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Pet Peeves Come Out From Behind the Desks

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THE trouble in the classrooms isn't always behind the desk, for the teachers daily grin and bear it, too. From a questionnaire sent to a representative group of teachers the following “pet peevés” were discovered.

The teacher reports to his class. He is all set to begin his lecture but are the students? “Today we are going to—” the instructor starts, but his voice is lost in the din caused by the mad scramble for papers, books, pens or pencils. A few of his pupils tear to the pencil sharpener to grind new points on their pencils. Those who have been in their seats for five or ten minutes before the class hour have been so busy visiting or writing home they've had no time to get their materials ready. Finally, his class time cut short by 5 minutes, the discouraged instructor begins again.

Slouchy Suzie's in the front row again. She is in her best “half-here” position, draped over her seat as though she were going to resume her slumbers where she left them before tiring to her 8 o'clock. This deep-dyed spine sitter even makes the teacher tired. Suzie may be a most respectable person, but her slouching makes her appear both ill-groomed and ill-mannered. When she obeys the urge to stretch and yawn, it's almost the last straw. Could she see herself in the mirror she'd do her sleeping at home.

Einstein's theory of relativity would be easier to explain than the presence of certain students in the classroom. Dreamy Dottie is a puzzle. She enters the classroom, late of course. For her benefit the instructor reviews what has gone before. By so doing, he doesn't have time to cover the whole lesson and loses the attention of the others who become bored with having to hear the same information twice.

Dottie, feeling no scholastic obligation, decides to give up following the lecture, she's so far behind already, and lets her mind wander hither and yon. She gazes lazily out of the window, plans her outfit for the next dance or concerns herself with her neighbor's new jacket. The teacher would rather talk to an empty seat, and might as well.

But worse, Dottie is annoying her neighbors by passively chewing gum. She doesn't realize that gum has its place wherever one may take it's almost the last straw. Could she see herself in the mirror she'd do her sleeping at home.

A charter member of the “half-here” students is Miss Messy Paper. She copies down her assignment so half-heartedly that she only gets half the directions. After an imposing array of insertions and cross-outs are arranged over the paper, she calls it a day and hands in her paper as is.

Upon sight of this paper, any teacher would lose heart. Gathering up his courage he may wade through it, but only to be left befuddled and weary. It takes several neatly typewritten, well-organized papers to revive a teacher's spirit after such an ordeal.

Do you enjoy a class in which there is a continuous undertone of whispering and laughing? The classroom is a poor place to catch up on news from home and five-pound parties. Private jokes with your neighbor are as distracting to the other students as to your teacher.

Every teacher's dread is the student who thinks she must contest every point made, no matter how minor. More than one gray hair has been caused by the frantic hand-waves of students who would do much better on the railroad flagging trains. The peek-a-boo hand-waver is another classroom terror. As if playing some game, she shoots her hand up and down, interrupting the speaker so often that what main points the teacher had planned to emphasize are buried in the heap of trivialities. If she'd only exercise a little self control and wait until the teacher pauses before raising her hand!

What art teacher wouldn't all but walk out when, after getting an unanimous class vote that a certain design is poor, one voice pipes up with, “But I like it.” Also much better left unsaid is the “Yes, I thought of that”, which follows a teacher's suggestion for improvement. Miss Know-It-All does not need to be in school. In contrast is the student who does not ask questions when he does not understand. Teachers might as well push on the hinged side of a door. Barging into a problem and not knowing what it is all about gets us nowhere, and teachers can do nothing unless the students ask the necessary questions.

One and one-half minutes are only a small fraction of the time wasted in the average student's day. Yet, self-assigned clockers whose practice it is to watch the time have the mistaken idea that a minute or so before the period ends is the time to put on the coat, fix the shiny nose and gather up the books.

The power of suggestion begins operation. Soon the room is bustling with activity. The summary of the lecture and the next day's assignment must be shouted to the few courteous listeners. Woe to the rude individuals who insist upon such quick getaways.

Icing doesn't remake a bad cake, nor will apple polishing make a grade for you. No teacher is hoodwinked by insincere attention. However, if you are courteous and show a sincere and active interest in your course, your teacher will certainly be pleased and more than anxious to help you in every way he can.

