



# The **BLAME** GAME

“If we can blame teachers for all that is wrong with schools today, then no one has to take a hard look at what is really going on, right?” says teacher blogger Mrs. Mimi

I don't know when teachers became the enemy. Yet, it seems that lately, blaming teachers for all that is wrong with the American school system is very en vogue. When test scores are down? Blame the teachers. When the latest silver-bullet solution fails? Blame the teachers. When graduation rates fall to an all-time low? Blame the teachers.

The situation has gotten so out of hand that I would not be shocked to see a news segment on why teachers are behind high gas prices. While we're at it, let's add rush-hour traffic and overcrowded animal shelters to the list.

Welcome to the blame game, my friends. We're being brutalized, and all too often we're not even given the courtesy to respond. I'm not sure whether to cry or to call Pat Sajak and inform him that America's favorite game show is now *Blame Teachers for Everything*.

## Why Us?

Perhaps it's easy to blame teachers because everyone went to school at some point in their life. Let me just say this. Friends, I have been to the doctor many times, but I wouldn't dream of rolling up my sleeves for a little minor



# WHAT TO SAY WHEN THE FINGER IS POINTED AT YOU A QUIZ

## 1. Someone says, "It must be nice to be done for the day at 3:00." Do you:

- Ⓐ Grit your teeth and smile.
- Ⓑ Wind up and give them a good smack with your 20 lb teacher bag that is full of work to do at home.
- Ⓒ Smile and politely inform the individual that while teachers may dismiss their students at 3:00, their day is far from over.

## 2. An individual remarks, "What other job has so much vacation time? Must be nice to have summers off ..." Do you:

- Ⓐ Run screaming out of the room.
- Ⓑ Laugh like you have just heard the funniest joke ever told.
- Ⓒ Let this person in on all the preparation you do over the summer and throw in a reference to your summer job.

## 3. You overhear someone say, "Those who can't do, teach." Do you:

- Ⓐ Step away from any sort of blunt object, just to be sure that you aren't tempted to wield it in a fit of rage.
- Ⓑ Inform this person just how much teachers actually need to do.
- Ⓒ Suggest that perhaps the saying should go, "Those who can't teach do something else."

Answer mostly As? Chin up, buttercup! Mostly Bs? Hang in there! Mostly Cs? We want to be you.



surgery, much less advise said doctor on how the procedure should be done.

While it's clear that the work of teachers is undervalued and misunderstood, certainly this reality alone can't tell us why it's so easy to blame teachers.

Perhaps it's easy to blame teachers because of the ways we're portrayed in the media. Teachers too often play one of two roles. The first is that of the Sing-Along Simpleton. We take attendance, read stories, line up the class for lunch and then it's time to go home, right? On a tough day, there might be some coloring. When not playing the part of the Simpleton, we're cast as the Superhero. Living off Ramen noodles in order to afford supplies, the Superhero spends sunrise to sunset in her classroom and saves every student from a perilous path. Talk about a dangerous dichotomy!

And yet, while this Dynamic Duo fails to portray a reasonable image of teachers, this can't be the sole reason teachers get stuck with the blame.

Perhaps it's easy to blame teachers because they represent the low man on the totem pole. Teachers rarely get a voice when it comes to issues of school reform. A dysfunctional system has been created in which teachers' hands are tied by "solutions" that are created for them, yet when those so-called solutions fail, the teacher is to blame.

However, teachers' under-representation in the political conversation on school change alone can't be the reason so many fingers are pointed their way.

## We're the Scapegoats

Ultimately, it's so easy to blame teachers because it lets everyone else off the hook. If we can blame teachers for all that is wrong in our schools today, then no one has to take a long, hard look at what is really going on.

Let's be honest—blaming teachers is much easier than thinking about issues such as poverty, unequal resources, overcrowded classrooms, poor parenting, violent neighborhoods, or layers of conflicting leadership, just to name a few. Yeah, that stuff. Evidently, those things are too hard to think about.

## Blame Game

I wonder if any thought has been given to the fallout of all this blame? My guess is no, because I can't imagine that this behavior would continue if anyone in a position of power had thought about where all this blame is getting us.

The way I see it, holding teachers solely accountable for student performance doesn't seem to be getting us anywhere. What's more, blaming teachers alone when students do not perform at the level we'd like them to isn't doing a heck of a lot to improve that performance. Instead, all this blame creates an environment where the work of teachers is not respected and it becomes nearly impossible for teachers to do their best. Maybe it's just me, but it seems ridiculous to try to reform education by hacking away at the very limited status, rights, and respect teachers have managed to earn for themselves.

As a teacher myself, I have the rare ability to relate everything in my life to some aspect of the classroom experience. With that being said, this whole situation is like a bunch of children arguing on the playground at recess. Just like a group of 5-year-olds, re-imagining the public school experience has become all about blame rather than a reflective examination of the many factors that contribute to our complex problems today. And let me tell you, no one wants to hear all the shouting on the way in from the playground. So, take the hint Powers That Be—while it may feel productive to point that finger from atop a soapbox, enough is enough. No one wants to hear it anymore.

In the end, all blame does is cloud our ability to learn what is truly causing the problems our schools are facing. Blame is about judging, not finding solutions.

So what are we teachers going to do? Are we going to let this blame define us? I say we let all this blame motivate us. Let it push us to step up as the professionals that we are, clear our dusty throats and make our voices heard. □

Mrs. Mimi is Jennifer Scoggin, a teacher, blogger, and the author of *It's Not All Flowers and Sausages* (Kaplan, 2009). Visit her at [mrsmimiteaches.com](http://mrsmimiteaches.com).



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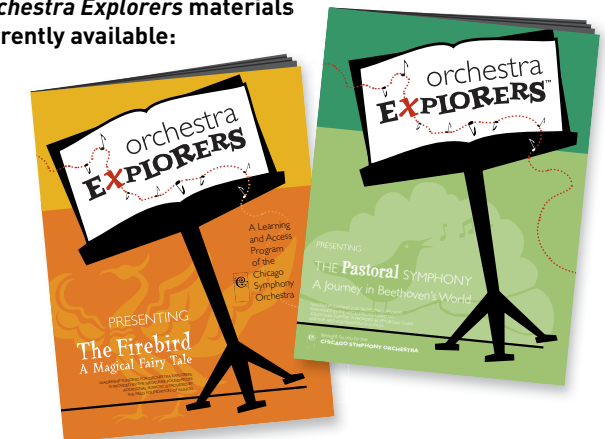
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