



How Come We Raise Our Hands in Class? by Douglas Evans

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 paid attention. Everyone was too busy calling out and talking

over each other. They all wanted to share something important. The noise was terrific.



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Not far from the schoolyard stood a crooked, thatched-roof cottage. Inside lived a cranky old wizard and his black crow, Corvus. Cobwebs covered the walls, fireflies lit the single room, and crickets chirped cheerful tunes in the shadows.

No place in the village was more peaceful than that cottage, except for one thing—the daily noise from the nearby school. Each morning, as the wizard mixed potions and stirred his bubbling brews, the children's shouts drifted through the windows. And every afternoon, when he tried reading his big book of spells, the racket drove him batty.

At last, on that spring day when the class was shouting, eager to share, the wizard could take no more.

"The noise! The noise!" he cried, stuffing moss into his ears. "I know the children want a turn to talk. But must they be so loud?"

"Caw!" called Corvus from his perch.

The shelves above the wizard's workbench were crammed with jars of crawly things--fire ants, jewel beetles, inchworms, stink bugs, daddy longlegs, bumblebees, dragonflies, and fleas. Now he reached up for 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 lovelies," he said. "Be good. Don't overdo it. Enjoy the Adam's apples."

The wizard uncorked the lid, and out flew twenty moths, one for each student in the classroom. Like tiny, colorful kites, they flitted around the room. Corvus swooped from his perch and chased them out the cottage door.

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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 window. 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 excelled at math and was eager to please. She was rarely wrong. She also knew that 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, making her sneeze.

“Achoo!”

It tickled her chin, batted her eyelashes, brushed her cheek, and flitted about her ears.

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

The teacher gave Gabby a puzzled look. She seemed not to see the moth.

“Stop it! Go away!” Gabby said, flapping her hand some more.

What a relief! The moment her mouth opened, the moth shot back in. Quickly, she clamped her jaws shut.

“Gabby? Are you all right?” asked the teacher.

The girl nodded.

“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?

The teacher turned toward the class. "Anyone else?" she asked. "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."

But the moment Jacob opened his mouth, he began waving wildly at the air, just as Gabby had.

Although Gabby couldn't see it, she knew what was happening. A moth had flown out of Jacob's mouth, one only he could see. It was fluttering around his head, making him wave and squirm.

"Hey! Stop! Go away!" he shouted.

Then—*snap!*— his mouth shut tight.

Yes, Gabby thought, The moth flew back in.

"Well," the teacher sighed. "Seven times seven. I still haven't heard the answer."

One by one, she called on more students.

Each one began to answer, then wrinkled their nose, waved a hand in front of their face, and snapped their mouth shut.

Gabby watched in awe. *Everyone in the class must have a moth in their mouth, she thought. Mouth moths! I bet the old wizard who lives nearby has something to do with this.*

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

Gabby opened her desk and grabbed her reader. Around the room, her classmates did the same. They all sat stiff and straight, mouths sealed tight.

"Jennifer, read 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, seated beside Gabby, also gave a quick shake of his head.

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 magic when no one could say a word?

She thought fast. *The blue mouth must be deep in my throat, on my tongue, or down by my Adam's apple.*

She swallowed. Nothing moved.

What if I held my throat with both hands and opened my mouth at the same time? That way, the moth wouldn't be able to fly out.

But even as she thought this, she knew grabbing her neck was neither smart nor safe.

She needed a better plan.

Wait, what if I raised my arms? she thought. *That might press on my throat*

just enough to keep the moth inside.

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 tried another test, 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's hand slowly crept upward.

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

“Gabby, why is your arm raised?” she asked. “That looks a little...odd.”

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*?”

“I think the wizard sent them,” Gabby said.

The teacher gave a knowing nod. “Yes, that grumpy wizard is always grumbling about noise from our school and forever casting his buggy spells.”

“Like when he sent yellow jackets to the playground during snack time,” said

Gabby. "After that, we had to eat inside."

"Or when his ants swarmed over Jenny's birthday cupcakes," said the teacher. "Just to keep us from singing the Happy Birthday song."

"But I figured out something," said Gabby. "When I raise my hand, it presses on my neck just enough to keep the moth from flying out."

"Clever, girl," the teacher said. "Sounds like you may have outsmarted the old wizard himself."

Now the other students caught on. One by one, their hands slowly rose in the air.

"Charles, do you also have a mouth moth?" the teacher asked.

Cautiously, the boy 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 wanted to keep your mouth moth from bothering you."

The entire class nodded.

"Well, maybe the wizard's magic worked after all," 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 something else to add?"

Gabby paused before saying, "Maybe we should raise our hands whenever we want to talk. It keeps the moths in, sure, but it also makes it easier for you to call on us. When everyone shouts at once, I can't even hear my own voice."

Again, her classmates nodded in agreement.

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. 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? Now he could work and read in peace...almost. One problem remained. When school let out for the day, 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 wizard tugged at his long beard. More magic would be needed.

"How can I make the village quieter after school?" he asked Corvus.

"Caw!" the crow replied.

He studied the jars on the shelf above his workbench. He read the faded labels aloud, "*Recess Roly-Polies...Banging Desktop Dragonflies...P.E. Bumble Bees...*"



He pulled down a dusty jar filled with hopping black fleas. The label read:

Ear Fleas

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

He uncorked the jar, and the fleas leaped out in a swirling cloud. They landed upon a crust of bread on the table.

The wizard leaned toward them and said softly, "Tomorrow, hop into each classroom in the school. Find the teacher, and whisper this message into her ear..."

He let out a gleeful cackle.

Corvus cawed again.

“Wouldn’t it be helpful if the children did extra schoolwork after school? That way, they won’t forget your brilliant lessons. Yes, yes... this is a marvelous idea.” He gave a wicked grin. *“And here’s what you’ll call it...homework.”*

"Caw!" Corvus crowed.