be more appreciated, talked about, and remembered by students.”* Don’t we all in our heart-of-hearts desire something akin to this?

❖ A way to create a relaxed, whimsically fun atmosphere. Magic is a tension-reducer, and an aid to creating a stress-free environment. A child feels safe to learn and will take risks in this type of setting. This aspect is essential for learning to take place (Bowman, 2002).

❖ As a means of giving joy to my students and making them happy. The atmosphere in my classroom is very joy-filled. To quote a favorite children’s song: *“If you’re happy and you know it clap your hands.”* My students are often happily clapping and delighted. They clap for themselves and for Merlin. I applaud their learning.





❖ As a means of using the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar. Research confirms the importance of using a student's prior knowledge and experiences as an aid to learning.

❖ As a way to praise and encourage my students for learning the concept. One of the soundest motivational principles is that "*success breeds success*". Youngsters will be motivated to try new tasks when they are praised for satisfactorily mastering previous ones. (Frymier, 1985).

❖ A way to peak children's curiosity. "Magic is filled with high-interest materials which can be used to stimulate a child's curiosity." (Goodman & Furman, 1981, p.102). "Teachers who can ignite children's natural curiosity and passion for learning must be present in every classroom." (White, 1997, p. 63).

❖ As a means to surprise. "...surprise is a major component of the curiosity triggered by a magician's tricks. Surprise takes place when a student is presented with a phenomenon that violates expectations derived from existing beliefs, a phenomenon that prior training and experience have led him to regard as improbable or impossible." (Vidler, 1981, p.273-74). The knowledge of this, helps me manipulate and utilize curiosity as an educational tool.

❖ A way to increase vocabulary. Through repetition, my students seem to absorb things through a magical osmosis. They enjoy repeating the "magic words." As one child put it: "*They tickle my tongue!*" Vocabulary is turned into "magic words" and the repetition of them solidifies their meaning in a child's mind. All because of magic, my four-year-olds can pronounce correctly, and tell you the definition of the following high-powered science terms: metamorphosis, proboscis, condensation, precipitation, and evaporation to name just a few. Why? Because they delight in saying them in answer to: "*What's the magic word?*"

❖ As an attention grabber and way to generate excitement. I call this going for the "Gotcha!" I consistently strive for this. My excitement and enthusiasm is transferred to my students, and their excitement helps promote the learning process. "Children of all ages, including adults are drawn to magic." (Goodman & Furman, 1981, p.102).

❖ As a means of keeping that attention. Magic retains and sustains students' attention. (Mc Cormack, 1990) "Now you have them. Now you don't. Students' attention spans are much like that. One moment we seem to have them in the palms of our hands. The next, we're wondering who tampered with their heads." (Abernathy, 2002, p.92).

❖ As a means to help my students re-focus. Magic acts as an important diffuser. *Prolonged periods of focus that are not aligned with the brain's organic need for variety, are actually detrimental to comprehension and*



retention. (Abernathy, 2002) *Our students' brains need a diffuser to regain focus; namely a one-to-three minute activity, (magic is quick) related to the topic, (magic is), that utilizes a different skill, intelligence, or modality. (magic does).*

❖ A way to build self-esteem and self-confidence. I think of simple tricks to teach my students. This not only builds their self-esteem (they feel special because I am sharing a "secret"), but they also feel successful when they entertain a friend or relative, which in turn, increases self-confidence.

❖ As a way to build self-worth. Although connected, self-confidence and self-worth are not the same thing. Self-confidence is our belief in our selves and how well we think we can achieve or accomplish something. Self-worth is based on our beliefs about how important or valuable we are. I'm sure you have known children who are extremely self-confident in their abilities, yet have low self-worth and a poor personal viewpoint about themselves. "...our self-confidence can be built by achievements and through working on our perceptions about those achievements. Self-worth, however, is built by other experiences that show us that we are valuable and lovable." (Bowman, 2002, p.12). Magic helps my students feel valuable and loved.

❖ A way to build verbal acuity. With that verbal expertise, magic gives students a great sense of timing, as well as the ability to sequence and recall a variety of information.

❖ As a way to teach life-skills. "...children can learn important social and academic success strategies that are taught as tricks." (Bowman, 2002, p.12)

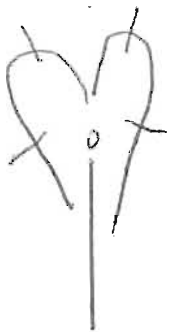
❖ A way to teach more visually. More than 90% of the information that comes to our brains is visual, and our eyes can register 36,000 visual messages per hour (Jensen, 1994), yet much of our instruction is auditory (Abernathy, 2002).

