

Encouraging students to embrace their curiosity is an important part of education.

Curiosity is key to learning. In fact, studies show that, when we're curious about a subject, we are much more likely to remember information we learned about that subject. If you're an educational professional or are considering earning a teaching degree and entering the classroom knowing how to ignite student curiosity can help you improve learning outcomes.



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Encourage Questions

Curiosity most often begins with “why?” Why does natural gas burn blue? Why is blue spelled blue and not blew? Why does the wind blow? If you want to fire up your students’ curiosity, you need to encourage them to ask—and try to answer—questions. That means you should avoid giving dry lectures where you explain everything. Instead, try designing your classes so that you’re posing questions, either implicitly or explicitly. And be sure to leave openings for students to participate and ask questions about what they’re learning.

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Make Room for the Unstructured

Not every question your students ask will be a question you expect. But all questions demonstrate a curious mind, so don't dismiss questions that don't fit with your lesson. Instead, leave unstructured time in class to address unexpected questions, or establish a system whereby unexpected questions can be "stored" for later, like on a whiteboard or in an online document.

In addition to making room for unexpected questions, you should also make room for student exploration of their questions. If you provide all the answers, your students' curiosity might wane, but if you give your students unstructured time to experiment with/discuss/explore questions, their curiosity is likely to expand.

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Be Enthusiastic

Presumably, you enjoy teaching. Let your students see that enjoyment. In particular, let them see your own curiosity. Even if you know all the answers for a given lesson—and no unanswered questions arise—try to recapture the curiosity you felt when you were first learning what you’re teaching. Think of yourself as an explorer leading an expedition. You may have traveled the path before, but you’re excited to show others what you’ve found and eager to hear their take on things. The more you demonstrate your own enthusiasm for discovery, the more likely it is your students will be curious about what you’re teaching.



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Create Time to Consider and Reflect

Curiosity is a fuel. It propels us to try to figure things out and, ultimately, to learn. But that fuel doesn't always need to burn hot, with excited questions and bold experimentation. Curiosity can remain active even when we're more passive, particularly in quieter moments when we can go over what we've uncovered and consider what it all means. Make sure you give your students time for this level of reflection. Have them jot down a journal entry about what interested them most in the day's lesson, or ask them to create a quick piece of art to reflect what they've learned. Not only does this kind of reflection aid in learning, it can also teach students to make curiosity a constantly present part of their lives.