

SCHOOLS OF FISH!

STUDY GUIDE

Grab a cup of coffee, hot cocoa, wine – whatever you prefer – and pull up a chair. The stories, essays, and FISH!® thoughts in *Schools of FISH!™* are meant to awaken, affirm, provoke, cajole, and otherwise incite you to examine how *you create* the culture of your classrooms and schools.

This guide asks questions, questions designed to make you think about what inspires you, tell your own stories, argue about best practices, share new and old ideas, challenge entrenched beliefs, but most of all re-ignite the idealism that fueled your desire to be an educator in the first place.

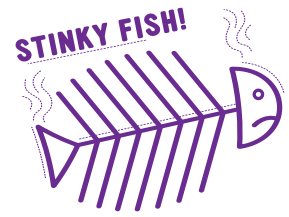
Feel free to make copies of this guide and start a book club with your colleagues. If you have ideas for new questions, questions about FISH! For Schools™ curriculum or workshops, or just want to connect with the passionate and dedicated education team at ChartHouse Learning, contact us at schools@charthouse.com.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- Growing up, who was your best teacher? What made him/her great?
- How do you think your students describe you? Does that match how you would like to be described?
- What is your philosophy of education?
- How do you bring your philosophy to life as you interact with students, parents, colleagues, administrators...?

A TEACHER'S STRUGGLE

- Describe your ideal classroom. How does that compare to your classroom now? What accounts for the difference?
- Have you ever had one of *those* classes? What worked? What didn't?
- What do you have in common with Chris?
- What do teachers like Chris – excellent but struggling with their students – need in order to turn things around?
- What role does administration play in your setting? Active support? Lip service support? Well-meaning, but not helpful? Actively in the way?
- What is your point of view on “ownership?” How much ownership should students have in a classroom?



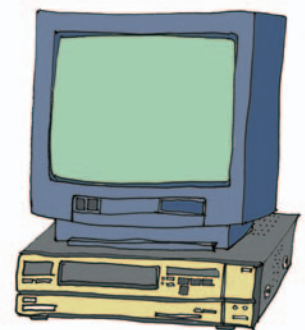
BE THERE

Essay

- In the essay on page 14-15, it is suggested that “Be There starts with the decision to be physically and mentally present.” Do you believe that Be There is a decision? Why/Why not? Are there times when you truly cannot decide?
- As an educator, what is within your control? What is out of your control?
- What is within the control of your students? What is out of their control?
- What impact does that control or lack of control have on learning?

“No One Kept The Good Ones At Home”

- Hartzel Jennings said that the community told him that “kids have changed.” Is that true? Does it matter? Why/Why not?
- If you believe they’ve changed, in what ways have they changed?
- Do you think that at-risk students would respond differently from gifted students when learning The FISH! Philosophy®? Why/Why not?
- Describe a situation or time when you did NOT feel accepted? How did it impact how you learned in school?



“The Good Keeps Me Going”

- How does/would greeting students by name in class, in the hallway, or outside of school impact your school environment?
- Are names important? Why/why not?
- Bonita Alston’s life experiences definitely had an impact on how she lives The FISH! Philosophy. How, do you imagine, your upbringing would impact your living of The FISH! Philosophy?
- Are there things or events in your background, or life outside of school, that you use to justify feeling negative?
- What is your approach to discipline? What about it works for you? For your students? How is their behavior when you are not with them?
- In the quote on page 27, Austin suggests that happiness is a decision. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

**The Teacher Who Flunked**

- Julie shares some of her personal experiences with her students. What have you shared with your students? How has it impacted their learning? How much sharing is beneficial and how much is too much?
- Thinking about your own life experiences, what might students learn if you shared with them?
- Have any of your former students contacted you to let you know how you impacted them? How did that feel? What was different about that relationship?
- When you were a student teacher, which teachers were your role models? What was desirable/undesirable about your lead teachers?
- Talk about some of your students who’ve been challenging, but have made progress. How have you recognized their achievements? What else could you do?
- Just like we practice writing and math skills, what interpersonal/relationship skills can you give your students opportunities to practice?



FISH! Thought: Control vs. Commitment

- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being totally teacher controlled and 10 being totally student controlled, how would you rate your room? What would the advantages/disadvantages be if you moved toward the other end of the spectrum?
- “What do you want your students to be like, long after they’ve left you?” How do/can you contribute to that?
- Is the level of control you exert in your classroom always supportive of your students becoming the kinds of adults you’d hope them to be? When does your control get in the way?

“What Memory Would You Like To Erase?”

