

25 Ways To Create Curiosity in Your Lessons

Ten Minute Tutorial Transcript

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Twenty Five Ways To Create Curiosity In Your Lessons

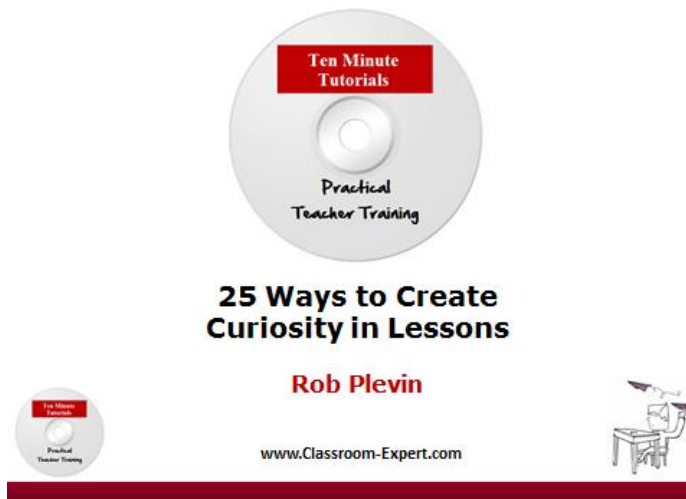
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Welcome to this Ten Minute Tutorial, my name is Rob Plevin.

Why do we want to create curiosity? Well, quite simply it's going to increase the chances of students being interested in your lesson. If students are curious we *invite* their attention rather than demanding it or forcing it.

So we are going to look at four main ways of creating curiosity and intrigue in lessons. The first is to create some sort of unexpected change, so that the students who arrive at the lesson see something different – they want to know what's going on. We are going to be looking at props and resources you can give to the students either before the lesson or as the lesson is starting. Finally we'll look at two types of games you can use to create curiosity.

OK. We've got twenty-five ideas to get through and the timer is running. We are actually going to go over the ten minutes on this tutorial but I will be going through them quite briskly.

The first way to create 'the unexpected' is through the Physical Environment – this is just simply rearranging furniture or taking students into a different classroom perhaps or even outside. The point being that they see something different, a break in the norm and they want to know why. For instance, if you have got your chairs all laid out in a circle they immediately think there is something different going on to the usual lesson content, so they are more inclined to listen to your instructions and want to know what that activity is going to be.

Unexpected Change No. 2 is a change to the mood either by using music perhaps or the lighting or even smells, if you want to use incense sticks and that kind of thing, the point is we try and change the atmosphere and the mood in the lesson.

One of the best lessons I have ever observed was a very simple fact-finding exercise which would normally be quite boring for the students but their attention was grabbed right from the start because when they arrived at the classroom, the room was in total darkness save for a very dim light glowing at the front of the room. There was also some background music being played from a stereo – it was kind of futuristic Jean Michael Jarre type music.

So the scene was set for this lesson on the solar system, the students had to find facts on each of the planets in the solar system and then fill out their fact card about each of the planets and they absolutely loved it. Once again quite a mundane activity but it was the atmosphere and the mood in the room which got them interested.

Unexpected Change No. 3 is to change to your own appearance – now I am not suggesting you're quite as enthusiastic with this than the people in the picture there – I can't see Shrek teaching many lessons - but just by wearing some sort of topic related costume such as a hat, you are going to get the students interested and listening at least at the start anyway.

Unexpected Change No. 4 is to have some sort of strange apparatus or equipment set up at the start of the lesson ready and waiting for them – obviously practical subjects such as science lend themselves very well to this – often students haven't seen certain pieces of apparatus so when that is set up in the room as a demonstration, they'll want to know what's going on, they'll want to know what's it about. But with some creative thought you can adapt this to pretty much any subject, you can have a demonstration of some sorts set up.

Unexpected Change No. 5 is to have somebody from outside as your speaker for the lessons so they take over as teachers – it might be an industry expert or just someone else to deliver the content other than you.

