Working with Middle School Students

While these tips are fairly universal, we advise heading into the tutoring space with an open mind. **The best strategies are student-specific rather than age-specific.** That being said, we hope you find these tips helpful!

Tip #1:

Get to know each other.

Before you jump into an assiment, ask the student about their day. Tell them about yours. Find out how their other classes are going, or inquire about their interests. Do they align with what you're inerested in? Do they relate to the assignment? You can begin to make content-specific connections while also building trust and rapport.

What to Say or Ask:
"Tell me about yourself."

"How's your day going?"

"How do you feel about this class?"

"What's the best class you're in right now?"

"What do you like to do outside of school?"

"What are you most interested in?"

What to Do:
Listen enthusiastically as the student explains their interests.

Introduce yourself (your name, why you're here, what you're interested in).

Begin to think about how you might engage the student in this assignment based on their interests.

Tip #2:

Read the prompt or assigment together.

Once you move on from getting to know each other, take a look at the prompt or assigment together. You could ask the student to explain their assigment to you (even if you already understand the task at hand!) to see how well they understand what they're being asked to do. At this stage, make yourself available to answer any questions the student may have about their prompt or assignment.

Tip #3:

Be positive and encouraging.

Your role as a volunteer is to be a sounding board for students' ideas. Continue to support the student as they begin to strategize about how they might complete the assignment, offering positivity, encouragement, and excitement about their thoughts and their progress. Remind them that their ideas matter.

Tip #4:

Brainstorm ideas together.

In addition to being a sounding board, you can also contribute to students' brainstorming process. Ask open-ended questions that encourage students to expand upon their thoughts, and offer ideas about how an assignment might be structured or completed.

Help students break down big ideas and assignments into manageable chunks (like an intro, evidence, and a conclusion) with measurable goals (such writing body paragraphs today.)

Tip #5:

Creatively keep students on-task.

Friends are awesome, but they can also be distracting. As the session continues, get creative with ways to redirect side conversations back to assignment. It is not your responsibility to discipline students, but you can motivate them to return to their work by reminding them of their goals for the day.

Tip #6:

Encourage productive group-work.

If students are working together in a group, try to keep most of the conversation focused on the prompt or assignment. Bring the students together and invite them to engage in conversation with each other by asking them open-ended questions. Keep an eye on who's participating, and try to draw quieter students into the discussion.

Tip #7:

Model respectful behavior.

Last but certainly not least, be sure that you are modelling behaviors and interactions that students should be emulating. Whether engaging with the teacher, a teacher's aid, a facilitator, or another student, show respect and a desire to learn.

Additional Resources:

For further tips on working with middle school students, check out:

- "7 Creative Ways to Reach Middle School Students," We Are Teachers
- "The Art of Managing Middle School Students," Edutopia
- "How to Motivate Students: Tips for Middle Schoolers," Teach Hub