

ways to motivate kids

By Caralee Adams

So often you tell us that motivation is the key to everything you do in the classroom. You want to motivate kids to read, write, and solve problems. You want to inspire them to take pride in a fluently-read paragraph or a simple act of kindness. You hope that your encouragement will help students to find their passions so they can become lifelong learners. It's an important job, and a big one. That's why we surveyed veteran teachers and experts for their tips on reaching kids. Everything's here, from advice on helping children to eat healthier to getting them to pick up a book. We hope this special back-to-school guide will serve as a resource throughout the year, as you turn a new group of kids onto learning. >>

6 INSPIRING GROUND RULES

1 Here's a secret: You are your own most powerful motivational tool. Get to know each child as an individual. Let them know you. Building a cheerful community will set the stage for effective learning.

2 Run the classroom as a lead manager, not a boss. Focus on explaining what is expected, and how to meet those expectations, rather than threatening or punishing kids who don't comply.

3 Plan assignments that encourage critical thinking. For instance, when studying the Revolution, have students role play journalists writing about the Boston Tea

Party. Kids are motivated by lessons built upon big ideas and by hands-on activities.

4 Focus on motivation to achieve, not motivation to avoid failure. Set realistic goals in small steps so students can experience success. To build confidence, praise progress and effort.

5 To motivate struggling students, get to know their individual strengths and weaknesses. You may need to make instructional and curricular adjustments more than motivational adjustments. Be ready to reduce the curriculum and accept reasonable effort— not just 100% effort all the time.

6 Rather than material rewards, talk about quality of life rewards from learning. That's what's important and what we can lose sight of.

—JERE BROPHY, AUTHOR OF *MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO LEARN*

3 Teachers' Favorite Motivation Mottos

- 1** Attitudes are contagious. Is yours worth catching?
- 2** When things go wrong, you don't have to go with them.
- 3** It is better to fail trying than it is to fail to try.

5 WAYS TO TEACH HEALTHY EATING

1 Have kids look at their lunches and group the items into the food pyramid. They'll see where they fall short and can make goals for the day, week, or year.

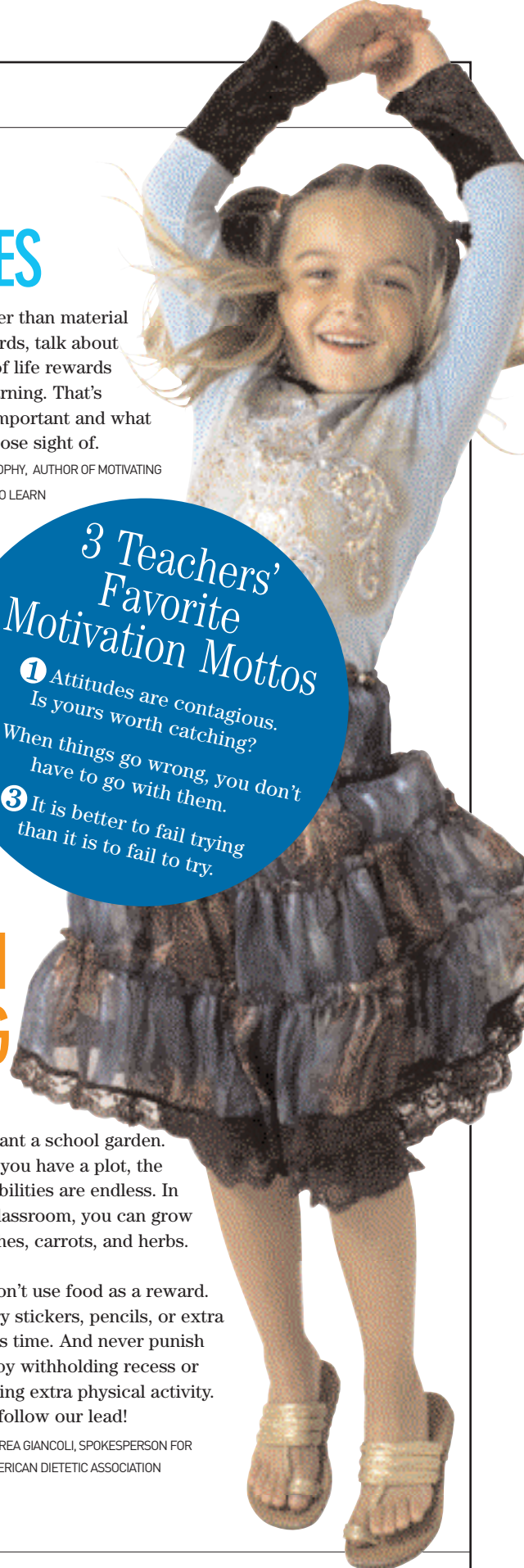
2 Stay away from talking about foods as "good" or "bad." Try calling desserts "once-in-a-while foods," and apples and carrots "all-the-time foods."

