

Marco's World

What if...

MARCO MORALES

When I was told I was going to start teaching at that school my pants fell down around my ankles. Fortunately, nobody was around. It was just going to be a two-hour class every other day, but when you are a new teacher you want to do things right. I would start teaching a grammar class from nine to eleven in the morning on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

"You'll have fifteen or sixteen students," the principal said. "Most of them are teenagers, but you might have older people too. There's a five minute break at 9:55. Here's the program, the books, plenty of chalk and an eraser. If you have any questions, feel free to ask, OK? Good luck!"

And, that was that. Of course, I had a couple of thousand questions about all kinds of things, but I decided not to ask anything in that moment. I wanted the principal to think I had everything under control, so I decided to go home and start planning my class for the next day.

I was a new teacher, but I was also a professional teacher and I felt anxious to put everything I knew into practice. I was determined not to let my students notice I was rocky. I started planning my class at five and at seven I was done. I had a beautiful lesson plan in front of me that covered all aspects of the material to be taught in one day. I stood up from the chair and went to the kitchen to make myself a cup of coffee. As I was coming back to my room I saw myself in the mirror in the hall.

"You're a genius," I told the guy who was standing there with a cup of coffee in his hand and a smile on his face.

Suddenly, he changed his pleasant, happy expression to a worried one. "I wrote my lesson plan on a sheet of paper in normal handwriting," I told myself. "What if I can't see it from where I'm standing? Oh, no!"

I dropped my coffee on the floor and hurriedly left the house. I rushed up to the stationary store on the corner and bought a couple of big markers and Bristol boards because I was planning to re-write my lesson plan in big letter size so I could see it clearly from anywhere in the classroom. Back home, it took me an hour to finish the job. I used all the stuff I bought, and I was sure I would be able to see everything fine.

But, as soon as I finished, another worry crossed my mind. "What if they don't know some of the vocabulary I need to use in the class?" I assumed my students knew it, but what if they didn't? An hour later, I finished drawing lots of wall charts I would use to present unknown words. Just in case, you know...

It was already nine thirty when I finally had everything ready, but as I was going over my lesson plan for the fifth time I thought, "The principal told me I would have teenagers and adults in my class. What if the kids don't find my warm up activity and my grammar presentation as appealing as I think they are?" I was sure adults would like them, but they might had been sort of boring for kids. I needed something fun... So, I adapted a song and an Archie comic strip to those activities. It took me forever, but I did it.

After that, I thought about my wind up activity. "What if I don't have the 15 students I need to make this activity work? I'd better think of an alternate activity. Just in case..." It took me thirty more minutes. It was eleven by my watch, but I was so nervous I didn't even think about the time.

"What if I have a blind student? From what I've heard, many blind people attend that school. What if I happen to have one? Or two...? They won't be able to follow the rest of the class." So, I decided to create some special materials for my possible handicapped students. I also got a tape recorder and clean tape to record my class so those students could listen to it as many times as they wanted to. I had to borrow the recorder from a friend who was already in bed when I called him. I went to his apartment to get it and I was back home an hour later. As I was going into my bedroom, resolved to go straight to bed, I ran into my brother in the hall who, by his breath, was coming from a party.

"Hi." he said.

"What's up?" I replied.

"Hey, brother" he said with a guttural voice. Obviously, he had drunk a lot. "I have a question for you."

"What is it?" I asked.

"How do you say *heart* in French? I just met a French girl, but I couldn't tell her what I wanted because I didn't know how to say it." The last three words were pronounced like one.

"I don't know" I said. "How am I supposed to know? Go to bed, now. Come on." I pushed him into his bedroom while he was talking to himself and I went to my own room.

As I was closing my eyes, I thought, "What if I don't know a word they ask me about? I'm the teacher. I'm supposed to know everything they ask about." I had already checked all the unknown words in the lesson and I had happened to find two or three, but what if the students asked me something I didn't know? I stood up and went to work again. Two hours later I had compiled two hundred possible words students might have come up with in class, but that was not the end...

"What if a student gets sick in class? I'd better take my portable first aid kit with me..."

"What if I get nervous? I'll put sedatives in the kit..."

"What if they don't like the song I use?"

"What if they won't sing along?"

"What if I sing out of tune?"

"What if I'm not properly dressed?"

"What if I have an observer in my class like the principal or another teacher?"

"What if a student doesn't bring his book?"

"What if there's an earthquake?"

"What if I faint?"

"What if Mexico wins the World Cup?"

"What if...what if...what if..."

"Hey, wake up! Didn't you say you had a new job?"

My brother was shaking my shoulders. I had been sleeping on the desk and the light coming through the window hurt my eyes.

"What time is it?" I asked with a drowsy voice.

"It's day time, and it's late too" he said. "You'd better take a shower, get dressed and go or you'll be late for your first day of work."

Was this the same person I talked to last night? I just couldn't believe I had fallen asleep in the middle of work, but it happened. I got into the bathroom, took

a shower, put my best suit on, had breakfast, picked up my things and went to work. As I was driving to school, I thought of all the work I had done. I was so proud of myself and my work that I couldn't help feeling a little selfish. I knew there was no way on earth I could have forgotten anything. I arrived ten minutes early. After I parked my car, I picked up my lesson plan, visual aids and the rest of the stuff and went to the secretary's office to ask her where my room was.

"Good morning," I greeted her with a sweet voice.

"Oh! I'm glad to see you now" the secretary said.

"Why, thanks " I said smiling.

"It's not what you think," she said, "there's been a change."

"What do you mean a change?"

"You're going to teach a conversation course not a grammar one, so take this book and go to Room 19. Your class starts in five minutes."

My pants fell down around my ankles again. But, this time, there was an audience...