Now to props and resources – the first one is obvious, a subject related prop – so whenever you are trying to find out the content, a prop about that content is to bring it to life. I was very fortunate years ago when I was doing a project on the Titanic with my students, I was very lucky to have a friend who had a distant relative who tragically died on the ship and she did actually have some of his belongings – so we had some genuine relics from the Titanic brought into the classroom and the students were absolutely mesmerized by these. So if you can get your hands on any real life subject-related props they are a great way of bringing the subject into the classroom.

Next we have got a timer and this is a really good way of getting students interested because having an activity timed can signify challenge or competition of some sort which most students enjoy.

Photographs are a great way of stimulating discussion and interest in the subject and there are all kinds of activities you can do with them. You could use them in a sequencing exercise, you might have a set of images or a storytelling project or individual photos could be used as writing prompts – what happened before this was taken? What do you think will happen next? How do you think the people feel? – that kind of thing.

Group cards – now most of your students will love working in groups and giving them a group card on entry to the room is a great way of getting them into groups – it's fun but it's also noisy. Each student is given a card with a picture of an animal on when they come into the room and there are four sets of each animal types – so you have got four lions, four tigers, four geese, four dogs – whatever animal it is – and the idea is that students have to find other members in their group simply by making the noise of the animal on the card – so all the dogs are going to bark, all the ducks are going to quack, all the lions are going to roar and so on. As I said, it's a noisy start to the lesson but the kids tend to enjoy it.

OK No. 5 – we have got a jigsaw piece and this is a great way to start the lesson but does take some set up on your behalf. You basically put the students into groups or you could have one large group, they could all work together on this. The idea is that they are going to complete a number of exercises and for each exercise they complete or each question they answer they receive another piece of the jigsaw. The idea is that by the end of the lesson or by the end of the scheme of work, they have completed a big picture. Each jigsaw piece could have a question written on it or it could have a subject for the lesson written on it. Obviously, you have got to actually create the jigsaw pieces beforehand so you need to get a big picture and then cut it up into jigsaw pieces. The first lesson you just give them one abstract jigsaw piece and then you explain what's going on – quite a nice activity.

No. 6 is the Ballot Box – again this could be set up in the centre of the room and the idea is that students are given a voting slip on entry to the room and the voting exercise really can be about anything, for instance just voting on the type of activity they are going to be doing in that lesson, so the voting slip is what creates the intrigue.

No. 7 we have a treasure hunt or scavenger hunt and really that is just one exercise that you can deliver within an envelope like this – the top secret envelope – in this particular case the students are going to get an envelope for each group on entry to the room and inside that envelope would be the first question that they have got to solve, it will have a clue on it plus directions to the next clue – either in the classroom

or around school. So they have got to answer a question, go to find their next clue, answer the question there and get their next clue which will take them to another location.

That is just one activity that you can use within an envelope, there are all kinds of others, for instance the photos that we mentioned earlier could be delivered in an envelope at the start of the lesson on entry to the room. The envelope, for some reason is a brilliant way of creating intrigue - we all like to open letters, we like to open parcels so the envelope gets their attention.

Next we have got a choice card, it's very simple - it just does what it says on the can. You produce a task choice card and they just fill that in as they come into the room. The point is here that those tasks are a little bit out of the ordinary, they are performing a song, filming a commercial - the activities are slightly different to the type of things they normally get so when they see them they are going to be curious about what each of those activities involves. So straightaway you have got them asking questions, you have got their attention.

Next you have got Box Bingo and if you're students haven't done this before it will definitely get their attention. Basically you give each group of four students a box, you write the lesson title on the board and you give students a list of 20 or 30 simple questions about the topic which you want answering during that lesson. Each student in each group must then pick one question and write it on a sheet of paper. They then each stick their question sheet to one of the box sides (as there are six sides to a box one student in a group could pick more than one question). The teacher then calls out questions randomly from the list and takes answers from students. The idea is as soon as a question is answered, any student who has written this down on their box should then write the answer down on the box as well under their question.

