

# Attentiveness

Character... It starts with me!

MONTHLY EDUCATOR BULLETIN

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## Vs. Distraction

### I WILL:

- look at people when they speak to me
- ask questions when I do not understand
- sit or stand up straight
- not draw attention to myself
- keep my eyes, ears, hands, feet, and mouth from distractions

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## Concentrating on the person or task before me

Paying attention to people or tasks requires concentration and focus. It requires the use of all of our senses to focus and to consciously block distractions. Sometimes it helps to know why being attentive to someone or something is important. Relating

attentiveness to a goal rather than just for the sake of paying attention helps to stay motivated. At this time of year, many people set goals for the new year. What do you have to be attentive to in order to meet your

New Year's Resolutions?



**Atención vs. Distracción**  
Concentrar en la persona o la tarea antes de mí



↻↻ Go to the Root ↻↻

Attentiveness is derived from the Latin, *attentus* which means to be heedful or observant. It is a word form of attend and in this sense it is an active verb. Attentiveness is more than just not being distracted but actively seeking to understand what you are focusing on.

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*“People will accept your idea much more readily if you tell them Benjamin Franklin said it first.” -David H. Comins*

## Character Quotables

When Mark Twain went out to the pasture to teach a mule the difference between "gee" and "haw" (that is, left and right), he began by giving the mule a friendly but solid whack on the rump with a two-by-four. When asked why he did this, he said, "The first thing you have to do to teach a mule anything is to get his attention."

-Unknown

"There are many benefits to this process of listening. The first is that good listeners are created as people feel listened to. Listening is a reciprocal process - we become more attentive to others if they have attended to us."

-Margaret J. Wheatley

"Those who are silent, self-effacing and attentive become the recipients of confidences."

-Thornton Wilder

"The true art of memory is the art of attention."

-Samuel Johnson

"The highest ecstasy is the attention at its fullest."

-Simon Weil

"Genius is nothing but continued attention."

-Claude Adrien Helvetius

"Order is never observed; it is disorder that attracts attention because it is awkward and intrusive."

-Eliphas Levi

"I envy paranoids; they actually feel people are paying attention to them."

-Susan Sontag

"The success of a production depends on the attention paid to detail."

-David O. Selznick

"You learn to love by loving, by paying attention and doing what one thereby discovers has to be done."

-Aldous Leonard Huxley

"In the successful organization, no detail is too small to escape close attention."

-Lou Holz

"Give whatever you are doing and whoever you are with the gift of your attention."

-Jim Rohn

"Success in life is founded upon attention to the small things rather than to the large things; to the every day things nearest to us rather than to the things that are remote and uncommon."

-Booker T. Washington

"No matter what you've done for yourself or for humanity, if you can't look back on having given love and attention to your own family, what have you really accomplished?"

-Lee Iacocca

"The moment one gives close attention to any thing, even a blade of grass it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself."

-Henry Miller

"The ego is nothing other than the focus of conscious attention."

-Alan Watts

"An expert is someone who has succeeded in making decisions and judgments simpler through knowing what to pay attention to and what to ignore."

-Edward de Bono

"Pay attention to your enemies, for they are the first to discover your mistakes."

-Antisthenes

## Curriculum Connection Science

A microscope is an excellent tool to teach the art of focusing. A microscope is almost never focused on the subject when you first look through it. You need to adjust the knobs to bring the item into focus. The same is true in the classroom. It isn't enough to be present in the classroom in order to be attentive. Staying focused on a lesson requires actively adjusting yourself to stay focused on your spelling words rather than what is going on outside the window. Have your students experiment with a microscope and see how small an area on which it can focus. Next give them a written seat assignment from one of your lessons. Have them pretend to be a microscope and focus on just that assignment.



# Sherlock Holmes, Hero of Attentiveness

Sherlock Holmes was a fictional crime detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. His powers of observation were the key to solving crimes. By paying attention to detail, he was able to draw conclusions that became vital clues to solving criminal mysteries.