❖ An incentive and reward for learning the lesson. During the formative stages of learning, rewarding students for effort tells them that effort itself is valuable and, over a period of time, demonstrates the importance of effort and commitment in achieving success (Tomlinson, 1992).

❖ As a way to encourage students to discover, experiment and hypothesize about how a trick was done.

❖ To provide interest. Mystery and intrigue captivate. (McCormack, 1990) Magic arouses curiosity and provokes interest. (Vidler, 1981).

❖ A behavior modifier and motivator for behaving appropriately. An illusion is my *super-duper-shutter-upper*. I stimulate a child's imagination and



their lips are zipped in anticipation. *"Some of the most defiant and disruptive children have been silenced with magic. They become focused and cooperative after seeing a magic trick."* (Bowman, 2002, p.12).

❖ An eclectic and versatile tool. I have used magic to help teach, introduce, review and summarize every single subject. It helps me make things relevant and memorable.

❖ A tool to reinforce problem solving, and thinking skills. Many magical illusions are merely conundrums or puzzles. McCormack calls these lessons *"Imagineering"*. He begins with a magical demonstration (I often use an imaginary story) from there he proceeds to involve kids in hypothesizing and theoretical model building. (McCormack 1990 p.6).

❖ A tool to stimulate a child's mind and kick-start their imagination. *"[Students] tend to think and write more divergently and vividly as a result [of magic]."* (McCormack 1990 p.6).

❖ A spatial/visual skill builder. *"The skills of visual/spatial thinking, identified by psychologists as crucial to creativity, are stimulated by exposure to magic. Trying to figure out how the trick is done, almost always involves visualization of unseen items and movements."* (McCormack 1990 p.6).

❖ A means to hone my student's observation skills. *"Students begin to watch every move and every object touched by the magician-teacher, searching for clues and insights as to how illusions are accomplished. As a result, students become more skilled observers."* (McCormack 1990 p.7).

❖ To enhance perception. *"Students learn about principles of human perception and optical illusions from magic-oriented teachers. Thus, they learn more about their own observational strengths and weaknesses."* (McCormack 1990 p.6).

❖ A means to reach and teach the *multiple intelligences* and various *learning styles*, as well as help stimulate both *right and left brain hemisphere learning*.

❖ A therapeutic tool, helping a child with a speech or physical problem.

❖ A way to broaden my students' horizons. Introducing a child to the wonder of magic might give them a new hobby or even inspire a future occupation, that could bring hours of satisfaction and pleasure.

❖ An evaluation tool. *"...students find magic non-threatening, and will respond to it. The teacher can pick up many clues about observation skills,*

problem solving, emotional responses and verbal expression.” (Goodman & Furhman, 1981, p.102).

❖ As a way to be more “real” to my students. Magic helps me share my interests, hobbies and things I am passionate about. *“A teacher’s passion is infectious and easily engenders the student’s interest. When a teacher’s passion for his subject matter is genuine and committed, it shows itself and transforms students; they too become believers in its importance.”* (Anderson, 2002, p.45).

❖ As a way to improve myself. Incorporating a bit of hocus-pocus is even more advantageous than other typical teaching strategies, in that its effects spill over and transforms the instructor as well. It allows you to give yourself something too—confidence, pride, and joy. (Bowman, 2002). While you are building your students’ self-worth and self-esteem, gratification of doing so, fills your own cup as well. It is sort of like love, the more you give away, the more you get. Magic improves teacher performance and attitude. (2002).

❖ As a connection for cross-curricular activities. Magic is a wonderful vehicle for tying everything up into one cohesive unit, stimulating students’ interest to move on other activities. It is the “*gotcha-glue*” that holds my entire themed-lesson together

❖ As my “*spoonful of sugar*” that helps the educational medicine go down. Magic is my lollipop for learning; it truly makes the mundane go down, as sure as sugar helps the palatable ness of medicine. Magic serves as a catalyst, and a tool that bolsters interest, which in turn increases knowledge. It not only encourages students to learn, but it promotes a desire to continue. Consider the following scenario:

“Let us summarize what we have learned today with a bit of magic.”

“Merlin, do you have a trick for us?” “You do?”

“Yay!” exclaim the children coming to rapt attention.

Merlin reviews and reinforces the morning’s lessons via a magic trick. He really needs the children’s help along the way, and they eagerly provide the magic words (vocabulary with definitions) as well as the sequencing of the science concept.

I explain to the children that we have to stop there and will continue our butterfly science tomorrow.

“No, please review it now. Please. Can Merlin show us more?” Their voices are pleading, their eyes beseeching.

I smile and remind them that it is time for recess.

They groan (what a compliment that is!) and reluctantly get in line. A few linger, in hopes that I will call them back and say: “OK; Merlin will explain metamorphosis one more time.”

But I don’t. Leaving them wanting more is after all, real *edu-tainment!*

