

RUN THE ROOM

Mr. O's Classroom Management Playbook for
New Teachers

Kamal Imani

Mr. O the Hip Hop Teacher

Run the Room: Mr. O's Classroom Management Playbook for New Teachers

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For every new teacher who drove home in silence after a hard
day and still came back the next morning.

And for every student who needed somebody to hold the line and
hold the door.

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Introduction: Meet Mr. O

Let me guess how you got here.

Maybe you just signed your first teaching contract and you're excited, nervous, and a little scared all at once. Maybe you're three weeks into the school year and somebody already threw a pencil, a chair, or a tantrum. Maybe you're a career changer who knows your subject cold but has never stood in front of thirty-one twelve-year-olds at 1:45 on a Friday. Or maybe you've been at this a while and you want a fresh playbook.

Wherever you're coming from, welcome. Pull up a chair. Not the wobbly one by the pencil sharpener. A good one.

Who I Am

My name is Kamal Imani, but most of my students know me as Mr. O the Hip Hop Teacher. I'm a veteran master teacher with over eighteen years in education, and I've taught in New Jersey and Florida.

I've seen this profession from almost every seat in the building. I've taught honors students who wanted extra credit on top of extra credit. I've worked as a substitute teacher, walking into a new classroom with no relationships and nothing but a lesson plan, if I was lucky. I've had my own classroom for years at a time. I've served as an in-school suspension administrator, which means I spent my days with the students other teachers had sent out, and I learned what was really underneath most of that "bad behavior." I've worked as a career transition coach, helping people figure out their next move. And I spent eight years as a basketball coach, which taught me more about building

a team, running drills, and getting young people to buy into a plan than any college course ever did.

I've taught across most of the special education spectrum. I've worked with students with autism, including students who years ago would have been described as having Asperger's. I've worked with students with ADHD, students with bipolar disorder, students with schizophrenia, and students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. I've taught young people who were in gangs or being pulled toward them. I've done all of this in urban, suburban, and rural schools, and I can tell you that kids are kids everywhere. The zip code changes. The need to be seen, respected, and challenged does not.

I know how to work with students who have IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), and I know how to run a classroom where some students are two grade levels behind and others are ready for the next grade. If that's your class right now, don't panic. This book will show you how.

What I Believe

I believe in honest, open communication with parents. I set up parent-teacher meetings early and often, and I try to build a real school community wherever the school allows it. Teachers can't do this job alone, and families shouldn't be left out of it.

I believe in teaching children to plan their futures early. I teach goal-setting and entrepreneurship to young students because it's never too early to think like a leader, a builder, and an owner. I tell my students every day that they are the future leaders of the world they're about to inherit, and I show them how each subject connects to that world. Math isn't just numbers on a worksheet. It's the money you'll manage, the business you'll run, and the building you'll design. Reading isn't just a test score. It's the contract you'll sign and the story you'll tell.

I believe in movies that support the lesson. Films like *Akeelah and the Bee*, *The Great Debaters*, and *Hidden Figures* show students what it

looks like when hard work, intelligence, and courage meet opportunity. A well-chosen film at the right moment can do what a week of lectures can't.

I believe in compassion and empathy. We teach in a time when many children don't have two fully active parents at home. Some students are raising themselves. Some are raising their younger brothers and sisters. They need structure, but they also need somebody who cares. So I bring a lot of inspiration and motivation into my classroom, and I bring a lot of humor, too. Kids love to laugh, and a class that laughs together learns together.

I believe in hip hop as a teaching tool. I rap some of my lessons. Where my school permits it, I teach students rap, hip hop, and poetry, along with the origin of hip hop as a culture and an art form. I also teach speech communication and acting, because a young person who can stand up and speak with confidence has a tool for life.

I believe in showing up. I tell my students that 80 percent of success is showing up, and once you show up, you give 100 percent. That goes for them, and it goes for me.

I believe in books. I've taught with computers, tablets, and smart boards, and technology has its place. But I prefer less screen time and more real reading and studying. There's something that happens when a student holds a book, turns the pages, and wrestles with the words that a screen just can't replace.

I believe in preparing students for the next grade, not just getting them through this one. And I believe that most conflicts can and should be handled inside the classroom, with conflict resolution, before they ever need to spill over to the main office.

Leaders of the Homeschool

Out of all of this, I created a learning resource called Leaders of the Homeschool, at leadersofthehomeschool.education. Students, parents,

teachers, and homeschoolers can all use it for supplemental learning. It uses animation, humor, and rap to teach skills that stick, including my SCEPS technique for English language arts (Settings, Characters, Events, Problems, Solutions), PEMDAS and the box method for math, and multiplication tables set to music. I'll mention ways you can use resources like this throughout the book.

What Nobody Told You in Teacher Prep

Most teacher-preparation programs do a solid job on lesson planning, standards, learning theory, and assessment. Then you walk into your own classroom and realize the lesson plan was the easy part. The hard part is getting everyone in their seats, quiet enough to hear you, willing to try, and kind enough to each other that learning can happen.

Here's the truth that took me too long to learn: you can't teach a room you can't run. The best lesson in the world dies in a room with no structure. A so-so lesson can still work in a room where students know what to do, feel safe, and trust the person in charge.

New teachers usually make one of two mistakes. Some come in trying to be the "cool" teacher. They want to be liked, so they skip the boring procedures and hope good vibes will carry the day. By October, the students are running the room. Others come in as the drill sergeant. They're so worried about losing control that they lead with threats and punishments. By October, students are compliant on the outside and checked out on the inside, or they're in open rebellion.

There's a third way. I call it running the room. You're serious and firm when it counts, warm and human when it's earned, and organized enough that the classroom practically runs itself. I call that last part automating the classroom, and you'll hear me say it a lot.

How This Book Is Built

Think of this book like an album. Each chapter is a track you can play on its own, but it hits harder when you listen in order.

Part One, Before the First Bell, covers choosing the right school, making your first impression, and setting up your room.

Part Two, Automate the Classroom, covers class jobs, time management, and the routines for hallways, specials, and car line that make or break your reputation in the building.

Part Three, Teaching That Manages Itself, covers engagement, accountability, and reaching every learner in a mixed-level classroom.

Part Four, When Things Go Left, covers rewards and penalties, conflict resolution and bullying, and when to send a student out, refer them, and document it.

