How to Set up Seating Charts for Your Classroom

Some of the best advice I ever received was from a principal who said, “Have them seat themselves on the first day, but use a pre-assigned seating chart. That way you can greet your students at the door and keep an eye on the students to make sure they are doing what you want them to do. You’re not busy trying to find names on a chart.”

She believed, as I do, that students should not be able to pick where they sit. There are many reasons for this, starting with the isolation of the least “popular” students to the way smart kids group together too much... Great advice!

So the last 20-something years of my career, I did just that. I had a seating chart at the front of the room, most often on a podium or science teacher’s cart. The students would come in on the first day of school. I would greet them at the door, tell them to pick up one each of the papers on the Pick-Up Table, find their seat by looking at the chart, and begin the bell, which was on the overhead or the SmartBoard.

**You need a seating chart for the first day of school!**

Marcia’s Science Teaching Ideas was founded by Marcia Krech, a retired Earth Science Teacher from Missouri, who believes passionately in passing on what she knows about good science teaching. I encourage teachers to use the active learning model including team games and foldables which puts the student to work and assigns the teacher the role of facilitator.

Email me with questions!

© Copyright 2018. MJ Krech. All rights reserved.
How to Set up Seating Charts for Your Classroom

The best seating chart method I've ever used had little picture tiles that stick to a sketch of the room. Great way to effortlessly learn names!

There are several ways to get these photos.
(1) Photocopy last year's yearbook photos. Laminate and cut out.
(2) Use the photos in the electronic files on your school's network.
(3) Take as many as you can if you have an open house before school starts.
(4) If all else fails, take them the first day during work period and make them up that first night. (But have the names on the chart without photos that first day!)

This wonderful seating chart was popular with subs and counselors who came in to talk with my classes because they could catch those who played musical chairs with the visitor.

Photo Tile Seating Chart

Make student "photo tiles" for a seating chart--a great way to connect new student names with faces! (1) Print out students' names in a small font with enough space for photos above the names. (2) Photocopy last year's yearbook pictures of each student and glue them above the names. (3) Laminate the entire page and cut the tiles out. (4) Put a blank copy of your seating chart inside a plastic sleeve. (5) Using sticky-tack or double-sided tape, stick each photo on top of their assigned seat.

This makes taking attendance a snap. Since the tiles are removable, new seating charts are easy! Counselors, substitutes, principals, will LOVE this!

Arrangement of Desks or Tables

I recommend changing seating on a regular basis. I trained my students to quickly change in and out of various formats. We practiced with my timer setting the amount of time it takes to change, usually one minute.

If you have small groups working together, it's one arrangement. Teacher presentation such as viewing a PowerPoint, is another. Team Games, is another. Individual work, it's still another.

Any arrangement can work. Don't fall into the trap of regretting you have tables, instead of desks, or vice versa. Use what you have and train your students to rearrange into different formations.

© Copyright 2012. MJ Krech. All rights reserved.
Some Good Ideas!

Traditional:
The "usual desk formation" can be traditional rows of desks with the teacher at the front in the power position, such as a podium or overhead projector. This works great for PowerPoint viewing, teacher lectures, presentations by students. This would be used for all tests and quizzes!

Group Work:
Tables with students looking to the center of the table and trained to turn toward the front when you are speaking/presenting. Works great when students are making foldables or other construction activities. You can move back into the Traditional for presentations or not, depending on how frisky your students are.

Team Games:
I trained my students to move from the traditional set-up into a Team Game formation. They could do it in under one minute and knew to be quiet and attentive when they were all seated. They could go back into the Traditional format just as easily. Email me for a download link about how to train your students to set up this formation, including an audio of myself training an actual class of students!

Other Ideas:
A fun arrangement puts a long aisle down the center of the classroom with the Teacher's desk at one end. Gives the teacher a good view of all your students as you walk down the center isle. This works great in long, narrow classrooms!

Or try this one: Group four desks together instead of just two. This would only work if your tables hold two, not four, students. Great if you need teams of eight students for projects.

How to Know Who to Put Where:
Okay! So what's the best way to group students? Here is my best advice, based on my 30-plus years of experience, having tried every method of grouping.

I believe the teacher should ALWAYS be in charge of who sits where! There are NO circumstances where student-chosen arrangements really work as well as your choices, for many reasons, especially the hurt feelings of those left out of the process.

Most importantly, you need a leader (smarter kid) in each team/group. If they argue tell them privately they need to learn to lead as they will be doing that a lot in their adult lives.

Use a printout of current class grades and put the top 6-8 in separate groups and then put the bottom 6-8 in separate groups. Then mix up the middle kids.

Keep track by putting a colored dot next to each name on a class chart. Each time you redo, add another colored dot, corresponding to your Team Game Tables, labeled with colored squares. (see Team Games Podcast for details.)

This system took me years to perfect, but worked great! If you ever get any grumbles, just say, "Always Teacher Choice around here," and move on!

I hope you have a great teaching year!

© Copyright 2012. MJ Krech. All rights reserved.