

Case 5.2: Not Time for Stories

Ms. Ward loved geography. She inspired and motivated students by telling them they were learning material typically reserved for older students.

The first unit Ms. Ward planned for the new school year focused on California. Although Rustin School, where Ms. Ward taught, was in the Midwest, she thought it would be a fun state with which to kick off the year. Students at Rustin represented a wide range of socioeconomic and racial diversity, but she knew many of them were interested in ocean beaches. California, in her mind, fit well with this theme.

Ms. Ward gathered her students on the carpet and began writing on a flip chart. Several students whispered excitedly as she wrote “California” at the top of the sheet. Although Ms. Ward was happy to see their excitement, she reminded them to remain quiet and raise their hands if they had something to say. Immediately several hands flew up.

“Are we going to learn about California?” Maddy asked.

“Yes,” Ms. Ward replied. “We will be learning about California in many of our subjects throughout the week.” Students chattered excitedly again and Ms. Ward reminded them to remain quiet: “I cannot understand you if so many of you talk at once.”

After explaining the unit a bit more, Ms. Ward asked who had been to California. DeQuan raised his hand. When Ms. Ward called on him he said, “A few days ago, I was at my grandmother’s house watching television with my little sister, but she was crying so I couldn’t hear very well. I told her to be quiet and gave her a toy to play with because the person on TV...”

Ms. Ward interrupted DeQuan and reminded him that the question she asked was who had been to California. Growing bothered by the side chatter and DeQuan’s indirect answer, she reminded the class that now was not the time for stories.

“Please raise your hand *only* if you can answer the question,” she said. Upon hearing this, DeQuan angrily added, “I was saying that the person on TV said the show was sponsored by a company that makes raisins, which are my favorite snack, and that the raisins are made in California!”

Ms. Ward reminded DeQuan he needed to raise his hand if he had something to say, and added that his tone was disrespectful. Attempting to refocus the group, she asked, “Has anyone been to Disneyland?” Maddy raised her hand and said, “I have. It’s in California, and it is sunny and warm there. It’s also far away because we were on the airplane for a long time.”

“You’re right,” Ms. Ward replied as she wrote “warm” and “sunny” along with the phrase “far from Rustin School” on the flip chart.

“Any other words to describe California?” she asked. As several others raised their hands, Ms. Ward noticed DeQuan still looked angry. Anticipating another outburst, she cheerfully said, “DeQuan, please try to compose yourself so that you can remain seated with the group.” Hearing this, DeQuan stood, walked to his desk, and slouched in his chair.”

Oh no, thought Ms. Ward. *He must not have heard me correctly.* Knowing time was passing quickly and that she needed to finish the lesson, Ms. Ward continued teaching but wondered how she should address DeQuan if his negative behavior persisted.