Part Five, The Bigger Team and You, covers parents, administrator observations, and protecting yourself, your reputation, and your health.

At the end, you'll find a toolkit of checklists, scripts, and templates you can photocopy and use tomorrow.

Throughout the book, you'll see three recurring features:

MR. O'S MIC DROP: The one big idea from a section, short enough to remember in the middle of chaos.

TRY IT TOMORROW: A small, specific action you can take in your very next class.

SAY THIS, NOT THAT: Real language you can borrow when you don't know what to say.

The classroom stories in this book are composites built from many situations, with names and details changed. If you see yourself or a student you know in one of them, that's the point. These moments happen in schools everywhere.

One Promise Before We Start

Some days you're going to do everything in this book and it's still going to be a rough day. That doesn't mean the strategies failed, and it doesn't mean you failed. It means you teach human beings, and human beings have hard days, too.

Classroom management isn't about being perfect. It's about being consistent enough that your students can predict you, and caring enough that they want to follow you.

Let's get to work.

Part One: Before the First Bell

Chapter 1: Know the School Before You Sign

Classroom management starts before you ever meet your students. It starts when you choose where you're going to work.

A great teacher in a school with no support, no consistent discipline, and toxic politics can get worn down fast. A developing teacher in a school with strong leadership, clear systems, and a healthy culture can grow into a great one. So before you sign that contract, do your homework on the school the same way you'd expect your students to do theirs.

Read the Culture, Not Just the Brochure

Every school has two cultures: the one on the website and the one in the hallway at 11:30 on a Tuesday. You want to see the second one.

Many schools won't tell you about the hard parts during an interview. That's not always dishonest. They need teachers, and they don't want to scare you away. But it means you have to look for yourself.

If you can, ask for a walk-through, and try to schedule it during peak activity times: class changes, lunch, dismissal, or the start of the day. A school at 9:15 with every class locked in a lesson can look calm. The same school at 12:05 during lunch transitions tells you the truth.

While you walk, pay attention to these things:

- How do students move through the hallways? Are teachers standing at their doors, or are the halls unsupervised?
- How do adults talk to students? Do you hear respect, yelling, or silence?
- How do students talk to adults? Do they greet staff, ignore them, or challenge them?

- What's on the walls? Student work and celebrations, or just rules and warnings?
- How many students are sitting outside classrooms or in the front office?
- Do teachers look tired but okay, or tired and defeated?

Questions to Ask in the Interview

The interview is a two-way conversation. You're interviewing them, too. Here are questions that get past the polished answers:

1. What does your school-wide behavior system look like, and how consistently is it used?
2. What happens when a teacher writes a referral? Who handles it, and how quickly?
3. How much support do new teachers get? Is there a mentor program?
4. What were the biggest challenges at this school last year, and what are you doing about them?
5. How many teachers left last year, and why?
6. How much protected planning time do teachers have each week?
7. How often are staff meetings, grade-level meetings, and planning sessions held?

Listen carefully to how they answer, not just what they say. A leader who's honest about challenges and has a plan is often a better bet than one who says everything is perfect.

Understand the Politics

Every building has politics. There are staff members who've been there twenty years and are close with the principal. There are friendships, family ties, and old loyalties you won't see on day one. That's normal, but it matters.

It matters most when something goes wrong. If you have a problem with a colleague who has a long, close relationship with the principal, it can be very hard to get a fair hearing. That's one of the biggest reasons I strongly recommend working in a school system that has a teachers' union or a real human resources department. A union or HR gives you a formal, neutral path to raise a grievance and protect your rights. In a school without one, your only path may run straight through the same people you have a problem with.

Before you accept a job, find out:

- Is there a teachers' union or association? How active is it?
- Is there a district HR office, or is everything handled inside the building?
- Is there a written grievance process?

Know What You're Signing Up For

New teachers are often surprised by how much of the job happens outside of teaching. Be ready for these realities:

Meetings, both planned and impromptu. You'll have staff meetings, grade-level meetings, data meetings, IEP meetings, parent meetings, and teacher planning sessions. Some will be on the calendar. Some will be announced that morning.

Standardized testing. Most schools will train you to proctor standardized and state tests, and those testing windows will take over the calendar. Many schools teach to the test. If you're dreaming of total creative freedom, know that unless you're lucky enough to land in a school that values it, you'll be working inside a pacing guide. You can still be creative, and this book will show you how, but you'll be creative inside a box.

Deadlines, especially for grades. Progress reports, report cards, interim grades, and data entry all have hard deadlines. Missing them can follow you into your evaluation.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: You're not just choosing a job. You're choosing a culture, a leader, and a support system. Choose with your eyes open.

TRY IT TOMORROW: If you're job hunting, email one school you're interested in and ask to visit during class changes or lunch. If you're already hired, ask a trusted veteran teacher, "What do you wish someone had told you about this school your first year?"

Chapter 2: The First Impression Is the Foundation

Here's something every veteran teacher knows and every new teacher learns the hard way: on the first day, your students are reading you. Every single one of them. They're figuring out how much they can get away with.

They're watching how you stand, how you talk, what you do when someone tests you, and whether you follow through on what you say. Within the first few days, they've made up their minds about who's running the room.

Start Serious

When you first walk into that class, be serious and stern. Not mean. Not cold. Serious.

That might feel uncomfortable, especially if you're a naturally warm, funny person. I'm a funny person. My students know me for rapping lessons and making them laugh. But they don't see that side of me on day one. On day one, they see a teacher who is calm, organized, and absolutely clear about how this room is going to work.

You can always loosen up later. You can let them know you're human, that you're cool, that you have a sense of humor. Once they know the boundaries, your humor becomes a reward and a connection. But if you start loose and try to tighten up in October, it's like trying to put toothpaste back in the tube.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: You can go from firm to friendly. It's almost impossible to go from friendly to firm.

Lay Down the Law and the Team Plan

On day one, you'll lay down two things: the law and the team plan.

The law is your short list of non-negotiable expectations. Keep it to four or five. For example:

1. Be on time and ready to learn.
2. Respect yourself, your classmates, and your teacher.
3. Follow directions the first time they're given.
4. Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
5. Give 100 percent effort.