3 Try taste tests in class: Compare skim, whole, and two percent milk and see if you can tell the difference.

4 Plant a school garden. If you have a plot, the possibilities are endless. In the classroom, you can grow radishes, carrots, and herbs.

5 Don't use food as a reward. Try stickers, pencils, or extra recess time. And never punish kids by withholding recess or requiring extra physical activity. Kids follow our lead!

—ANDREA GIANCOLI, SPOKESPERSON FOR THE AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION



5 MOTIVATION SECRETS FROM TEACHERS

1 Give students the chance to contribute to your school. At my previous school, we developed a program where our 5th and 6th grades volunteered at 14 different school jobs. Office assistants sorted mail and answered the phones, the activity crew set up the sound system, and tour guides greeted visitors. Kids felt a part of the school and had a sense of purpose. Over two years, attendance improved and discipline referrals dropped. —DR. PAM NEWELL BRADLEY, MUSKOGEE 7TH AND 8TH CENTER, MUSKOGEE, OKLAHOMA

2 Connect learning to real life. Our students do a major “budget project” in which they research a career,

buy a house and a car, and pay bills. The kids do stellar work and see math in the English classroom, and the value of English skills in math. We do similar activities in social studies and science.

—MICHELLE DAVIS, LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS, IMPERIAL MIDDLE SCHOOL, LAHABRA, CALIFORNIA

3 We held a student skating party after the state assessments. Students who were “caught” using their “super test skills”—highlighting, underlining, and rereading—received special recognition. The next time, we noticed an increase in the use of these important strategies. —TERI FULTON, NEW CHELSEA ELEMENTARY, KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

4 Hold a poetry slam! When kids are given opportunities to perform and share in a public forum, they rise to the challenge. They put out their best effort to express themselves, and it takes the learning to a much deeper place. —SARAH FITZPATRICK, MERCER MIDDLE SCHOOL, SEATTLE WASHINGTON

5 I motivate my students with Fun Money. They earn class currency when they are working well, showing responsibility, being caring of their classmates, volunteering to read, etc. Each Friday, we trade in the Fun Money for real treats. —MIMI BLACKWELDER, DESTINY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, SEAFORD, DELAWARE

4 TIPS FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

1 Set up a learning environment that gives students with special needs an opportunity to succeed—and to bring home good grades. Differentiate: Make learning goals appropriate (and As and Bs achievable) for all students.

2 Shorten the length of assignments when possible. If completion seems achievable, students will be much more motivated to keep trying.

3 Spend more time explaining assignments. Often, students with special needs may appear “unmotivated” but are actually unclear what to do or how to get it done. Walk through the assignments step-by-step.

4 Give special needs students the opportunity to work in groups and to take leadership roles. Participation fosters friendship, self-esteem, and motivation to succeed.

—DR. GEORGE GIULIANI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS



5 TIPS FOR HELPING KIDS REACH OUT

1 As a class, try to identify community needs by brainstorming together about issues, conducting a survey to ask what kids' greatest concerns are, giving them a list to rank, or reading the local newspaper to find stories that point to community problems.

2 Check with your local Volunteer Center to find age appropriate and youth-friendly volunteer opportunities in your community by calling 1-800-VOLUNTEER or visiting www.1800volunteer.org.