So when a team's questions have all been answered they can shout out "BOX BINGO!" It's an active slant on a very common game.

Next we have got "What's in the Bag?" and this is another way of introducing your props to the lesson and getting their attention, again you can't do it every single lesson but a few times that you do this it really will get their attention - this is one that I have used many times and very successfully.

You basically tell students that they have 20 questions to try and work out what's in the bag and they can only ask questions which elicit a "Yes" or "No" answer - so they can't say, "What colour is it?" but they can ask, "Is it Blue?" "Is it Red?" "Is it made of wood?" - those sort of questions. It is a good idea to write those questions down on the board as they are asked, otherwise you lose track of where you are up to. Very rarely they won't get it within the 20 questions so you end up giving them extra

questions or they face a forfeit of some kind such as 'extra homework' – that always goes down well. ☺

Next we have 'games' and the first type of game is 'Active Games' so any game involving any apparatus that you can set up in the room, the one that my students loved was Basketball, so we would have a Basketball hoop set up at the front of the room and the students are asked the questions and if they get the questions right they are asked to shoot a rolled up piece of paper or a sponge ball at the basket and we just basically kept a competition running between the teacher and the students or between 2 groups of students. Because they saw the basketball hoop set up straightaway they wanted to know what was going on, "Are we playing that game" or if it is a piece of apparatus they haven't seen before they will want to know what the apparatus is for – so the point of active games is that you have something set up for them to take part in, it gets their interest straightaway.

The next type of game is just 'for fun' games and you can have these written up on the board or you can give them some sort of sheet or something to take part in the game on entry into the room. One of my best games that my students liked to play just for fun was to guess a film quote, so you give them a quote from a film they have got to guess what film it was from or you could get them to come up with the films and the quotes separately on pieces of paper and they would put them in a hat beforehand and you can draw them from the hat – that saves you for having to come up with films that they might not have heard of because they aren't going to write down some films that are current with them. That is just a fun game, but fun games are a great way to get their attention at the start of a lesson.

OK we are now onto Introductions and Starter Activities – so ways of introducing the lesson and the starter activities – the first one comes from the advertising world, if you have been on my mailing list for any length of time you will be very familiar with this one – it is all down to the headline – Claude Hopkins who is considered the Godfather of direct response advertising once said that Curiosity is one of the strongest of human incentives and he applies it whenever he can in his advertising.

In advertising one of the most critical places to use curiosity is in the headline – if the promotion doesn't have a strong headline then it just isn't going to be read and we need to use that same philosophy before introducing our lesson topic to our students. If we just tell them they are going to learn something that they have to or it's because it's on the exam or that you said so, then they are not going to be very curious or interested about it, but if we can really sell it to them then there's more chance they are going to want to take part.

There is a general formula for an advertising headline and it is as follows: 'Here's how you can...' (and then you fill that in with the main benefit that they are going to get)...in a certain amount of time' so it would be 'Here's how you can have really white

teeth in 24 hours' and then you have a proviso... 'without wasting too much amount of time or without costing loads of money'.

So it would be 'here's how you can have really white teeth in 24 hours without spending hours brushing your teeth'.

Now if we can apply that same formula to the lesson when we introduce it to the students by telling them they are going to learn something really, really valuable or really, really cool, in a certain amount of time and what it's going to do for them or how it's going to help them. So the formula applied to a lesson on memory techniques for example might be:

"Today I am going to show you a really cool method that's used by astronauts, world leaders and even the world memory champion Dominic O'Brien, to remember any list at all for any subject in just 10 minutes without having to do loads of revision."

Another example from the advertising world is to pre-sell a lesson – this one is quite cool it takes a little bit of time, a little bit of thinking about but it really works well. The idea here is to do exactly what production companies and film makers and manufacturers do whenever they are launching a new product - they build up lots of hype.