The team plan is the "why" behind the law. This is where my coaching background comes in. A basketball team doesn't run plays because the coach is bossy. It runs plays because that's how the team wins. Your classroom is the same. Explain to students that you're a team, that the goal is for every person in the room to grow and move on to the next grade ready, and that the expectations are how the team gets there.

Explain the Why, Every Time

I explain everything to my students. When I set a rule, I tell them why it exists. When the school has a policy, I tell them why the school has it. And I connect it to the world outside the building.

Why do we line up quietly? Because in the real world, people who can follow a procedure and respect a shared space keep their jobs. Why can't you curse in class? Because the words you choose in a job interview, a courtroom, or a meeting with your boss will decide what doors open for you. Why do we have a dress code? Because many workplaces have one, too.

When students understand how school rules work, they start to understand how society works. That's not just classroom management. That's preparation for life.

SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Instead of: "Because I said so."

Try: "Here's why we do it this way. In this room, and in the real world, this is how teams and workplaces stay safe and successful."

Your First-Day Game Plan

Here's a simple structure for the first day with any class:

1. Greet students at the door. Look each one in the eye. Hand them a seat assignment or direct them to the seating chart.
2. Have a short task on their desk or on the board so they have something to do the minute they sit down.
3. Introduce yourself briefly and seriously. Share your name, what you teach, and that you're here to help them succeed.
4. Present the law and the team plan. Explain the why.
5. Teach and practice two or three key procedures, such as how to enter the room, how to get your attention, and how to leave.
6. Do a short, real learning activity so students know this class is about learning.
7. Dismiss them using the procedure you taught.

You'll find a full first-day script in the toolkit at the end of this book.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Write your four or five classroom expectations on a sheet of paper. Next to each one, write one sentence explaining why it matters in school and in the real world.

Chapter 3: Set Up a Room That Runs Itself

Your room arrangement is a classroom-management tool. Before students ever walk in, the way you set up desks, boards, and materials either sets you up for success or sets you up for chaos.

My goal is always the same: make students self-sufficient in their thinking and their actions. Every question they can answer for themselves is a question that doesn't interrupt your lesson. That's what I mean by automating the classroom.

The Seating Chart Is Not Optional

Never let students choose their own seats on the first day. Ever. If you do, best friends will sit together, the talkers will find each other, and the student who needs to be near you will end up in the back corner.

Make a seating chart before day one, even if it's alphabetical. Then adjust it as you learn your students. Seating charts help you:

- Learn names faster.
- Take attendance quickly.
- Separate students who play and talk too much with their friends.
- Place students who need extra support close to you or near a strong peer helper.
- Give substitutes a fighting chance.

Expect to move seats. Some children will have to be moved away from friends they can't stop talking to, and that's fine. Present it as a fresh start, not a punishment. "I'm moving you so you can focus and show me what you can really do."

Put the Answers on the Walls

The same handful of questions will come at you all day long. What time is it? What are we doing today? When is lunch? How do you spell that word? What's the homework?

If you answer every one of those questions out loud, you'll spend a big part of your day as a human information desk. Instead, put the answers where students can see them.

Post the class schedule. Write the daily schedule on the board where everyone can see it, and give students a printed copy, too, so they don't have to ask you. When students know the schedule, transitions get smoother because nobody's surprised.

Write today's assignment on the board. Every day, write the assignment, the objective, and any homework in the same spot. When a student asks, "What are we doing?" I point to the board, or a student points to the board for me. Before long, they stop asking and just look.

Teach the analog clock. Many students today can't read an analog clock, and they will ask you for the time constantly. Take a few minutes early in the year to teach them how to read the clock on your wall. Or let a student who already knows how teach the others. Now the clock answers that question for you, and students have learned a life skill.

Teach students to sound it out. Many of your students won't be reading on grade level, and they'll ask you how to spell words all day. Instead of spelling every word for them, teach them to sound words out phonetically. Post a phonics chart or a word wall. Ask, "What sounds do you hear?" They might not spell it perfectly, but they're thinking for themselves, and that's the goal.

Arrange the Room for Movement and Sight Lines

When arranging desks, keep these principles in mind:

- You should be able to see every student's face from wherever you teach most.
- You should be able to walk to any student within a few steps. Proximity is one of your best management tools.
- High-traffic areas, like the pencil sharpener, trash can, supply shelf, and door, should not be next to students who are easily distracted.
- Have a clear, consistent place for turning in work and picking up materials.

Post the Standards and the Objective

Most administrators expect to see the day's standards and learning objective posted on the board. Make it a habit from the first week. It keeps you focused, it tells students why the lesson matters, and it means you're always ready if someone walks in to observe. We'll dig into observations in Chapter 14.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Every question your walls can answer is a question you don't have to.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Pick the one question students ask you most often. Find a way to post the answer on your wall or board, and the next time someone asks, simply point.

Part Two: Automate the Classroom

Chapter 4: Class Jobs That Run the Room

When I coached basketball, I didn't have to personally dribble, pass, rebound, and shoot. I had a team. Every player had a role, and when everybody did their job, the game flowed.

Your classroom works the same way. You're the coach, not the whole team. When you give students real jobs and real positions, three things happen. The class starts to run on its own. Students feel ownership and responsibility. And you get your time and energy back for the most important job in the room, which is teaching.

Jobs That Work

Here are the jobs I use most. Adjust them for your grade level and your school.

Teacher's Assistants. This is a leadership position, and it's a big one. My Teacher's Assistants help delegate which students will read or answer a question, and in what order. During a read-aloud, the Teacher's Assistant calls on the next reader. During review, they might draw names or follow the seating chart to choose who answers. This keeps participation fair, keeps the lesson moving, and frees me to listen, correct, and teach.

Line Leader. Leads the class in the hallway, sets the pace, and stops at designated points.

Caboose. The last student in line. The caboose makes sure nobody is left behind, closes gaps, and lets me know if something's happening at the back of the line.

Door Holder. Holds the door for the class during transitions and makes sure it closes behind the group.

Classroom Cleanup Crew. In charge of making sure the floor, desks, and shared areas are clean before dismissal.

Cafeteria Crew. Makes sure the class's lunch area is clean before the class leaves. This matters more than you think. Cafeteria staff notice which classes leave a mess.