3 Consider common avenues for getting youth involved:


- Working with other youth
- Running drives
- Working with the environment
- Working with seniors
- Working with hunger and homelessness.

4 Check out Kids Care Clubs, a program of the Points of Light Foundation, designed to develop compassion and the spirit of service in elementary- and middle-school-aged youth. Go to www.kidscare.org for information on new service projects each month centered on issues such as literacy, hunger,

poverty and the elderly. You'll find instructions, meeting activities, resources related and possible partners.

5 Tie the service into the seasons. The Seasons of Service (www.pointsoflight.org/programs/seasons) include national opportunities for students to volunteer for service projects and activities throughout the year, including Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, National Youth Service Day, National Volunteer Week, and Join Hands Day. In addition to the traditional holiday season, students can practice good deeds on Valentine's Day, Earth Day, Veteran's Day, and during Random Act of Kindness Week.

—KATHY SAULITIS, DIRECTOR,
POINTS OF LIGHT FOUNDATION



When kids know that you believe in their potential, it's a potent motivator."
—George Giuliani

3 IDEAS TO HOOK THEM ON BOOKS

1 Children like to read what they are familiar with. So expose kids to a little bit about a lot of books. Every day, share one fiction book, one non-fiction, and one that is something else, such as poetry. Hold it up and talk about it. Then put the books in your library and watch the kids snatch them up. You'll introduce them to 15 books a week.

2 Start a "Beloved Books Library." Ask for donations of gently used books from a non-profit or church. Create a library of about 200 books that can be used as gifts for students. On special occasions, give one to each student. Personalize it with a name plate. It communicates that books and reading are highly valued.

3 Follow up silent reading with a "quick share." Have kids turn to a partner and tell something interesting, exciting, or puzzling about what they just read. They'll be more motivated to pick up the book again. —LINDA GAMBRELL, PRESIDENT-ELECT OF IRA



5 HEART-THUMPING ENERGY BOOSTERS

1 Get into the groove with an active lifestyle by enrolling students and teachers in the President's Challenge, sponsored by the President's Council on Physical Fitness. You can win awards for daily physical activity. Go to www.fitness.gov for details.

