



How Come We Raise Our Hands to Talk in Class?

In the merry old days of schools, in a village far away, a teacher asked her class a simple question.

“Who has something to share?”

The classroom exploded with noise. Everyone started talking at once.

“I do! I do!”

“Pick me! Pick me!”

“I never get a turn.”

“Let me share!”

The teacher waved her hands. “One at a time! One at a time!” she cried.

But no one heard her. Everyone was too busy calling out, talking over one another. Everyone was eager to share something. The noise was terrific.

Not far from the schoolyard stood a crooked, thatched-roof cottage. Inside lived a wise old wizard and his tabby cat. Cobwebs laced the walls, fireflies lit the single room, and crickets chirped cheerful tunes in the shadows.

No place in the village was more peaceful, except for one thing—the clamor from the nearby school. Each morning, as the wizard stirred his potions and the cat prowled for mice, children's shouts came sailing through the windows. And every afternoon, when they both tried to nap, the racket drove them batty.

Finally, on that spring day when the class was calling out, eager to share, the wizard and his cat could take no more.

"Yowl!" cried the cat, its tail twitching.

"I know the children want to be called on," said the wizard, stuffing moss in his ears. "But the noise! The noise! Must they be so loud?"

The shelves above the wizard's workbench held jars of bugs and other crawly things--ladybugs, fire ants, jewel beetles, inchworms, stink bugs, bumblebees, dragonflies, and fleas. He reached up and took down a

large jar filled with fluttering moths. Each one was a different color and no bigger than a nickel. A faded label on the glass read:

Mouth Moths

"Time to go to work, my beauties," he said. "Enjoy the Adam's apples."

"Yowl!" the tabby repeated.

The wizard uncorked the lid, and out flew twenty moths, one for each noisy student in the classroom.

The cat sprang after them, batting at the air with its paws. Like tiny, colorful kites, the moths flitted out the cottage door.

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, the noise grew louder still. Sharing time was over, and the teacher had moved on to math.

"Who knows seven times seven?" she asked.

The outburst was instant and deafening.

"I know, I know!"

"Call on me! Call on me!"

"Easy! That's easy!"

At that very moment, the wizard's moths flew through the open windows. As each student shouted, a moth darted into an open mouth. No one saw them; no one felt a thing. But one by one, the mouth moths landed softly on each of their Adam's apples.

The teacher nodded toward Gabby in the front row.
“Gabby, tell us the answer.”

Gabby was excellent at math and eager to please. She was rarely wrong. She also knew if you called out the loudest and whined a little, you were more likely to get picked.

But this time, as she opened her mouth to say,
“Forty- nine!” something remarkable happened.

A blue moth flew out. It fluttered around her nose and made her sneeze.

“Achoo!”

It tickled her chin, batted her eyelashes, and flitted about her ears. Then it zipped in and out of a nostril.

“Achoo! Achoo!”

Gabby waved a hand in front of her face, trying to swat the moth away. But it slipped through her fingers and brushed her lips. Still beating its blue wings, it circled her head as if she were a lightbulb.

The teacher gave Gabby a puzzled look. She didn’t seem to see the moth at all.

“Stop it! Go away!” Gabby said.

But the moment her mouth opened, the moth shot back in. Quickly, she clamped her jaws shut.

“Gabby? Are you all right?” asked the teacher. “Do you know seven times seven?”

Gabby shrugged. She dared not open her mouth

again. Where had that moth come from? What was it doing inside her throat?

“Anyone else?” asked the teacher. “Who knows seven times seven.”

Once again, the room erupted with shouts.

“I do! I do!”

“That’s easy!”

“Me! Me! Me”

The teacher pointed to Jacob in the second row.

“Okay, Jacob. Let’s hear it.”

The moment Jacob opened his mouth, he swatted wildly at the air, just like Gabby.

Although Gabby couldn’t see it, she knew what was happening. A moth had flown out of Jacob’s mouth too. It was flitting around his head, driving him nuts.

“Hey! Stop! Go away!” he shouted.

Then—*snap!*— his mouth shut tight.

Yes, Gabby thought, *The moth went back in.*

“Well,” said the teacher. “I guess no one knows the answer to seven times seven.”

Voices filled the room again.

One after the other, the teacher called on students, and one by one, they wrinkled their noses and flapped their hands in front of their faces. Then, one by one, their mouths snapped shut.

Everyone in the class must have a moth in their

mouth, Gabby thought. Mouth moths. I bet that old wizard who lives nearby has something to do with this.

In the front of the room, the teacher scowled. "Well then," she said. "Since, you're all acting silly today, maybe we'll switch to reading. We can review our times tables some other time. Please take out your reading books."