The character of Holmes is likely based on Joseph Bell, a medical lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Bell emphasized the observation of detail

before making a diagnosis and was a pioneer of forensic science. Conan Doyle worked for Bell as a clerk at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Sherlock Holmes admonished Dr. Watson with the classic quote: "You have seen but not observed." He recognized observation as a primary investigative skill. Today you can see the powers of observation in the following recent TV shows: *House*, *Psych*, *The Mentalist*, *Monk*, and of

course the Jedi Knights in the *Star Wars* saga. Sherlock Holmes and these TV fictional characters use attentiveness to observe what others overlooked.



Boost your own powers of observation: [www.calculatorslive.com/Observation-Skills-Test.aspx](http://www.calculatorslive.com/Observation-Skills-Test.aspx)  
[www.mychessblog.com/one-simple-mental-exercise-to-improve-your-mind-power/](http://www.mychessblog.com/one-simple-mental-exercise-to-improve-your-mind-power/)



## Team~Building Activity

Building a culture of good character requires building the class into a community. Here is this month's teambuilding activity:

**Snowballs** Have each student write a fact about themselves on a white sheet of paper. Make sure that they know that the fact will be shared and used to identify them. Do not put a name on the paper. (Younger students can draw a picture of something that they like.) Once they are done, have them crunch up the paper into a "snowball". Choose an appropriate snowball activity. They can throw them at a target, toss them back and forth like an egg toss, stack them into a snow mountain or any other snow game that mixes up the snowballs. When they are done with the game, have each student grab a snowball, open it up and share it with the class. They need to see if they can guess who it is.



### Hugs and Bubbles

Want to get your students attention? Try Hugs and Bubbles. Teach your students that whenever they hear Hugs and Bubbles, they are to give themselves a big hug and puff out their cheeks with air as if they have bubbles in their mouth. If they are making bubbles, they can't talk and if they are hugging themselves they are keeping their hands to themselves.

## Tips and Tricks to Keep on your Toes!

### Eating and Attentiveness

Studies have shown the importance of eating breakfast on academic success but did you know that what you eat makes a difference? Protein and whole grains are the best choices for a breakfast that helps attentiveness. For more information visit:

[www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/806.html](http://www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/806.html)

### The Power of Language in Regulating Attention

When young children are learning something new they often think out loud to help them learn a task. As they mature, this private speech does not always get internalized. One way to help children stay focused is to teach them how to (think) talk to themselves to stay focused. Jane M. Healy, Ph.D., a teacher and educational psychologist, tells this story:

I remember one impulsive eight-year-old who could not remember to bring both book and pencil to the reading table. Every day the teacher said to her, "Tell me what you will need. Now ask yourself, 'Do I have my pencil? My book?'" She thought this was a wonderful game, and soon we only had to say, "Have you asked yourself the question?" Eventually, Daneesha was able to do it herself. Now a sophisticated preteen, she sidled up to me in the hall not long ago with a big grin on her face. "You know," she said, "I still ask myself the question."

For more information on this topic visit: [www.parentsleague.org/publications/selected\\_articles/helping\\_children\\_learn\\_to\\_pay\\_attention/index.aspx](http://www.parentsleague.org/publications/selected_articles/helping_children_learn_to_pay_attention/index.aspx)

or

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private\\_speech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_speech)

### Sign Language

Check out the following website for the American Sign Language interpretation of the word Attention and Distract for visual ways to describe attentiveness and distraction:

[www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi](http://www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi)



## Scramble your Senses

Mr. (or Mrs.) Potato Head has removable parts that are related to all 5 senses. Use a Mr. Potato Head to set up some games to focus on each of the senses. They can be activities that deprive a sense (remove his eyes if you are using blindfolds) or focus on a sense (only insert the sense you are using).. Some examples:

- blindfolded students must fold paper according to vocal instructions
- go outside and have students listen and identify what they hear
- make a recording of various sounds and have the students guess what they are
- hide items in paper lunch bags or cloth bags and let students feel the bag to guess what's inside
- create some vials of smelly foods and see if they can identify what they are
- make some simple candy that has a flavor that doesn't match the color (i.e. the cherry flavor is yellow and the grape flavor is orange) and have the students try to identify the flavor. Find out if they are paying attention to the color or the taste.

Once you have completed several of the activities, relate attentiveness to training your senses to stay focused on what is important.