Equipment Manager. In charge of getting and returning athletic equipment at recess, such as balls, cones, and jump ropes. Nothing gets lost, and nobody fights over who carries the basketball.

Office Liaison. Carries messages, notes, and attendance to the front office. Choose a student who's reliable and won't take the scenic route.

Other jobs you might add include a supply manager, paper passer, technology helper, plant caretaker, calendar keeper, and greeter for visitors.

How to Make Jobs Work

Jobs only automate your classroom if you set them up the right way.

Teach each job like a lesson. Don't just say, "You're the line leader." Show them exactly what the line leader does, where they stand, and what they do if the line gets loud.

Post a jobs chart. Make it visible so everyone knows who's responsible for what this week.

Rotate jobs on a schedule. Every week or every two weeks works well. Rotation gives more students a chance to lead and keeps the jobs from feeling like a popularity contest.

Make leadership jobs something students earn. Positions like Teacher's Assistant can be earned through effort, behavior, and responsibility. That turns the job into a reward.

Remove a job when it's not being done. Calmly, without drama. "You'll get another chance at this job when you show me you're ready."

MR. O'S MIC DROP: You're the coach, not the whole team. Give students real roles and let them run the plays.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Choose three jobs from this chapter. Pick students for them, teach each job in two minutes, and post the names where everyone can see them.

Chapter 5: Time Is Your Most Valuable Resource

If you ask me what the number-one skill is that separates teachers who survive from teachers who struggle, I won't say content knowledge. I won't even say discipline. I'll say organization and time management.

Teaching is a job of a thousand small deadlines. Grades are due. Lesson plans are due. Data is due. Parent emails need answers. And meanwhile, you've got a room full of young people who need you every minute you're with them.

Know Your Transition Times

Here's something most new teachers don't think about until it's eating their lesson: transitions take time. A lot of time.

You need to know, almost to the minute, how long it takes your class to:

- Settle in after you take attendance in the morning.
- Settle down after coming back from specials like art, P.E., music, or the media center.
- Settle down after lunch and recess.
- Clean up after an activity.
- Pack up at the end of the day.

Time it for a week. Literally use a timer. You'll be surprised. A class that takes eight minutes to settle after P.E. and seven minutes to pack up is losing fifteen minutes a day. That's more than an hour a week and more than forty hours over a school year.

Once you know your numbers, you can do two things. Plan for them, so your lesson doesn't get cut off. And shrink them, by practicing transitions, using timers, and making it a class challenge to beat their best time.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Time one transition in your class, like coming in from lunch. Write the number down. Tell students, "Today it took us seven minutes. Let's see if we can do it in four."

Protect Your Prep Time

Your planning period is gold. Use it wisely, because sometimes it'll get taken away for coverage, meetings, or emergencies.

When you do have it, have a plan for it before it starts. Use it for the work that needs focus, like grading, entering grades, making copies, and planning. Don't spend it scrolling your phone or chatting in the hallway every day. A little connection with colleagues is healthy, but if prep time disappears into conversation, the work will follow you home.

About Grading at Home

I'll be honest with you. Many administrators will subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, suggest that you grade papers and enter grades at home. I don't believe in that as a regular practice.

Your home time is for your family, your rest, and your health. If you make grading at home a habit, it'll become an expectation, and the job will swallow your life. Some weeks, like report-card week, you might have to take a little work home. But it shouldn't be every night.

Here's how to protect your evenings:

- Grade during class when students are working independently.
- Don't grade everything. Choose which assignments get a full grade and which get a quick check.
- Use answer keys, rubrics, and student self-checking where it makes sense.
- Enter grades in small batches during the week, not all at once before the deadline.

- Keep a calendar of every grading deadline, and work backward from it.

Stay Organized or Get Buried

Organization isn't a personality trait. It's a system. Here's a simple one:

1. Keep one calendar for everything: deadlines, meetings, testing dates, and parent conferences.
2. Use labeled trays or folders for "to grade," "graded," "to file," and "to send home."
3. Keep a substitute folder ready at all times with your schedule, seating charts, class jobs, procedures, and emergency lesson plans.
4. End each day by writing tomorrow's assignment on the board and setting out materials. Your morning self will thank you.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Time you don't plan for is time you lose. Know your transitions, protect your prep, and protect your home life.

Chapter 6: Hallways, Specials, and the Car Line

This chapter covers something nobody talks about in teacher prep but everybody in the building notices: how your class moves.

You can teach a brilliant lesson, but if your class is loud and late in the hallway, the whole school will know you as the teacher whose class is out of control. Fair or not, your hallway is your reputation.

Dropping Off, Traveling, and Picking Up

One of the most important protocols in any school, and one of the most overlooked, is how teachers drop off their class, travel with them, and pick them up. It needs to happen in a quiet, respectful, and prompt manner, every single time.

When your class is loud in the hallway or late to a special like art, P.E., music, tutoring, or the media center, it causes problems. Other teachers have their lessons interrupted. The special-area teacher loses instructional time. Administrators get complaints. And bit by bit, the whole school culture is diminished.

Here's how to make hallway travel work:

- Teach the hallway procedure like a lesson, with modeling and practice.
- Use your class jobs: line leader in front, caboose in back, door holder at the door.
- Choose stopping points, like corners, stairwells, and doorways, where the line pauses so you can check it.
- Walk where you can see the whole line. Often that's toward the back or the middle, not out in front.
- Be on time for drop-off and on time for pickup. When you're late picking up, you're taking time from another teacher.

- If the line gets loud, stop. Wait. Don't move until it's quiet. Then praise them when they get it right.

SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Instead of: "Shhh! Shhh! Be quiet! Why are you all so loud?"

Try (stopping and waiting calmly): "We'll move when we're ready. Thank you, front of the line, you're showing exactly what I need."

Coming Back From Specials

When your class returns from a special, they bring that energy with them. Have a routine ready: a short, quiet task on the board, a song or a breathing exercise, or a quick partner question. Give them two or three minutes to reset, then start teaching.

The Morning and Afternoon Car Line

In many schools, there's a morning and afternoon car line, or loop. Most teachers will be assigned to duty there at some point. This is about safety first, then communication and promptness.

