

Read-aloud and extension activity for IT'S HARD TO BE A VERB by Julia Cook

Objectives:

Students should develop:

- A basic understanding of ADHD and the challenges it presents to those who have it
- Greater empathy for those with ADHD
- Understanding that it is not acceptable to tease or label those with ADHD.

Background/introduction:

It's Hard To Be a Verb is about a boy named Louis who has urges to move at the wrong times and places and difficulty controlling himself. Rather than labeling him by his ADHD, his mother cleverly refers to him as “a verb.” Understanding that Louis needs to control his impulses, she helps him develop effective techniques and coping strategies.

Children who struggle with focus and organizational skills can be challenging in a classroom. Since internal organization can be very difficult for students with ADHD, external organization becomes very important. When students develop greater understanding of both the challenges faced by someone with ADHD and the strategies that can help, better peer relationships typically emerge.

Materials:

It's Hard To Be a Verb, whiteboard or chalkboard, paper, clipboards, pencils

Activities:

1. Book introduction and game (15 minutes)

- Set up hangman game on the board using the word “verb.” Once students guess the word, discuss definition and ask students to give examples of verbs.
- Introduce book.

2. Read-aloud

While reading, ask students to identify how their bodies feel when they're “a verb.” Say, “Louis feels itchy and jumpy. How do you feel? Is it your body? Is it your mind? Is it both?”

- “Why does Louis’s mom call him a verb? What does that mean?”
- “Do you know what ADHD is?” (Can explain after students give answers)
- “Do you ever feel like a verb? Give examples.”

3. Writing and Distraction Activity (2 parts: 10 minutes each)

- Ask students to write about their favorite activity and why they like it. Provide some ideas to get them started: sports, family time, hobbies, video games, travel, etc.

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- Once students begin writing, interrupt and distract them by making comments or asking questions. For example: “It’s beautiful out today!” or “What is that pencil doing on the floor?” or “Who is walking by the room right now?” This illustrates how hard it is to stay focused when there are distractions that grab students’ attention.
- Give students clipboards and paper. Students will walk around room with clipboard and copy exactly what teacher is writing on board. (Teacher can write about anything.) Students must not stop while writing - they need to continue to walk and to copy what’s on the board, demonstrating how it challenging it can be to focus on a task when moving.)

3. Follow up questions and debrief (10 minutes)

- What was it like being distracted while you were writing about what you like to do?
- Was it hard to concentrate? Why?
- Did you feel scattered and lose your thoughts? Explain or give an example.
- Did you feel frustrated? Why?
- Thinking about the walking around activity and copying from the board, was that hard? Why?
- Would it have been easier to sit still and focus on the words and copying?
- Did it make you frustrated? Why?

Say to students: “Sometimes it’s very hard for people to focus and sit still, just like Louis. They can’t help this; it’s just the way their bodies are. In school students are expected to be good listeners and focus on their work. What are some ways students behave when they are focused? (Listening eyes, hands, feet)

- Why do we need to be good listeners?
- If someone is having a hard time listening, how can we help him or her?
- What might be some ways people can get their wiggles out so they can focus?
- Do people have different tools/strategies to stay focused? Give some examples.
- Let’s brainstorm some places where it is ok to be a verb. (PE class, recess, playgrounds, motor breaks in the classroom)
- Should people get teased because it’s hard for them to sit still and stay focused?
- What can you do if you hear someone being teased?

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