- When you read about the memories that the two students wanted to erase, how did you feel? Without breaching any confidences, describe what you felt and why.
- What memory would you like to erase? How does that memory impact your ability to teach or learn?
- In the anecdote about stickers, Charla realizes that even tough 20-something gang members desire recognition and validation. How do you recognize and validate your students? Colleagues?
- Have any of your students ever said anything so surprising that you could not help but laugh? What was said? How did you respond?
- React to the quote from John Ruskin, “Children need models rather than critics.”

FISH! Thoughts: Planting Seeds

- Have any of your former students turned out significantly different from how you expected? How?
- Do you agree that for all but the rarest exception, if we as educators approach our students with “patience, encouragement, and hopefulness,” they will eventually bloom? Why/Why not?
- Is it possible to “waste” kindness?

“It Means No One Has To Be Alone”

- When are you willing to make leaps of faith and try new things? When are you more likely to wait, watch, and see? What are the advantages/disadvantages of approaching changes in schools this way?
- In what circumstances are you a wait and see type? A leap of faith type?
- Amy Amsden chose to put up a poster and set out a stuffed fish. These were the only external changes to her physical environment. What role does your physical environment have on your students? On you?
- Lee was able to discuss her fears with her assistant principal Kevin. How, do you imagine, did Kevin make it comfortable enough to allow that to happen? What did Kevin and Lee gain from this?
- Lee’s students declared that FISH! is something they can do all their lives. What are some ways your students can do FISH! now and in the future?
- We all get nervous and have fears. Who helps you deal with your fears? What do they do that helps?
- Thinking back on your experiences in school, were there school personnel, besides your teachers, who had an impact on your learning? Who? How?

**“Good People Are Waiting”**

- Describe a time when your colleagues have really been there for you. What did that do for you? For them?
- What are some tough things that you or your students have dealt with either in or out of school?
- How would you handle or how have you handled the death of a student or colleague? What would you want your students and staff to do/know/appreciate/feel/be following such an experience?
- How can you turn tragedy and loss into something positive for your students, your school, yourself?
- Robert, the boy who died from cancer, chose an attitude of optimism and joy. Whatever he was doing, his way of being allowed others to see beyond his illness. How are you being that rubs off on others?



PLAY

Essay

- What words come to mind when you think of “work”?
- What words come to mind when you think of “play”?
- What are the benefits of Play?
- What is the relationship between fear, creativity, and Play?
- Can you be creative without being Play-ful?

“It’s My Job To Care”

- Ever had one of those days when Murphy’s Law was in full force? What choices did you make that made it better? Worse?
- High school teachers often express concern that their students will not respond to playfulness. Are they justified, or is there a different approach that makes more sense?
- Kristin has a great sense of humor, but not everyone is funny. How can those who were not given the comedy gene create a sense of light-heartedness in their classrooms and schools?
- Kristin used a novel approach to a number of mundane routines – getting the students quiet, encouraging participation, improving pronunciation. What are some mundane elements of your day that you could make more Play – ful?
- Have you ever contacted a parent with good news? How did that feel? What impact did it have on you, the parent, or the student?
- “The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving.” As an educator, what does this quote mean to you?



FISH! Thought: Honest Questions

- What questions get under your skin? How do you respond?
- What are some of the best questions that students, parents, or colleagues have asked?
- What are some things you do to maintain your curiosity?
- We sometimes say that there is no such thing as a dumb question, but there are some questions that are more powerful than others? What questions have you asked of students that were really powerful? What made them so?

“But You’re A Girl”

- What’s the most surprising thing you’ve ever done to relate to your students?
- Describe the learning differences between boys and girls in your class. Are these differences genetic or learned? How do they impact the way you teach?
- Are there differences in the way girls and boys play? In the way they learn? How do these differences impact learning?

“Who’m I Talkin’ To?”

- Why did you choose to become an educator? Is that the same reason that you continue to choose to be an educator? Explain.
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of “controlled chaos?”
- When Rick Wagoner gets really frustrated he focuses on one student’s face to remind himself why he is teaching. What strategies do you use to handle frustration?
- What are your staff lounge conversations like? How do they impact the morale, mood, culture of your school?
- Rick Wagoner states, “The reason teaching is so dangerous is that with one word you can destroy a kid’s spirit.” Agree? Disagree? Why? Have you seen this happen?
- Ben Franklin said, “We do not stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.” When do you feel most “old” at school? Most “young”?

