

Scenario 1:

4th Grade Math Lesson



Upon returning from recess, students see the word “Geometry” written on the board. Colorful geometric shapes adorn the space above the chalkboard and fill one bulletin board, and some brightly-colored shapes are even suspended from the ceiling. Students settle into their seats with an air of excitement and importance.

Warmed by the students’ excitement, Ms. A. leads the class through a brainstorming session on what they already know about geometry. She explains that today they will be learning how to measure the area of a plane using geoboards. Student helpers pass out geoboards, worksheets, and buckets of rubber bands. The lights are dimmed, and Ms. A. begins to model the lesson on the overhead. A yelp and muffled giggles disturb the lesson. Admonishing those who made noise, she waits for the class to quiet down and then proceeds. Another rubber band is snapped, and then another.

With anger welling up inside her, Ms. A. stomps across the room to turn the lights on. She begins with an angry lecture directed towards the noisiest table; then clearly impatient, almost at a loss, she reviews class procedures for listening. She moves to the chalkboard in a hasty effort to continue with a modified version of her original lesson. A few more snaps and giggles are heard as she rushes to close the lesson. She breathes a sigh of relief as students begin to work independently. As Ms. A. walks from group to group, she notices that although students are working together and working with the geoboards, few students are actually on task.

Ms. A. is brusque as materials are collected before lunch. Dramatically, she puts the geoboards and rubber bands into the closet, and announces to the class that they are simply too immature to continue with the geometry project. As the classroom empties for lunch break, she wonders, “All my hard work and planning this weekend...what went wrong? Those ungrateful students! Who can I talk to?”