

## Classroom Tips GRADES 6-8 (Middle Grades)

Thank you for volunteering to share your time and experience with JA students. The following information might help you prepare to speak to students in grades 6-8. These grades might also be called middle grades or junior high, and students most commonly range in age from 11-13.

### General Student Profile

- While adulthood is still off in the distance for these students, they are hungry for any glimpse of **what life is like** after their school days are complete.
  - They may ask personal questions about your job, family, salary, and such. Consider in advance what you are comfortable sharing and what you will need to politely decline to share.
  - Be yourself. Talk about your early aspirations, your current job, and how you were hired.
- There is a significant **range in maturity** from sixth graders, who are transitioning from childhood, to eighth graders, who are transitioning to their teenage years.
  - Students are beginning to think abstractly, but many still often think in literal, concrete terms, so be prepared to offer concrete examples of abstract concepts.
  - They are also becoming more independent, but still need to feel cared about and respected by adults.
  - Most, especially the younger students, are still open and enjoy interacting with adults.
  - Middle school students often aspire to be teens, so when offering examples, avoid things associated with younger children (toys); instead use examples closer to interests of a teen.
- **Conformity** is critical at this age. Avoid criticizing or making fun of students.
  - Ask them questions about their experience or previous knowledge on the topic to help them connect to the topic and feel included. Don't assume they have previous knowledge about your topic.
  - Be prepared to **wait after asking a question** for someone to respond.
  - Be confident and decisive, but friendly.
  - Provide resources for them to do additional research on their own.
- A rule of thumb for **attention span** is one minute for each year of age. So plan to chunk your presentation into 10- to 12-minute segments in which you allow students to shift their attention to something different in between.
  - For example, as you tell them stories about your experience, stop after 5-7 minutes and ask questions, show a video, or have them tell the person next to them something they remember.
  - Avoid directly lecturing to students for more than 3-5 minutes. Use stories and examples intermixed with questions for discussion.

#### Try to avoid:

- being students' friend
- criticizing
- speaking in a monotone
- showing nervousness

## Planning Suggestions

## Organize

- Review the program material and consider how to share your experiences that best support the desired learning.
- Come up with a list of stories about yourself that you can share.
- Start with a goal: What do you want students to remember later? Why is your story important? What are the “key takeaway” points?
- Keep it simple. Avoid jargon.
- Plan for small chunks of lecture with questions and visuals to keep their attention.
- Prepare props, visual aids, and student instructions.

## Connect

- Be honest and respectful, and be yourself.
- Share things about yourself. Prepare a 60-second overview about your life to start off.
- Ask students to share what they already know about your company or your speaking topic.
- Respect students' backgrounds, heritage, and culture. Be aware of activities or questions that could make students uncomfortable or ashamed.
- Be positive; offer affirmations (thank students for participating, answering questions, etc.)
- Maintain eye contact.
- Show your passion.

## Check In

- Make sure students understand an idea before moving to the next one.
- Ask compelling and open-ended questions.
- Allow time for students to process questions before answering.
- Listen to what students say.
- Choose a place to stop and have the students predict what they think happened before sharing the end of the story.

## Reflect

- Leave time at the end of your presentation to summarize your top 1-3 items you want them to remember.
- Offer possible resources where they may go to learn more.
- Ask for volunteers to state a fact or concept they will remember.
- Ask for any questions they may have.