Gabby opened her desks and grabbed her reader. Around the room, her classmates did the same. They all sat stiff and straight, mouths clamped shut.

"Jennifer, please page six," the teacher said, nodding toward a girl in the back row.

Jennifer shook her head.

The teacher's voice sharpened. "Well then, Charles, please read."

Charles, who sat next to Gabby, gave a quick shake of his head too.

Gabby's heart pounded. Someone had to do something. The teacher was getting angrier by the second. But if anyone opened their mouth, the moth would escape. How could anyone explain the wizard's trick when no one could say a word?

She thought fast.

The blue mouth must be deep in my throat. Maybe it's sitting on the back of my tongue, or all the way down near my Adam's apple.

She swallowed, but she couldn't feel it move.

Would eating a cracker, make the moth slide down to my stomach? she wondered.

No. She had a better idea.

Maybe if I clutched my throat and opened my mouth at the same time, the moth wouldn't be able to fly out.

But even as she thought it, she knew pressing on her throat wouldn't be safe.

So she came up with an even better idea.

What if I raised both my arms? That might press on my neck just enough to keep the moth in, she thought.

She gave it a try. Quickly, she raised both arms high above her head and opened her mouth wide.

It worked. No moth appeared.

"Ha! You're trapped in there, mouth moth," she said through her lips. "Now I can talk without you pestering me."

Gabby tested it again, this time raising just one arm.

Right arm up, mouth open. Good. Still no moth.

"Yes," she said aloud. "Mouth moth problem solved."

Meanwhile, the frustrated teacher scanned the room. "Okay, does *anyone* want to read today?"

Once again, silence.

But, in the front row, Gabby slowly raised her hand.

The teacher stared at her. Then, to Gabby's surprise, she smiled.

"Gabby, why is your arm up?" she asked. "You look ridiculous."

Gabby took a deep breath. With her hand still in the air, she opened her mouth.

"A mouth moth," she said.

The teacher blinked. "A *mouth moth*," she repeated.

"I think the wizard sent them," Gabby said.

The teacher nodded. "Oh, I see," she said. "Yes, the wizard complains often about the noise coming from our school."

"And I figured out that raising my hand presses my throat a little," Gabby explained. "That keeps the moth from flying out."

Now the other students saw what Gabby was doing. One by one, they raised their hands too.

"Charles, do you have a mouth moth as well," the teacher asked.

Cautiously, Charlie opened his mouth. When no moth appeared, he said, "A red one. It flew around my head. It was awful."

The teacher called on Jennifer.

"Mine was pink," she said. "It was terrible. Only I could see it."

"Now I understand," said the teacher. "Today during

math and reading you weren't all being stubborn. You just didn't want to your mouth moths from bothering you."

The entire class nodded.

"Well, I must admit, the wizard's trick worked," said the teacher. "The room has been much quieter."

Gabby raised her hand again. She waved it back and forth hoping the teacher would call on her.

"Yes, Gabby," the teacher said. "Do you have a comment?"

"Maybe raising our hand before we talk is a good idea," Gabby said. "It makes it easier for you to call on us. And it keeps our moths from flying out. Plus, when everyone shouts at once, I can't even hear my own voice."

Her classmates nodded.

The teacher smiled. "I agree," she said. "Let's try it. From now on, if you want to speak in class, raise your hand first."

Jennifer's hand shot up. "Which hand should we raise?" she asked.

"Either one," said the teacher. "Just wait for me to call on you."

So it began. From that day on, raising a hand before speaking in class became a school tradition, just as it is today. And, thanks to Gabby and the wizard, classrooms

have stayed much quieter ever since.

As for the mouth moths? By the end of the school day, they turned into peppermint drops. When the students swallowed them, they all had minty fresh breath.

And what about the wizard and his cat? Now they could work and nap in peace...almost. One problem remained. When school let out, the noise outside was the noisiest noise of all.

“Hurrah! We're free!

"So long, school!"

"No more pencils! No more books!"

“Race you home!”

“Last one into the pond is a monkey’s uncle!”

The cat howled and the wizard tugged at this beard. More magic would be needed. How could he make the village quieter *after* school?

From a high shelf, he grabbed a jar full of buzzing black flies.

“The mouth moths did their job well, my beauties” he said. “Now I have a task for *you*.”

He uncorked the jar and the flies swarmed out in a cloud. They landed on a crust of bread on the table.

The wizard leaned in and whispered his plan.

“Tomorrow, fly into every classroom in the school. Find each teacher and buzz this message into their ear...”

He let out a gleeful cackle.

“Wouldn’t it be helpful if the children did extra schoolwork after school? That way, they won’t forget your brilliant lessons. Yes, yes...a marvelous idea.”

He gave a wicked grin.

“You should call it...homework.”

"Yowl!" cried the cat.