**The Cheerleader And The Football Player**

- Katrina Smith improvised a story to engage her students while learning Spanish. How often do you improvise while teaching? How does it feel when you do? What are the keys to successful improvisation?
- Sometimes we get stuck in a rut. List the strategies that you often use for presenting new concepts. What else might you try?
- What kinds of recognition do you, your students, your parents, your administration, and your school receive? How does it feel? How could you increase positive recognition?

FISH! Thought: Creativity Has No Routine

- What are the benefits of routines? What problems can routines cause?
- How can routines impede creativity and innovation?
- How willing are you to experiment with the routines in your classroom or school in order to make learning more fun and engaging? How might that keep students interested? How might that help keep you interested?

The Book Without An Ending

- How would you respond if your students suddenly did the wave when one of them answered a question correctly?
- The students in Jana DeHart’s class brainstormed a number of strategies for each of The FISH! Philosophy principles. For the next several few minutes do a brainstorm of your own. What strategies can you use to Be There, Play, Make Their Day, and Choose Your Attitude?

“You Gave Us Back Our Child”

- Michelle Tibbs and her colleagues turned the punishment of missing Fun Fridays into an opportunity for one-on-one attention. What are some of the punishments you use? Can any of them be turned into opportunities?
- There are some students and teachers who end up in a downward spiral. Behavior leads to punishment which leads to even worse behavior... Discuss students you fear may be falling into that rut with you. Use your colleagues to invent plans to help pull you out of that spiral.
- Is it reasonable to expect perfection? Why? Why not?
- Heraclitus, the 6th century Greek philosopher, stated, “We are most nearly ourselves when we achieve the seriousness of the child at play.” What does he mean?

**MAKE THEIR DAY****Essay**

- What makes your day?
- What have you done to make the day of your students, colleagues, administration, parents, self...?
- How do you feel when you make someone’s day?

A Universal Language

- How do you think the job of educator has changed over the last 15-20 years?
- How do you plan for cultural differences?
- Discuss the concept of “common language.” How might developing some common language help your classroom or school culture?
- Piper reported that she finished more curriculum than usual; even though she had spent time teaching The FISH! Philosophy. How was that possible?
- Playwright and poet Richard Dehmel said, “A little kindness from person to person is more valuable than a vast love of humankind.” What might this mean for educators? Administrators?



FISH! Thought: What's Your Focus?

- In the classroom, office, library – wherever you do what you do – what is your focus?
- Often we blame others for things we don't like, but the fact is we cannot change others, we can only change ourselves. What are some things about our school that we do not like? What can each of us do to change them?

“If You Can't Say Something Nice...”

- Looking back, were there times when, like Charla, you did not act but now regret it? What happened? What similar situations might you encounter in the future and how would you respond differently?

The Unreadable Assignment

- How might being vulnerable in front of your students affect the way they perceive you or themselves?
- What role do natural consequences play in your setting? Are your students really aware of them? How can you know?
- Jason Pelowski engaged a “popular” student to open the doors for a student who did not have the same social skill. How do you feel about this approach? What are the benefits? Drawbacks? Keys to success?
- Talk about a time when you've reached out to a student who was really struggling. What happened for him or her? For you?

FISH! Thought: Fear Gets An F

- How does fear impact learning?
- How does fear impact teaching?
- What can/do you do to alleviate fear in your setting?
- What policies does your school have in place to enhance emotional safety?
- High school senior, Bell, reported that because she and her classmates were having fun, not goofing off, they created a safer environment for all. How can you create that kind of environment?

Turn It Up A Notch

- Principal Scott Raftery describes FISH! as an invitation. What does that mean? How does that impact how open people are to The FISH! Philosophy?
- As a staff, do you tend to spend staff meetings on problems or on what is going well? What is the right balance?
- As educators, we play a variety of roles for students, colleagues, parents, administrators, and the community. During the next three minutes, make a list to see how many different roles you play. How does that list make you feel?
- What behaviors do your administrators model that are reflected in the school?
- What behaviors of yours are reflected in your students?
- What would you say your “Breakfast of Champions” is?

**FISH! Thought: First Live It**

- If you were going to choose one attitude or behavior that you would like others to “catch” from you, what would it be? How can you make that happen?

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CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE

Essay

- What is the difference between a feeling and an attitude? Do we have a choice about either or both of these?
- How can we effectively “choose” our attitudes?
- Are there certain people who always seem to upset us? What assumptions do we have about their intentions, their motives? What might happen if we assumed (set aside whether we are right or wrong) that they have the most positive intentions at heart?
- What do you do to choose a beneficial attitude?
- What strategies can you teach your students for choosing attitudes that accomplish what they hope to accomplish?