### Too Much of a good thing...

Start this activity by having the students make a list of things that can happen when someone is not attentive such as missing an assignment or distracting another student. Once that list is complete, start a discussion on too much attentiveness. Is it possible to be too focused? Of course! Think about being so involved in an activity that you do not smell smoke or notice that a child needs attention. Have the students add to the list times when someone may have been so focused on something that they forgot something else.

## Telephone

This age old game can be used to teach attentiveness. Divide the class into two teams. The same phrase is given to the first student on each team. Have each team race to see how fast the phrase can be whispered from student to student. See how different the ending phrase is from the beginning phrase. Play a second time, but this time add the rule that the team who gets the correct phrase to the end is the winner. Identify that the second time, there was additional attention on accuracy as well as speed.



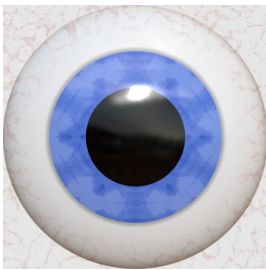
## Wake Up!

Part of staying focused is learning to recognize when you have lost your focus and bring yourself back. Frank Logan, at The University of New Mexico, in a document titled “College Learning: Whys and Hows” discussed attention in college students in an effort to help them with their studies. He proposes that selective attention is a learnable response. Help students identify what they are doing when they recognize that their attention has wandered. Are they looking out the window or fidgeting with a pencil. If it is their hands getting them into trouble, perhaps sitting with their hands folded will help them to stay attentive.

For more information on Logan’s discussion on attention visit:  
[www.unm.edu/~quadl/college\\_learning/attention.html](http://www.unm.edu/~quadl/college_learning/attention.html)

### Memory Game

We’ve all played the memory game with a deck of cards. Several pairs of cards are shuffled together and then laid out upside down in a grid. The students take turns turning over 2 cards to find the matches. They need to pay attention when the other students are playing so that they know where the cards are laying. You can play this game with vocabulary from any other class matching words or matching words to definitions or synonyms or antonyms. You can match math problems to the answer. Whatever you choose to match, be sure to discuss the value of attentiveness to being successful in this game.



### The Focus Game

Start this game by asking the students if they are breathing. Immediately they will think about their breathing. Some may even look at their chest or focus on the air going in and out of their mouth. Point out that they had been breathing all day without thinking about it but when it was mentioned, it got their attention. Now have them look for things that are circles in the classroom. Let the students point them out for everyone to observe. Ask them if they had noticed that there were that many circles in the room. Explain how you find what you focus on. Next look for rectangles. The same can be done with colors. For the rest of the day, challenge students to be more focused on a shape or a color as they go through their day. Remind them before they leave for the day to look for the shape or color on the way home, at home or at practice. Have them report back the next day how many things they noticed. Did they notice circles even when they weren’t really looking for them? Relate this exercise to selective attention.

## Directions Test

The following test is another old activity but can be effective if the students haven't seen it yet. Give this test to the students and see how many of them read all of the instructions first. When the test is done, discuss the importance of following directions.

1. Read everything before doing anything, then work as quickly as possible.
2. Put your name in the upper right hand corner of the paper.
3. Draw a box around your name.
4. Circle this instruction.
5. Pat the top of your head twice.
6. Draw four smiley faces at the bottom of the paper.
7. Clap three times.
8. If you are left handed, put an X in the lower left hand corner of this paper.
9. If you are right handed put an X in the lower right hand corner of this paper.
10. Draw a circle around the X.
11. If you are the first person to get this far on the test, call out "I am the first person to get to number 11!"
12. Now that you have finished reading carefully, do only sentence number 2 then sit quietly and say nothing to anyone else.

## Tongue Twisters

Tongue Twisters can help teach attentiveness. Find some age appropriate tongue twisters. Have the students pair up and practice saying the tongue twisters that you give to them verbally. See how fast they can say them. Now pass out sheets with tongue twisters printed out and see if having the words to focus on helps in either their speed or accuracy. Discuss how attentive they needed to be to the differences in the words in order to say the tongue twisters without messing up.

*Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.  
Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers?  
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper  
picked?*

*Betty Botter bought some butter,  
"But," she said, "this butter's bitter.  
If I bake this bitter butter,  
It will make my batter bitter.  
But a bit of better batter -  
That would make my batter better."  
So she bought a bit of butter,  
Better than her bitter butter,  
And she baked it in her batter,  
And the batter was not bitter.  
So 'twas better Betty Botter  
Bought a bit of better butter.*

*She sells seashells on the  
seashore.  
The shells she sells are  
seashells, I'm sure.*

**A tutor who tooted the flute  
Tried to tutor two tooters to  
toot.  
Said the two to the tutor:  
"Is it harder to toot or  
To tutor two tooters to toot?"**

# Robin's Reading List

## Teacher Resource:

### Attention Games: 101 Fun, Easy Games That Help Kids Learn To Focus

by Barbara Sher

### Grades Pre – 3:

Dawdle Duckling by Toni Buzzeo and Margaret Spengler

Dawdle Duckling won't follow dutifully behind Mama Duck like his three siblings do. He's too busy preening and playing, splashing and spinning, dunking and dipping...and always, always dreaming. But he's in for a surprise... there's a crocodile waiting for a duckling lunch to swim by. When Mama quacks a warning, suddenly Dawdle Duckling isn't such a dawdler after all.

Fox and His Friends by Edward Marshall

This is an easy-to-read story where Mom, once again, wants Fox to look after Louise, but Fox wants to have fun with his friends... not take care of his little sister!!!!

Officer Buckle and Gloria by Peggy Rathman

The children at Napville School always ignore Officer Buckle's safety tips, until a police dog named Gloria accompanies him

when he gives his safety speeches. How will Gloria liven up the speeches?

Madeline's Rescue by Ludwig Beleman

One day on a walk through Paris, Madeline slips and falls off a bridge right into the Seine. Everyone feared she would be dead, "But for a dog/that kept its head," saving her from a "watery grave." What choice do Madeline and the girls have but to take the heroic pooch home, feed her biscuits, milk, and beef, and name her Genevieve? Sadly, when Lord Cucuface gets wind of the new dog, he decrees that no dogs will be allowed in the "old house in Paris that was covered with vines," and kicks Genevieve out on the street. Madeline vows vengeance and the girls scour Paris looking for the pup.

Hi by Ann Herbert Scott

Sometimes children are literally overlooked, and hurt feelings result. Such is the case with Margarita, the heroine of this picture book.

On a trip to the post office with her mother, Margarita becomes increasingly frustrated when her repeated greeting is ignored—by girls "too busy talking with each other," by a harried mother "too busy taking care of her baby," etc. Finally the postal clerk makes Margarita's day

with a hearty "hi" of her own.

### Grades 3 – 7:

For Your Eyes Only by Joanne Rocklin

When Mr. Moffat gets everyone in class to start keeping journals, Lucy pours her heart out to him in entries with the warning: For YOUR eyes only! Through the journal, Mr. Moffat becomes Lucy's confidant and inspiration. Lucy begins writing poetry and becomes more attentive to the world around her, and her feelings about her divorced parents, her best friend, and a boy named Andy.

The Cat Ate My Gym Suit by Paula Danziger

Marcy Lewis is bored by school and life in general, until Ms. Finney comes along. Although Ms. Finney is accessible and human, her controversial teaching methods cause her a suspension. With a new sense of self, Marcy embarks in a protest that provokes her suspension, too.

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Mary, a frightened orphan, discovers the joyful wonders of life on the Yorkshire Moors with the help of two local boys and a mysterious, abandoned garden...where all things seem possible.

Misty of Chincoteague by Marguerite Henry

On an island off the coasts of Virginia and Maryland lives a centuries-old band of wild ponies. Among them is the most mysterious of all, Phantom, a rarely seen mare that eludes all efforts to

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# Robin's Reading List

capture her—that is, until a young boy and girl lay eyes on her and determine that they can't live without her. The wild roundup that follows on the next "Pony Penning Day" does indeed bring Phantom into their lives, in a way they never would have suspected. Phantom would forever be a creature of the wild, but her gentle, loyal colt, Misty, is another story altogether.