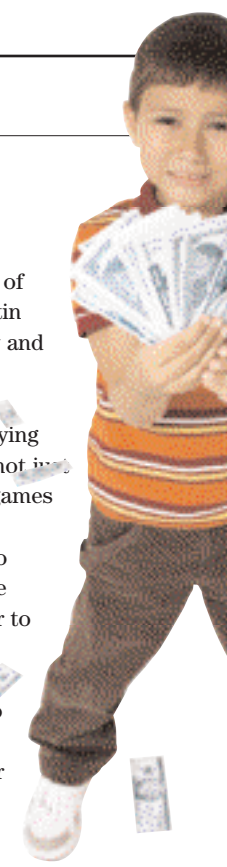
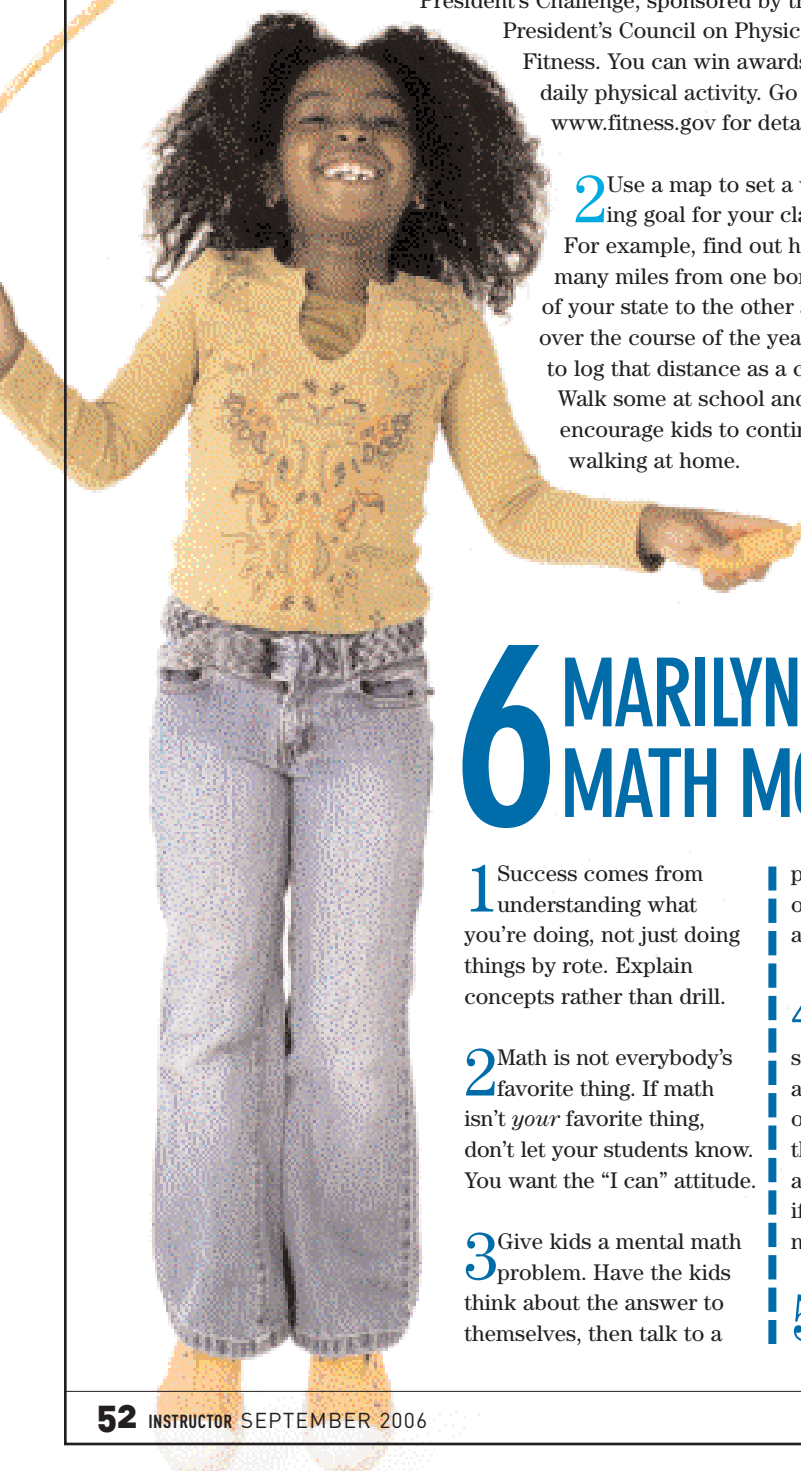
2 Use a map to set a walking goal for your class. For example, find out how many miles from one border of your state to the other and over the course of the year try to log that distance as a class. Walk some at school and encourage kids to continue walking at home.

3 Try teaching different types of dance in school, such as Latin jazz and rumba, to make it funky and cool for children to get moving.

4 Make sure kids are actually playing and being active at recess and not just sitting around chatting. Encourage games and movement. Appoint a child for the day to be the "fitness hero" to come up with fun movements on the playground. "Something that is peer to peer is most successful."

5 Bring in a high-profile person to motivate kids to be physically active. Check out the C.H.E.E.R. for Character Program, where the Harlem Globe Trotters do school assemblies in the 200 cities where they play games each winter.

—MELISSA JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS AND SPORTS



False praise doesn't work. We need to give kids opportunities for authentic success.
—Dave Montague

6 MARILYN BURNS' MATH MOTIVATORS

1 Success comes from understanding what you're doing, not just doing things by rote. Explain concepts rather than drill.

2 Math is not everybody's favorite thing. If math isn't *your* favorite thing, don't let your students know. You want the "I can" attitude.