At car line:

- Know exactly where you're supposed to stand and what your role is.
- Keep students in a designated area, and don't let them run, play near the curb, or wander.
- Never release a child to anyone who isn't authorized. When in doubt, check with the office.
- Communicate clearly with other staff on duty, using radios if your school has them.
- Be on time. Car line doesn't wait for anybody, and neither do parents.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Your hallway is your reputation. Quiet, respectful, and prompt, every time.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Before your next transition, stop the class at the door and practice the hallway procedure once with no destination. Praise what's right. Then go.

Part Three: Teaching That Manages Itself

Chapter 7: Engagement Is Management

Here's one of the biggest secrets in classroom management: a lot of behavior problems are really boredom problems. When students are engaged, curious, laughing, and challenged, they don't have time to act up.

That doesn't mean you have to be an entertainer every minute. It means your teaching has to give students a reason to lean in.

Humor Is a Tool

Kids love humor. I use it every day, after I've established the structure of my class. A well-timed joke can break tension, wake up a sleepy class, and help a lesson stick.

There's a difference between laughing with students and laughing at them, though. Keep your humor kind. Make fun of yourself, the situation, or the textbook, never a student. We'll talk more about sarcasm in Chapter 15, because it can turn on you fast.

Rap, Hip Hop, Poetry, and Performance

I rap some of my lessons. Multiplication tables, vocabulary words, parts of speech, story structure. When a lesson has a beat, students remember it, and they sing it in the hallway, at lunch, and at home.

Where my school permits it, I go further. I teach students to write their own rap and poetry, and I teach the origin of hip hop: where it came from, who created it, and why it matters as a culture and an art form. Students who never raise their hands in English class will write sixteen bars about their lives if you give them the chance. That's writing. That's literacy. That's voice.

I also teach speech communication and acting. Class plays, skits, debates, and presentations build confidence, teamwork, and public-

speaking skills. A student who can stand up in front of the class and speak clearly has a tool they'll use for the rest of their life.

You don't have to rap to use these strategies. You can:

- Use call-and-response to get attention or review facts.
- Turn key facts into a chant or a rhythm.
- Let students create songs, poems, or skits to show what they've learned.
- Use music during transitions or cleanup.
- Use resources like Leaders of the Homeschool for animated, musical lessons that do some of the performing for you.

Movies That Accentuate the Lesson

A well-chosen film, shown at the right time and connected to your lesson, can be powerful. I use movies like *Akeelah and the Bee*, *The Great Debaters*, and *Hidden Figures* because they show young people what it looks like when intelligence, hard work, and courage meet opportunity.

Akeelah and the Bee connects to spelling, vocabulary, and perseverance. *The Great Debaters* connects to argument, research, public speaking, and history. *Hidden Figures* connects to math, science, and the history of the people whose brilliance was overlooked.

To make a movie a lesson and not a day off:

- Always check your school's policy on films and get any required approval or permission slips.
- Preview the film and know which scenes matter most.
- Give students a viewing guide with questions to answer.
- Pause to discuss key moments.
- Connect it to a writing assignment, a debate, or a project afterward.

Connect Everything to the Real World

With every subject, show students how it connects to the real world they're going to inherit as future leaders.

When we do fractions, we talk about recipes, construction, and money. When we read persuasive essays, we talk about commercials, political speeches, and social media. When we study science, we talk about the jobs, inventions, and problems that science solves.

The question every student is silently asking is, "Why do I need to know this?" Answer it before they ask.

Teach Goals and Entrepreneurship Early

I teach goal-setting and entrepreneurship to young students. I ask them what they want to be, what they want to build, and what they want to own. Then we break it down: What do you need to learn? What grades will you need? What skills? What can you start doing now?

When students have a goal, school stops being something that's done to them and becomes a tool they use. A student who wants to own a business suddenly cares about math. A student who wants to be a lawyer suddenly cares about reading and arguing well.

Books Over Screens

I've taught with computers, tablets, and every kind of screen. Technology has a place. But I prefer less screen time and more real book reading and studying. Screens can easily become a distraction, and many students already spend hours on them outside of school.

When students read from real books, take notes by hand, and study from paper, they slow down and focus. Make reading physical books a regular part of your class, and match books to students' interests whenever you can.

Eighty Percent Is Showing Up

I tell my students that 80 percent of success is showing up. If you're not here, you can't learn, and you can't be part of the team. And once you show up, give 100 percent.

Celebrate attendance. Recognize students who come every day. Call home when a student is absent, not to scold, but to say, "We missed you." Students show up for places where they know they're wanted.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Show up, then give 100 percent. That goes for students, and it goes for teachers.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Take one fact or vocabulary word from tomorrow's lesson and turn it into a quick chant or call-and-response. Use it three times during class.

Chapter 8: Accountability for Attention

Every teacher has seen it: you're teaching, and half the class isn't writing anything down. Some are staring into space. Some are drawing. One is pretending to take notes while actually writing a letter to a friend.

Students need to learn that paying attention in class has value and consequences. This is a skill, and it can be taught.

The Open-Book Test and the Pop Quiz

When students aren't engaged or aren't taking notes during instruction, I might give them an open-book test or a pop quiz.

Here's the lesson in that. With an open-book or open-notes quiz, the students who took good notes do great. The students who didn't realize, very quickly, that they're stuck. I don't have to lecture anybody about taking notes. The quiz teaches it for me.

A pop quiz works the same way. When students know that what's taught today might be checked today, they pay closer attention.

Use these tools to teach, not to punish:

- Keep pop quizzes short, maybe three to five questions.
- Afterward, show the class how the answers were in the notes or the lesson.
- Give students a chance to improve, like a retake or a correction assignment, once they've shown they understand the lesson.
- Explain the life lesson: in the real world, you're expected to pay attention in meetings, trainings, and classes even when nobody's checking.

Teach Note-Taking Directly

Many students don't take notes because nobody ever taught them how. Show them. Model it on the board. Use guided notes with blanks to fill in. Tell them, "This is important. Write this down." Check notebooks regularly and give credit for good notes.

Homework and Quizzes as Diagnostic Tools

Homework and quizzes aren't just for grades. They're one of the best tools you have for seeing your students' strengths and weaknesses.

When you look at a stack of quizzes, ask yourself:

- Which questions did most of the class miss? That's something I need to reteach.
- Which students missed the same type of question? That's a small group I can pull.
- Which students got everything right? They might need a challenge.