## Grades 4-9:

**Buttermilk Hill** by Ruth White

Until Piper Berry is ten years old, life is simple and stable in her hometown of Buttermilk Hill, North Carolina. She lives with her mom and dad, spends time listening to her grandmother's stories, and has fun with her best friend's aunt, who is also her age. But then her parents divorce. Her mother goes back to college and her father remarries. Suddenly, Piper has to deal with a whole new set of circumstances, such as trying to fit in with her step family, and spending less time with her mother who is busy with classes and new boyfriends. Faced with these challenges Piper learns to express herself through poetry, and discovers that her newfound talent can open the door to her dreams.

## Grades 5- 8:

**Koya Delaney and the Good Girl Blues** by Eloise Greenfield

Koya has a knack for hiding her true feelings with her infectious laugh that leaves everyone happy, except herself. Koya is upset by an argument that her sister Loritha and her friend Dawn had right before a jump rope contest. Not sure what to do about the situation, she remains angry with the both of them, and confused the situation. Her cousin Del, a rock star, comes to visit, and now her attention must be focused on him instead of Loritha and Dawn.

**Crackback** by John Coy

John Coy presents the high stakes world of high school football, where doing what it takes to win doesn't always mean doing the right thing, and a young man discovers that the hits he takes on the field don't compare to the ones he faces in life. This look into the world of high school boys and athletes, and their struggle to be the best, is honest...teens struggling with adults who demand, but don't always deserve respect.

## Grades 9-12:

**Bad** by Jean Ferris

Sixteen year old Dallas loves the rush, the excitement of "skating." She and her friends decide to rob a convenience

store, and she gets caught. Since it is her first offense, the judge says she can go home on probation, but her father says that he can't control her. Dallas gets six months in the Girls' Rehabilitation Center. Once there, she meets an assortment of "bad" girls, many of whom don't expect to change. Those who do, often time don't make it. How Dallas comes to terms with herself, both the bad and the good, makes for a heartfelt and insightful novel about troubled teenagers and the odds they face in trying to turn their lives around.

**Home of the Braves** by David Klass

Joe Brickman, captain of the soccer and wrestling teams, is trying to find the courage to ask Kristine, his best friend since childhood, out on a date. Antonio is a Brazilian Soccer star who arrives as a transfer student, is totally self-assured, and able to defend himself one-on-one, and scoffs at the system. Joe tries to explain how things work, but the newcomer is rude and condescending. Joe's nerdy buddy, "Mouse" is marked by the jocks and refuses to play the game. When violence erupts, the administration responds with a zero-tolerance policy. Intervention comes in the form of bars on the windows, metal detectors, police in the halls, etc. There are many strands in this multilayered story. The characters are believable teens searching for answers to complex societal and individual issues.

# Croskey's Corner

Did you have the opportunity (or burden?) to travel by plane during this holiday season? What a transportation system! I read that more than 24 million holiday travelers will have flown by the time New Years is over. For me, part of the wonder of flying is that all those people get on the planes, go where they want to, get off the planes, and then repeat the whole process in reverse. And, delays and other obstacles notwithstanding, most people get where they need to go with only a few difficulties. No, this piece is not going to be about full body scans. But flying, with the weather delays and flight cancellations, and baggage foul-ups, is still a fairly efficient process. In particular, I am amazed by the job air traffic controllers do. Whether the airport has just a couple runways or 10, the controller's job is to know what blips on a radar screen to pay attention to, in what order, and to make sure that the "blips" which aren't immediately allowed to land are not left up there to run out of fuel and drop in unannounced, so to speak.

One of my favorite metaphors for students in school is to think of them as airports. They are at the center of a whole lot of activity, just like an airport which has planes, ground traffic, and communication messages coming and going all day. If the student is the airport, then his or her brain is the control tower. The key to the airport functioning successfully is whether the air traffic controller "pays attention" to the important incoming information such as weather reports, to communication from planes in the air, and to the demands of planes which need to take off. We know that if the air traffic controller ignores the planes that require immediate attention, and focuses on a plane hundreds of miles away, or if the controller gives priority to a small plane with plenty of fuel which could land on a shorter runway, rather than allowing a jet with hundreds of passengers which has been circling in a holding pattern for an hour to land, chaos will reign at the airport.

