

Upgrading your class for a middle school audience in a couple easy steps!

1. Experienced Splash teachers: take your curriculum for one of your classes and cut down to a third. You don't need to reduce the rigor, just reduce the amount of material you present.
 - 1a. Inexperienced Splash teachers: jot down all the things you'd want to teach about topic. Now choose one and only one.
2. If a "typical" high school Splash class format is lecture from :05 to :55, then think of your "typical" middle school Splash class as having four "acts"
 - A. Warmup/getting to know you (~5-10 minutes)
 - B. Lesson (~20 minutes)
 - C. Activity that reviews and extends the lesson creatively (~10 minutes)
 - D. "What did you learn today" and answering crazy questions time
3. More information on each of the acts:
 - A. Middle school students are lacking in social/adaptation skills, and they're going to feel uncomfortable. Play a warmup game with them. You may not think at first this is a good use of classroom time, but I promise you that this time invested in a warm-up is going to reward you in the lesson because your kids are going to be good to go. If you are doing a lecture, then have kids introduce themselves to the person sitting next to them and give them an assignment (e.g. what's the weirdest thing you have in common? Does anybody in this room have your birthday?) Sometimes you have to go over and introduce the students to each other because they are too shy to do it themselves.

Bonus points: do a quick survey of the kids and notice anybody who seems overly out of it. If it's a smaller class, use out loud introductions to jot down names on a seating chart. That way you can call on individual names without knowing the kids really,
 - B. Give them a clear lesson objective that they can cling to to measure their learning. E.g. you say, "Today, you are going to learn why Alan Turing was the bomb dot com."

Bonus points: have the kids echo the objective back to you by asking questions that confirm that you guys are all on the same page and you they know what you're talking about

C. You can fangirl about Alan Turing for a bit, but then turn it over to the students to apply and extend the knowledge you've given them.

So maybe you give them something Alan Turing wrote about the Turing machine and ask them to imagine they received this in a letter and you ask the kids to respond to his ideas in a way they imagine to be historically appropriate. (So if you just finished telling them how unusual Turing was, this is their opportunity to be creative and expressive while solidifying the ideas presented in the lecture.)

That's just one example. Others are:

- give students math and physics problems to solve, alone or in groups
- invite students to write a poem modeled after one that was analyzed
- have them imagine they are scientists, and ask them to develop research questions around the material just presented (this approach nearly always works for any topic!)
- ask them which philosopher/idea they disagree with most and why (I'm a fan of "like least" because it allows students to be critical thinkers in a way that "like most" does not.)

Bonus points: break up the room into different stations and have the kids share with each other what they did at each station. (This is a nice trick not only for differentiation, but for making everybody in the classroom feel that their input is important, but also because not everybody has the same information or did the same activity.)

D. What did you learn? Leave some time at the end for questions, extensions, and a "cool down." Assess their understanding of the topic, invite those crazy questions that you know the kids want to ask, and see if conversation wanders somewhere excellent, as it often does.