



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Tiffani Adkison Fun and games have place in classroom, gifted teacher says

Tiffani Adkison,
third-grade
teacher at
Katherine
Stephens
Elementary

School in Garland, has discovered a teaching method that's as fun as it is productive. And the best part, Ms. Adkison says, is that she enjoys it as much as her students do.

"There's probably nothing on earth I can't turn into a game. Today's child needs more than a talking head at the front of a classroom to learn effectively. By making learning into a game, I get them into learning without drudgery, and they learn without even realizing it."

As a result of making learning fun, Ms. Adkison says half the battle of teaching is over. Students are motivated by competition or by personal achievement.

As an added benefit, Ms. Adkison says teaching through games "keeps my job interesting. It's really a self-defense move. And it fits my personality. I don't learn well from talking heads or just papers handed out, so why should my students?"

One example of Ms. Adkison's teaching-through-games strategy is the recent "Hot Seat Game."

"Just this morning, we were reviewing for a test on a novel. In the Hot Seat Game, two students get to sit in fancy chairs at the front of the room. As long as they can answer the review questions, they get to stay in the chair. Once they miss, another student takes their place. Meanwhile, everybody learns during the questions and answers, whether they realize it or not," Ms. Adkison says.

As effective as learning through fun is, Ms. Adkison doesn't rely on it alone. "It's necessary for parents and even community members to support what's happening in class. Kids are expected to learn a lot more than in the past – not that that's a bad thing – but the hours kids go to school haven't changed. So reviewing and reinforcing what's being done in school has to be

done at home, on the soccer field, at the grocery store. It shows kids there's a practical application for the things they're learning, and it makes learning come alive," she says.

Ms. Adkison shows her dedication to her students and their achievements in another important way. "I meet the kids on a personal level. When you build a personal relationship with the student where you really know that child, you create a safe environment. They know you care about them first as a person, then as a learner," she says.

How to build that relationship? Ms. Adkison has a ready answer. "To involve myself in their lives outside the classroom, I invite each one to bring me a schedule of their dance recitals or sports events. I make time to go to each student's activity. When you do that, you reach them on a new plane. They realize you mean what you say. All of a sudden, they're bending over backward to do well for you.

"That may sound manipulative, but it's not. It shows them I'm willing to go the extra mile, and as a result, so are they," she says.

Ms. Adkison earned her teaching degree in 1995 at Texas Woman's University. "I think the desire to become a teacher began at birth. Teaching is more a calling than it is a choice."

She says her elementary education influenced her as well. "My fifth-grade teacher made learning fun. I made that a goal for my own teaching," she says.

Ms. Adkison has been on the third-grade team at Stephens since she graduated from college. For seven of those twelve years, she's been team leader.

"We're blessed with a fabulous team. We're very close, and take a personal interest in each other's lives."

That personal touch may be important among the third-grade team members, but it's safe to say it's even more meaningful for Ms. Adkison's students. Stephens is fortunate to have such a dedicated, creative, enthusiastic educator on staff. Congratulations to Garland ISD's very deserving Teacher of the Month, Tiffani Adkison.



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