Each student has a kind of air traffic controller in his or her head. That area functions in this way: it manages what the brain will attend to, what it will ignore, how long it will sustain its focus, and how it will ignore trivial stimuli and respond to information of major importance. It tells the brain when to start functioning. ("Alert: The teacher is about to explain the assignment! Pay attention!") It tells the brain when to ignore distractions. ("Mike is trying to get you off task. Pay no attention to him.") It tells you when to stop doing one thing and start doing a different thing. ("Attention: Put this science work away and you will finish it for homework. It's time to switch to math.") It also tells the brain to stick with a task and finish the job. ("You have 2 more problems to do. Finish them while you are still fresh in your understanding of the process. Then you can go outside.") We call this process of initiating tasks, ignoring distractions, sticking with the job, and bringing it to a finish Executive Functioning. It is commonly accepted that students with strong Executive Functioning skills are successful in school. In fact., if you ask a teacher to name her smartest student, she will ignore IQ scores and will tell you that it is the one with the strongest Executive Functioning skills.

The Character Quality of the Month for January of this new year is Attentiveness. It is defined as "Concentrating on the person or task before me." Attentiveness is a wonderful Character Quality to focus on for a brand new year. I would like you to think particularly about how you can help students to improve their attentiveness through building stronger Executive Functioning. Truly, some student seem born with these skills, but all students can learn them and can improve their skills and, in turn, their attentiveness.

First, teachers need to recognize that, in a world of multi-MULTI-media, schools are in competition with many slickly produced, more enticing stimuli. Movies; TV shows; popular music; game systems; and computers and phones! So, we would do well to train students in the discipline of employing Executive Functioning. It involves engaging the student, convincing him or her to invest cognition (brain power) in a topic, and demonstrating to the student the value that comes from exercising this discipline. Those without the natural Executive Functioning skills will need training, which should involve cues to start, reminders to focus, rewards for staying on task, and help in self-monitoring so that students know how well they are progressing and experience satisfaction when they complete a job.

Second, students need to be familiar with the vocabulary to discuss these processes. Initiate, focus, sustain, ignore, and monitor are words that help them to be able to be more objective in their analysis of their skills. Working memory is a process of holding information in one's head briefly, making use of it, and then allowing it to pass on without caring about storing it in long-term memory areas. This process is key to developing successful Executive Functioning. So, teach kids about Working Memory.

Bill Croskey is a retired school psychologist from the Loveland City Schools

Kids "get" the airport and air traffic control metaphor, so use it with them. Or invent your own metaphor that captures this process. Then teach it to parents and kids so that each can monitor students' progress. The kids will be glad you did. Their air controller can be first rate and can make sure planes take off and land with superior efficiency. Happy flying in the New year!



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**Character...It Starts With Me!**

## Character in the Classroom *Continuously*

There are many ways that you can teach the Character Quality of Month. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Ask students to make posters to hang in the classroom or around the school.
- Challenge students to find quotes, news stories, current (or classic) songs or movies that portray the character quality of the month. Be sure to share these with the class and “archive” these to use in future years.
- Add the character trait of the month to the spelling word list. (Even if it is posted in the classroom to copy!)
- Offer for students to make a video or write a rap that demonstrates the Character Quality of the Month.
- If you teach younger students, see if you can “borrow” some older students to lead your students in an activity or switch the roles and have the younger students “teach” a rhyme to the older students.
- If you teach older students, you can be the initiator in the previous activities.
- Invite local business leaders or small business owners to talk about the importance of a character trait. If you teach older students, aim to get a representative from a business that typically hires teens so that they can relate the importance of good character when applying for and *keeping* a job.
- Men and women in uniform usually make impressive guest speakers. Police departments, fire departments and military recruiting offices are usually willing to come into a classroom. Do not be afraid to give them specific requests or guidelines for speaking so that it is pertinent to the lessons of the month.
- Always have a generic character activity planned and ready to go that you can use as filler when you have time to kill or that a substitute teacher can use in your absence.