Keep homework purposeful and manageable. Practice what was taught, not what wasn't. And look at it, even quickly, so students know it matters.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Grades tell students how they did. They should also tell you what to teach next.

TRY IT TOMORROW: At the end of tomorrow's lesson, give a three-question exit ticket. Sort the answers into "got it," "almost," and "not yet," and use those piles to plan your next lesson.

Chapter 9: Teaching Every Learner in the Room

Most classrooms aren't made up of students who are all on the same level. In a single class, you might have students reading two grade levels below, students right on grade level, and students who are ready for the next grade. You might have students with IEPs, students with 504 plans, English language learners, and gifted students all at once.

That's not a problem to fix. That's the job.

Understand IEPs and Your Role

An IEP, or Individualized Education Program, is a legal document that describes the services, accommodations, and modifications a student with a disability is entitled to receive. If a student in your class has an IEP, you're responsible for following it.

That means:

- Read every IEP for every student you teach. Don't wait for someone to hand it to you. Ask for it.
- Know each student's accommodations, like extended time, preferential seating, reading tests aloud, or breaks.
- Work closely with the special education teacher or case manager.
- Document what you're doing to support the student.
- Attend IEP meetings when invited, and come with real observations and work samples.

Working Across the Spectrum

I've taught students with autism, ADHD, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and emotional and behavioral disabilities, and I've taught students who were in gangs or being pulled toward them. I've learned that labels can tell you a little, but the student will tell you a lot more if you pay attention.

A few principles that have served me well:

Structure helps almost everyone. Many students with autism, ADHD, and emotional challenges do better with predictable routines, a posted schedule, and clear expectations. The automation strategies in this book help them most of all.

Give warnings before transitions. "In five minutes, we'll clean up." Sudden changes can be very hard for some students.

Break tasks into chunks. Instead of "Write an essay," try "Write your first sentence. Now show me." Small wins build momentum.

Allow movement where possible. Some students need to move to focus. Standing desks, errands, class jobs, and brain breaks can help.

Learn each student's triggers and calming strategies. Talk to the student, the family, and the special education team. What sets this student off? What helps them calm down?

Stay calm. Students who struggle with emotional regulation need the adult to be the calm one in the room. Your calm is contagious, and so is your panic.

Respect and high expectations go together. Students who've been in gangs, or around violence, or labeled as "bad kids" for years can usually tell right away whether an adult respects them. Respect them, and hold them to a high standard. Many of them have never had both at once.

Modifications and Hands-On Tools

Many students learn best when they can touch, move, and see. Use modifications and hands-on tools like:

- An abacus or counting beads for math.
- Counters, blocks, and everyday counting items for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.
- Flash cards for math facts, sight words, and vocabulary.

- Graphic organizers for reading and writing.
- Word walls and phonics charts.
- Audio books or read-alouds for students who struggle with decoding.

SCEPS: A Story Map Every Reader Can Use

One of the tools I use most with mixed-level readers is SCEPS, a technique I teach on Leaders of the Homeschool. SCEPS stands for Settings, Characters, Events, Problems, and Solutions. It gives every student, from struggling readers to advanced ones, the same five questions to ask about any story.

1. Settings: Where and when does the story take place?
2. Characters: Who is the story about? Who are the main characters, and what are they like?
3. Events: What happens? What are the most important events, in order?
4. Problems: What problem or conflict do the characters face?
5. Solutions: How is the problem solved, or not solved?

SCEPS works for classroom management, too. When every student has the same five-part map, they know exactly what to look for while reading, so they stay on task. Struggling readers can answer with a word or a picture. On-grade readers answer in full sentences.

Advanced readers can cite evidence from the text for each part, or compare the SCEPS of two different stories. Same tool, different levels, one lesson.

Post the five SCEPS letters on your wall, give students a SCEPS graphic organizer, and use it with read-alouds, independent reading, and movies like *Akeelah and the Bee*. Students can even use SCEPS in reverse to plan their own stories.

Students Below and Above Grade Level

For students who are below grade level:

- Teach them to sound out words phonetically and to use the word wall.
- Use small-group instruction while the rest of the class works independently.
- Provide sentence starters, word banks, and guided notes.
- Use supplemental resources like Leaders of the Homeschool for extra practice with animation and music.

For students who are above grade level:

- Give them extension tasks, not just more of the same work.
- Make them Teacher's Assistants or peer helpers, carefully, so they're growing too.
- Let them lead projects, research questions, or teach a mini-lesson.

Prepare Them for the Next Grade

I always keep one eye on next year. What will these students need when they walk into the next grade? Which skills, habits, and routines? I tell my students directly: "I'm getting you ready for next year, and I'm getting you ready to lead." When they know you're preparing them for something bigger, they take the work more seriously.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Every student in the room is a different starting point, but the destination is the same: growth.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Pull out the IEP or accommodation list for one student you've been struggling to reach. Choose one accommodation you could use better tomorrow, and do it.

Part Four: When Things Go Left

Chapter 10: Rewards and Penalties That Work

Every classroom needs a system of rewards and penalties. Students need to see that good choices lead to good outcomes and that poor choices lead to consequences. That's how the real world works, too.

The key is balance. A classroom with only penalties feels like a prison. A classroom with only rewards can feel like a game show where nobody takes anything seriously. You want both, used consistently and fairly.

Rewards That Motivate

Here are rewards I've used that students love:

Student of the Month and Student of the Year. Recognize students for effort, improvement, leadership, and character, not just grades. Post their names and photos where the class can see them. Call home to tell the family.

Stars and stickers. Don't underestimate these, even with older students. A star chart or a sticker on a paper still makes kids proud.

Class trips. Field trips can be earned as a class reward for meeting behavior or academic goals.

Class plays and projects. Getting to perform in a class play or work on a big project can be both a reward and a learning experience.

Science experiments. Hands-on experiments are exciting, and earning the right to do one teaches students that responsibility unlocks fun.

Leadership positions. Jobs like Teacher's Assistant or line leader can be earned privileges.

Positive phone calls home. This may be the most powerful reward of all. More on this in Chapter 13.