The classroom attitude is important for many reasons. First there is the personality chart, kept by each laboratory teacher. These charts make up a permanent record, and upon graduation, when recommendations are to be made, this record is referred to. Next there is the permanent grade record. Inattention, lack of interest, and general slippshod work are not going to cultivate good grades.

More important than either grades or personality charts is the attitude. Habits developed in college will either haunt or help students the rest of their lives. To know now the things that annoy superior associates will help one to avoid them in the future.

Eleanor White speaks up for the teachers in their criticisms of student behavior

Pet Peeves Come Out From
ALL'S fair in love and the classroom—or so it seems. Anything goes, or does it? Do the students ever get past the front row of seats to understand the teacher and does the teacher ever come out from behind his desk to meet them on equal basis? Or do they both tolerate each other's faults in silence—sort of grin and bear it attitude?

On the whole, students in the classroom are good-natured, hardened people. They prepare those all-night-affair assignments, submit themselves to knuckle-breaking lectures, and scribble four-hour exams in two hours without an audible murmur of complaint—that is, unless they are pinned down to a cross examination. Then they will weaken and readily admit that their instructors are not entirely perfect.

If these students were to list their most scathing pet peeves, they would, no doubt, be included in the following one-sided outlook on a lecture class.

The instructor enters the room, perhaps late enough that the class feels a tinge of annoyance. One hundred and forty-three pairs of eyes watch him as he closes the door, walks to his desk and opens his notebook. One hundred and forty-three people mentally take note of his dress. Is he wearing the same tiresome tie, or if it is a woman, does she persist in appearing in the same dress week in, week out? These are material thoughts but none-the-less representative.

The instructor begins his lecture. The students wait with bared teeth for that sarcastic introductory remark concerning their intelligence. They came to college to obtain some knowledge, not to be told that they possess none. Maybe they are not all "three or four-pointers" but many of them are conscientiously trying to do their best.

The lecture continues. He taps his pencil, clears his throat for the fifteenth time or moves the desk two inches toward the North. The class, although well-acclimated to his nervous traits, becomes once more painfully conscious of them and partially loses its train of thought for the lecture. Any such distractions as these, although they can be overlooked, serve to irritate students and reduce their amount of concentration.

The lecturer talks on; sentence after sentence of seemingly dull, unmemorizable facts is given. If there would be only a few minutes of relief, maybe an amusing story about the chemist who evolved this particular theory or an application of that law to students at Iowa State, the aspect could be brightened.

The instructor has written a book, or his thesis is on some phase of the subject he is teaching, and he is extremely enthusiastic about it. Maybe he fails to see that the students do not already possess this enthusiasm but must have it partially, at least, instilled in them.

Suddenly he whirs and faces the board. He dashes a long definition or equation across the writing surface. The students, scarcely having copied the first half, gasp as he sweeps the eraser across the precious information. No doubt these same words will appear as a question in the next exam.

Having erased the material from the board, the instructor asks for an example. The three women in the front row, who have taken the brunt of the questions all quarter, begin hurriedly to think of a reply. Hands are raised behind them while these three in the front row know that such a gesture is unnecessary. Each of them has a three-to-one chance. One is called on, the other two relax for awhile. With a resigned sigh the chosen one begins her recitation.

These three students believe themselves picked on. A few "brainstorms" in the back of the room insist the instructor is showing partiality to those apple-polishers in the front row. The rest consider themselves fortunate.

Taking advantage of the interruption in the lecture, a student dares to ask a question. Immediately the instructor emphasizes the fact that he explained this point clearly in the previous lecture. He seems surprised that not everyone understood it. Instead of an answer, he fires two or three questions at the miserable culprit.

Giving the impression that the last previous minutes have been wasted by a hasty frown at his watch, the instructor hurriedly continues the lecture. Students unconsciously lean forward in their seats in an effort to grasp his words. He walks to the window, talking continually, or turns to the board and draws an illustration. His muffled voice is barely audible to the exasperated students.

The class hour is over. Students in other rooms are filing out. The instructor continues. The class becomes restless and fidgety. Hardly anyone is listening.

Notebooks are closed, pencils are shoved in pockets, coats are in mid-air. Oh yes, the assignment! The instructor calmly returns to his desk. He advises writing it down as it is a rather long one. The class cringes.

After a few valuable seconds they are ready to write. He certainly wasn't exaggerating about the length of the assignment. Is he aware that they are taking 18 hours of work? If they prepared that assignment well, there would be no adequate time for other subjects.