As in the case of a blockbuster film for example you will see adverts for it all over the place, you will see them in various media, you will see them in supermarkets, billboards, newspapers, television and the adverts are absolutely everywhere, so the idea is that you are going to advertise or pre-sell a coming unit or a coming lesson or a coming topic with curiosity provoking posters or clues, teasers, puzzle pleasers, all over the school for about a week running up to this lesson or before launching a new scheme of work. You can put posters up in corridors, leaflets in books, you can leave little post it notes, announcements made in assemblies, you can get the form teachers to drop hints about it, etc. So you are basically building up hype, building up interest in this amazing lesson that you are going to be teaching them.

Another way of introducing your lessons or starting lessons is by way of a story – and if you do this right you can really grab even the toughest group's attention. Years ago one of my colleagues was teaching a topic on Myths and Legends and he decided the way he was going to introduce this was by reading Beowulf to them. He decorated his room with Anglo Saxon pictures and he had some straw on the floor, the lights were turned off and he had a candle at the front of the room. He invited the students in and he got them to sit down and listen in silence to him tell the story by candlelight. They absolutely loved it – I put my head round the door and the students were all totally enthralled.

Obviously it was the mood set by the room decorations and the lighting and the candle, etc. But to get them quiet for so long, that was all done through the story. If you can come up with a story yourself or you have got a story linked to the topic then that's a great way of starting the lesson.

OK another way of introducing your topic is by way of a dramatic demonstration of some sort, this might be something you do yourself or it might be that you get one or two students involved or it might be that you have the whole class involved. A good one I saw recently was a history teacher who asked for all her students to do an impression of someone who had been horrifically murdered so she turned to face the board and she said, "When I turn back I want each of you to be doing your best impression of someone who has just been murdered" (kids love gore) – she picked the best actors and actresses to come to the front and then did a role play about Henry VIII – it was a good way of introducing the topic (if a little gruesome).

OK next we have film clips and of course we have all showed film clips in lessons before but the idea here is that you make it just a little bit different, a bit special – it could be an idea to have popcorn on entry to the room, it might be that you have a poster advertising the film clip outside the room, or you have been running that advert all week as I said before about building hype about the lesson, you might even give them tickets to see the film clip in their books when you mark them so that when they come back in the next lesson they present the tickets – straightaway the intrigue is there even before the lesson started, even before they were in the queue for the classroom. It's just about making things a little bit more special, more of an occasion.

Next we have mysteries and we all love a good mystery – this is just a way of presenting information to students that gets them thinking. It's designed to encourage them to talk with each other and discuss ideas and deal with ambiguity by addressing a question that hasn't got any single correct answer especially when they aren't even sure, they have to try and work out what has happened or what is likely to happen. Depending upon how much effort you put into these – it can be a tremendous way of starting a lesson.

One that I did in science years ago (it is a very common one nowadays you can buy packs readily built for this) was to set up a crime scene investigation so you can show a broken window and you have things that have been smashed in the room and the kids have got to work out what has happened. With the pack that I bought you have police barrier tape and all kinds of props to bring the scene to life. It's a great way of getting their attention.

And finally we have magic and this is without doubt the best way of creating curiosity and intrigue and novelty and humour and excitement in your lessons. I actually came across this purely by accident whilst I was doing a topic on Shakespeare. We were doing Macbeth - the Witches – and we got into a discussion about paranormal

activities and then that lead to David Blain and Streetmagic and that kind of thing. It got to the point where the students were so intrigued and so excited about doing magic that we started doing it as a starter activity in lessons and it went on to be an entire scheme of work on magic. They loved it so much that I didn't want to spoil their enthusiasm. Magic is a great way of introducing topics or just as a fill in or just as a starter activity and there are lots of magic tricks included with [Take Control of the Noisy Class](#) and some of my other resources.

OK, that's us finished. You now have 25 ways of creating curiosity in lessons and I hope you enjoyed this 10-minute tutorial. Thank you.

END OF TAPE