Penalties That Teach

Penalties should be calm, predictable, and connected to the behavior. Here's a simple, escalating system:

1. A nonverbal cue, like a look, a gesture, or standing near the student.
2. A quiet, private verbal reminder.
3. A seat change.
4. Loss of a privilege, such as a class job, free time, or participation in a reward activity.
5. A reflection sheet or a conversation with the teacher after class.
6. A phone call or email to the parent.
7. A referral to administration, for serious or repeated behavior.

Post your system so students know what to expect. Then follow it every time. Consistency matters more than severity. A small consequence that always happens works better than a big consequence that only happens sometimes.

SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Instead of: "That's it! You're going to lose recess for a week!"

Try (calmly): "You chose to keep talking after two reminders, so you've lost your job for today. You can earn it back tomorrow."

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Consistency beats severity. Every time.

Chapter 11: Conflict Resolution and Bullying

Conflict is part of life. Students will argue, disagree, and get on each other's nerves. Your job isn't to prevent all conflict. It's to teach students how to handle it.

Handle It in the Classroom When You Can

I do my best to handle situations inside the classroom without them spilling over to administration. That's not about hiding problems. It's about building your own authority and teaching students that problems can be solved without escalating them.

When you send every small issue to the office, two things happen. Students learn that you can't handle the room. And administrators start wondering the same thing. Save the office for the big stuff, and handle the everyday conflicts yourself.

A Simple Conflict-Resolution Process

When two students have a conflict, try this:

1. Separate and cool down. Give both students a few minutes apart to calm down.
2. Meet together, calmly. Bring them together somewhere private.
3. Each person speaks without interruption. Each student describes what happened from their point of view.
4. Each person names the feeling. "I felt disrespected." "I felt embarrassed."
5. Find the solution. What can each person do differently? What needs to happen to make it right?
6. Agree and move forward. A handshake, a fist bump, or simply an agreement to move on.

7. Follow up. Check in with both students later that day or the next day.

Teach this process to the whole class before you need it, so students know what it looks like.

Nip Bullying in the Bud

Bullying in all its forms, whether physical, verbal, social, or online, needs to be stopped immediately. Don't ignore it, and don't wait for it to get worse.

When you see or hear about bullying:

- Stop it right away, calmly and firmly.
- Make sure the targeted student is safe and supported.
- Talk to the student who did the bullying privately.
- Follow your school's bullying policy and report it as required.
- Document what happened.
- Contact families as appropriate.

I also explain to students why bullying isn't productive, both personally and in society. Bullying doesn't make you strong. It shows that something inside you isn't right, and it damages your reputation, your relationships, and your future. In the real world, bullying in the workplace gets you fired. Bullying in the community can get you arrested. I want my students to understand not just that bullying is against the rules, but why it holds them back as people.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Teach conflict resolution before the conflict. Stop bullying the moment you see it.

Chapter 12: Sending Out, Referring, and Documenting

Some situations are bigger than the classroom. Knowing when to send a student out, when to make a referral, and how to document everything is one of the most important skills you can learn. It protects your students, and it protects you.

When a Student Must Leave the Room

Sometimes a student is so disruptive that the rest of the class can't learn. You have to know when that point has been reached. Generally, a student should be sent out of class when:

- The behavior is preventing other students from learning, and your in-class steps haven't worked.
- The student is being openly and repeatedly defiant in a way that's escalating.
- The student needs time away to calm down and can't do that in the room.
- There's any risk to safety.

Follow your school's procedure for removing a student, whether that's a buddy classroom, a dean, a behavior specialist, or the office. Stay calm. Don't argue in front of the class. Document it right away.

When a Referral Is Required

Referrals must be made when a child has been a danger to themselves or others. Don't hesitate here. If a student threatens to harm themselves or someone else, brings a weapon, becomes violent, or shares something that suggests they're in danger, follow your school's emergency procedures and notify administration immediately.

You're also a mandatory reporter. If you suspect abuse or neglect, you're legally required to report it according to your state's law and your district's policy. Learn that policy in your first week.

Refer Personal and Emotional Situations to the Experts

You're a teacher, not a therapist. When a student is dealing with personal or emotional situations, like grief, family problems, anxiety, depression, or trauma, refer them to the school counselor or social worker. You can still be caring and supportive, but get them connected to someone who's trained to help. And document it.

Leave a Paper and Email Trail

I can't say this strongly enough: document everything. Keep a paper and email trail of grades and behaviors.

Documentation protects you when a parent disputes a grade, when an administrator asks what happened, or when a student's needs are being evaluated. It also helps you see patterns that you'd miss otherwise.

Keep a simple log with:

- The date and time.
- The student's name.
- What happened, described with facts, not opinions.
- What you did in response.
- Who you contacted, like parents, the counselor, or administration, and when.
- The outcome or next steps.

When you communicate with parents by email, keep copies. When you talk by phone, write down the date, time, and what was said. You'll find a documentation log template in the toolkit at the end of this book.

SAY THIS, NOT THAT (in your documentation)

Instead of: "Marcus was being a brat and disrespectful all class."

Try: "During independent reading at 10:15, Marcus talked loudly to peers after two private reminders, then said, 'I'm not doing this.' I moved his seat. He completed two of five questions."

MR. O'S MIC DROP: If it isn't written down, it didn't happen.

Document everything.

Part Five: The Bigger Team and You

Chapter 13: Parents as Partners

I believe in honest and open communication with parents. When families and teachers work together, students win. When they work against each other, or don't communicate at all, students fall through the cracks.

Never Leave a Parent in the Dark

Be quick to call parents, for good situations and bad ones.

Most parents only hear from teachers when something's wrong. Change that. Call home when a student does something great: improves a grade, helps a classmate, shows leadership. That positive call builds trust, and it makes the harder calls easier later.

When there's a problem, call early, before it becomes a crisis. A parent who learns in November that their child has been failing since September has every right to be upset. Never leave a parent in the dark.

A Positive Phone Call Script

"Hi, this is Mr. or Ms. ____, your child's teacher. Do you have a quick minute? I'm calling with good news. Today, your child _____. I wanted you to know how proud I am. Please tell them I said great job."

A Concern Phone Call Script

"Hi, this is Mr. or Ms. ____, your child's teacher. Do you have a few minutes? I'm calling because I care about your child's success and I want us to work together. I've noticed _____. Here's what I've tried so far: _____. I'd love to hear what you see at home and what works for your child. Can we come up with a plan together?"