3 Give kids a mental math problem. Have the kids think about the answer to themselves, then talk to a

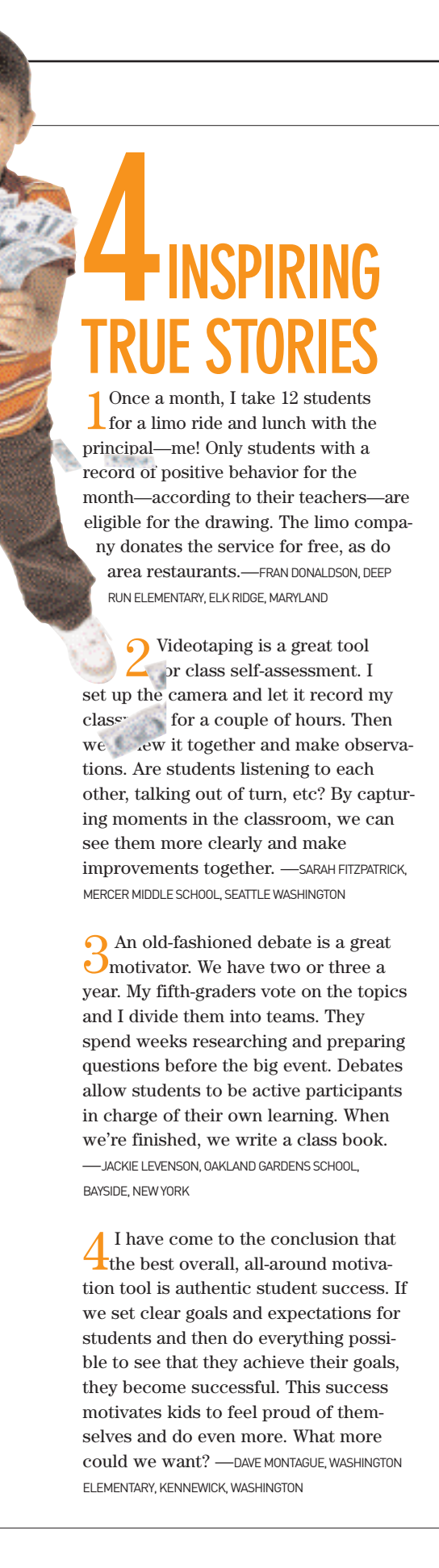
partner about it. It gives all of the students the chance to air their thoughts.

4 Pose problems that lend themselves to different strategies. After they've had a chance to think on their own, see how many ways there were for finding the answer. For example, ask if kids can think of three numbers that add up to 100.

5 Use children's books to motivate students to

think mathematically. Students love being read to and books provide rich sources for learning math. Use references to numbers to encourage them to make predictions or solve problems based on the story.

6 Play math games, especially when the games involve some kind of strategic thinking. —MARILYN BURNS, FOUNDER OF MATH SOLUTIONS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (WWW.MATHSOLUTIONS.COM)



4 INSPIRING TRUE STORIES

1 Once a month, I take 12 students for a limo ride and lunch with the principal—me! Only students with a record of positive behavior for the month—according to their teachers—are eligible for the drawing. The limo company donates the service for free, as do area restaurants. —FRAN DONALDSON, DEEP RUN ELEMENTARY, ELK RIDGE, MARYLAND

2 Videotaping is a great tool for class self-assessment. I set up the camera and let it record my classroom for a couple of hours. Then we review it together and make observations. Are students listening to each other, talking out of turn, etc? By capturing moments in the classroom, we can see them more clearly and make improvements together. —SARAH FITZPATRICK, MERCER MIDDLE SCHOOL, SEATTLE WASHINGTON

3 An old-fashioned debate is a great motivator. We have two or three a year. My fifth-graders vote on the topics and I divide them into teams. They spend weeks researching and preparing questions before the big event. Debates allow students to be active participants in charge of their own learning. When we're finished, we write a class book. —JACKIE LEVENSON, OAKLAND GARDENS SCHOOL, BAYSIDE, NEW YORK

4 I have come to the conclusion that the best overall, all-around motivation tool is authentic student success. If we set clear goals and expectations for students and then do everything possible to see that they achieve their goals, they become successful. This success motivates kids to feel proud of themselves and do even more. What more could we want? —DAVE MONTAGUE, WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY, KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

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