The “Annihilation” Philosophy

- Why is it that when asked what we don’t like, we can make a list a mile long, but when asked for the positives, we sometimes struggle? (If you don’t think this is true, make a list of the things you’d like to change about yourself and another of the things about you that you think are great.)
- How might the impact on John DeFelice’s school have been different if a clean up crew and gardeners had come in to spruce up the building and grounds rather than the faculty and students pitching in together?
- Have you ever felt like using the “annihilation” philosophy? Did it work? Did the effects last? Why? Why not?
- What opportunities do you have to coach each other? How can/do you coach your peers in a positive, helpful way? What is required of the “coacher” and the “coachee”?
- When parents prepare to contact you about a problem, what do you think they are thinking and feeling? What impact would you like to have on those thoughts and feelings? What can you do to achieve that impact?
- How will students who are inspired learn differently from those who are not? What inspires you? Your students?



FISH! Thought: Who Are You Being?

- Who are you being while you're doing what you're doing?

"I Caught The Baby On The Way Out"

- Reading about the challenges facing Denise and her students, what struck you? What did you feel and think?
- Looking forward, rather than wallowing in the poor decisions of the past, is a central theme in Denise Mileson's classes. What experiences from your past do you hold on to – for better or worse? What might happen if you let go of these and put more emphasis on where you want to go?
- Denise notes that being a teacher is more than preparing lesson plans. What is most challenging about what you do? What is most rewarding?
- What role does love play in your teaching?

**FISH! Thought: New Day, New Choices**

- What is the difference between seeing students for the choices they have already made and envisioning them with the choices they could potentially make?
- When someone realizes that s/he has made a poor choice, what stops him/her from making a new, hopefully better, choice? Has this ever happened to you?
- Brainstorm ways that you might approach this idea with your students. How can they make the choice to start from now, rather than living in the past?

"Give A Little Part Of Yourself"

- Steve Colorio says, "Every student is different, but they all want the same thing." What do you think that thing is?
- Choosing "the right thing for the right reason" is not always easy to do. What are some situations for you, where choosing was especially difficult? Why? How might that be different in the future?
- Steve concludes his story, saying, "The greatest thing you can give another person ... is a little something of yourself." What "little something" do you want to give to your students? Your colleagues? Parents? Administration?



The Attitude Board

- In what ways are schools like other workplaces? How are they different?
- In Bob Kohut’s classroom, the students and teacher share responsibility for the well-being of everyone in the room, including guests. How does the way he approaches Choose Your Attitude impact the classroom culture?
- Discuss Bob’s assertion that “social skills aren’t separate from academic success; they are the path to it.”
- If Ralph Waldo Emerson is correct and “The secret in education lies in respecting the student,” how do we as educators demonstrate and teach respect?



FISH! Thought: The Real Self-Esteem

- What elements of your curriculum or approach intentionally deal with self-esteem? Are they effective? Why/why not?
- Thinking about the students you currently serve, how does each one’s self-esteem impact his or her ability to learn? What are you or can you do to improve that situation?
- Since we cannot “award” self-esteem, what can we do to create opportunities for students to earn it?

A TEACHER'S PURPOSE

A Place Kids Don't Want To Leave

- How would you answer the question from David St. Germain's first interview, "What word best describes what learning should be?"
- David notes that too often, people show the video FISH! and then expect things to take care of themselves. The reality is that any positive change requires effort. What kinds of effort does it take to improve the culture of your classroom, school, or district?
- Are you the same person inside your classroom as you are outside of school? Why? Why not? How does that work for you? For your students?
- How do you feel about David's approach to discipline – "spending less time telling students what to do, and more time asking what they thought *they* should do?" What might you gain by this approach? What's the risk?
- How does Choose Your Attitude empower students? Educators?
- David's assignment to his colleagues – the living eulogy – costs nothing, but potentially gives the recipients a kind of recognition that they would never otherwise receive. Try it on one of your colleagues. See how it feels for them and for you.
- David says, "The easiest way to kill [FISH!] is to mandate it." How could you as individuals or as a staff bring The FISH! Philosophy to life in your setting?
- What does the statement "this is what I was meant to do" mean for you?
- How does the quote, "Example has more followers than reason" impact the way you show up as an educator?



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT:

- FISH! For Schools K-12 curriculum for creating vibrant, meaningful, and effective school culture
- FISH! For Schools LIVE National Workshops for teachers and administrators
- On-site workshops for districts and schools

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