**Celebrate the Struggle!**

**Helping Students Extend and Apply Knowledge**

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|  | “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”  ~Albert Einstein |

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**Introduction**

One of the best things about being around young children is their passionate and fierce sense of curiosity.

It defines their genius. **Why is the sky blue? Who discovered the world? How did the sun get so hot? Where did toothpaste come from? And my favorite: Are we there yet?**

It isn’t exactly clear when it happens, but somewhere between grade school and grad school we stop relishing in the question and start celebrating answers. Our goal is to never want children (or adults) to underestimate the power questions hold; especially when asked of the right people at the right time.

The goal of the lesson is to help students; big and small, understand that genius is not determined by the questions you are able to answer but rather the questions you are courageous enough to ask of yourselves and of the others you lead and serve.

**My thoughts about the experience of students in our school…**

**What is Genius Hour?**

Genius hour is a movement that allows students to explore their own passions and encourages creativity in the classroom.  It provides students a choice in what they learn during a set period of time during school.  It’s not easy to determine where the idea was originally created, but there are at least two events that have impacted genius hour.

**Genius Hour Origins**

The search-engine giant, Google, allows its engineers to spend 20% of their time to work on any pet project they want.  The idea is very simple.  Allow people to work on something that interest them, and productivity will go up.  Google’s policy has worked so well that it has been said that 50% of Google’s projects have been created during this creative time period.  Ever heard of Gmail or Google News?  These projects are creations by passionate developers that blossomed from their 20%-time projects.

Another origin of genius hour projects came from the book [*Drive*](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1594484805/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1594484805&linkCode=as2&tag=stubsearchcom-20) by best-selling author, Daniel Pink.  In a blog post he [writes](http://www.danpink.com/2011/07/the-genius-hour-how-60-minutes-a-week-can-electrify-your-job) about how the Google-time projects are also used in other corporations.

*Each week, Google employees can take a Genius Hour — 60 minutes to work on new ideas or master new skills. They’ve used that precious sliver of autonomy well, coming up with a range of innovations including training tools for other branches.*

**Genius Hour in Education**

The same genius hour principles apply in the classroom as they do in the corporate environment.  The teacher provides a set amount of time for the students to work on their passion projects.  Students are then challenged to explore something to initiate a project over what they want to learn about.  They spend one hour (or longer) each week researching the topic before they start creating a product that will be shared with the class/school/world.  Deadlines are limited and creativity is encouraged. Throughout the process the teacher facilitates the student projects to ensure that they are on task.

There are many educators leading the way with passion projects in their classes, but much of their inspiration came from the book [*The Passion-Driven Classroom: A Framework for Teaching & Learning*](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1596671599/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1596671599&linkCode=as2&tag=ckesler-20) by Angela Maiers and Amy Sandoval.

Many teachers are raving about the autonomy that students are finding in their classes.   A goal of every teacher should be to create lifelong learners.  Genius hour projects are a huge step towards that goal.

**Sample Genius Hour Questions**

* How can we make it /each other better?
* How do we know this to be so?
* Is this what is needed most?
* What is it we hope to accomplish and what’s stopping us?
* What are we most proud of?
* What is possible?
* When can we start?
* How will we prevent failure?
* Who/how can we make this happen?
* What do we regret most?
* How can we make the best use of…?
* What if we…(Dream big!)

**Approaching Your Administration about Genius Hour**

**Propose Your Genius Hour Idea**

Once you have decided to move forward with a genius hour project, you’re going to need to get approval from your administration. Don’t assume that your proposal for a genius hour without asking that your administration would never approve a project like this. You will need to be prepared with a list of benefits and how genius hour will positively impact students.

1. **No loss of class instruction** – You will need to explain right out of the gate that there will be no loss of class time by implementing a genius hour at your campus. This will undoubtedly be a principal’s first reservation about the project. I wrote a post about [how to make time for genius hour](http://www.geniushour.com/2013/03/29/making-time-for-genius-hour-in-the-classroom/). The argument can be made that by having a laser-like focus on each minute of in class instruction that your teaching will actually improve during curriculum time.

2. **Creating LIfe-long learners** – The goal of genius hour is to create a love for learning. By allowing the students to learn about whatever they want, it helps them to understand that school is not just a place where they have to come and memorize facts about curriculum that they will never use in their real lives. Encouraging students to further develop their passions may even unlock a future career path. Most schools today funnel students down a standardized path of compliance. Genius Hour is also grounded in the work of Dave Burgess of [*Teach Like a Pirate*](http://goo.gl/UNcPY) fame, but it’s totally true.  Genius hour is like giving students a magical key that opens up a door to a world that has never been seen before.

3. **Develop relationships with students** – One of the most important factors in becoming an effective teacher is to be able to develop a personal relationship with our students. When students feel safe and fully trust their teacher they will follow them to the ends of the Earth. Students love genius hour projects. The teacher is able to take time to develop relationships during genius hour time that they simply don’t have the time to cultivate during the regular work week. A by-product of Genius Hour is students raise their standards of performance during the normal curriculum time because of the relationships that the teacher has built with them during genius hour time.

4. **Teaching 21st century skills** – Common core and state standards include technology integration as a skill that students should learn and possess. Although technology is not required for genius hour, many teachers have found that many students choose to create their final projects with technology that is not taught in the classroom. Almost all students use technology to research their project as well. Genius hour is a huge opportunity to introduce new technology skills to the students. The students also teach the teacher technology that they may not know about during this time also. It’s a win-win for both. The key to a successful genius hour proposal is to be prepared with all of the positive outcomes from a genius hour project.

**Essential Editable**

**Resources to Successfully**

**Implement Genius Hour**

**In School/Grade-level/**

**Course/Class**