Parent-Teacher Meetings

I arrange parent-teacher meetings early and often, not just during conference week. Come prepared with work samples, grades, and

specific examples. Start with something positive. Listen as much as you talk. End with a clear plan and a date to follow up.

Compassion for Every Kind of Family

We teach in a time when many children don't have both parents fully active in their lives. Some live with grandparents, aunts, foster families, or one parent working two jobs. Some families have had bad experiences with schools themselves.

Lead with compassion and empathy. Be flexible with meeting times when you can. Use the communication method that works best for the family. Assume the best about families until they show you otherwise. Most parents love their children and want them to do well, even when life makes it hard to show it.

Build a School Community

Where possible, build a real school community. Invite families to class plays, presentations, and celebrations. Send home newsletters that celebrate what the class is learning. Share resources families can use at home, like Leaders of the Homeschool, so learning doesn't stop at the classroom door.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: Call home for the good before you have to call home for the bad.

TRY IT TOMORROW: Make one positive phone call home tomorrow. Just one. Notice how it changes your relationship with that student.

Chapter 14: Ready for Observation

Administrators will observe you, sometimes on a schedule and sometimes unannounced. Observations can feel nerve-racking, but if your classroom is organized and automated, an observation is just another day.

What Administrators Look For

While every school's evaluation tool is different, most administrators want to see:

- The learning objective and standards posted on the board.
- The day's assignment and agenda clearly visible.
- Students actively participating, not just the teacher talking.
- Classroom routines and procedures that run smoothly.
- A range of instructional strategies and evidence of student thinking.
- Checking for understanding and giving feedback.
- A respectful, well-managed learning environment.

Get the Board Ready

Every day, not just observation days, have the proper assignments posted on the whiteboard along with the standards. When an administrator walks in, the first thing they'll often look at is the board. Make it tell the story of your lesson: the standard, the objective, the agenda, and the assignment.

Show Participation and Automation

During an observation, let your classroom automation shine. When your Teacher's Assistant calls on the next reader, when the paper passer hands out materials without being asked, when students point to

the board instead of asking what to do, administrators see a classroom that runs on systems. That's exactly what they want to see.

Show a Range of Knowledge and Skills

A strong lesson shows students learning in different ways: hearing, seeing, practicing, and applying. Here are two examples of what that can look like.

A Math Observation

The administrator walks in and sees students studying their multiplication tables, maybe using a rap, a chant, or flash cards. Then the teacher shows the class how multiplication and division are connected: division is the reverse of multiplication. If 6 times 7 equals 42, then 42 divided by 7 equals 6. Next, students come up to the board to solve a few problems, while the teacher gives input and correction where necessary. Finally, students practice independently at their seats while the teacher checks in with individuals.

In just a few minutes, the administrator has seen review, direct instruction, a connection between concepts, guided practice, feedback, and independent practice.

A Reading Observation

The administrator walks in as students are verbally pre-testing vocabulary words, saying the words aloud, sounding them out, and guessing meanings. Then the Teacher's Assistant has students begin reading aloud, calling on readers in order. As they read, the teacher has students annotate the text, underlining key ideas, circling new words, and writing questions in the margins. The teacher pauses at key points to ask questions about the main idea and comprehension, using SCEPS to check the settings, characters, events, problems, and solutions, and encourages students to cite evidence from the text: "How do you know? Show me where it says that."

The administrator has seen vocabulary instruction, fluency practice, student leadership, active reading, higher-order questioning, and evidence-based thinking.

Observation-Day Tips

- Don't change your whole routine for the observation. Students can tell, and so can administrators.
- Keep a copy of your lesson plan ready to hand over.
- If something goes wrong, handle it calmly. How you handle a problem can impress an observer more than a perfect lesson.
- After the observation, ask for feedback and use it.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: An automated classroom is always observation-ready.

Chapter 15: Protect Yourself and Your Peace

This last chapter might be the most important one in the book. You can't take care of your students if you don't take care of yourself, and you can't stay in this profession if you don't protect your reputation, your career, and your health.

Physical Boundaries: The Fist Bump Rule

Some students will want to hug you. It's hard to be aloof, especially with young children who are looking for affection, or older students who've had a hard day. But touching students, even in a well-meaning way, can be dangerous for your career. A hug can be misunderstood, misreported, or used against you.

Offer a fist bump, a high five, or a handshake instead. And explain why, kindly: "I care about you, and I'm proud of you. In school, teachers keep their hands to themselves to keep everyone safe and comfortable, so let's do a fist bump." Most students understand. You're also teaching them an important lesson about boundaries.

Also avoid being alone in a closed room with a single student. Keep the door open or another adult nearby.

Watch Your Mouth

Kids hear everything, and they repeat everything. What you say in your classroom can be misinterpreted, exaggerated, or repeated to friends, parents, principals, other teachers, and even the police.

Before you say something, ask yourself: Would I be comfortable if this were repeated to the principal word for word? Would I be comfortable if it were posted online? If the answer is no, don't say it.

That includes comments about colleagues, administrators, other students, and families. Keep your professional opinions to yourself in front of students.

Control Your Sarcasm and Your Anger

Sarcasm is one of the most dangerous tools a teacher can use. Adults might hear it as a joke. Students often hear it as an insult. A sarcastic comment can damage a relationship with a student in seconds, and it's easy to repeat out of context.

Anger is the same. Students will push your buttons, sometimes on purpose. If you lose your temper, you lose the room, and you give students power over you. Stay calm, even when you don't feel calm. Take a breath. Lower your voice. Walk away for a moment if you need to. Handle it later if you have to. You never regret staying calm.

SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Instead of: "Oh wow, great job, genius. Did you even read the directions?"

Try: "Let's look at the directions together. What's the first thing it asks us to do?"

Watch Out for Burnout

Burnout is real, and it hits new teachers especially hard. The long hours, the emotional weight, the endless deadlines, and the feeling that you're never doing enough can wear you down.

Watch for the warning signs: dreading work every morning, feeling exhausted no matter how much you sleep, getting irritated with students more easily, getting sick often, or feeling like nothing you do matters.

Here's how to protect yourself:

- Set boundaries around your time. Leave work at work as much as you can.
- Use your prep time wisely so the work doesn't follow you home.
- Find a mentor or a trusted colleague you can talk to.
- Keep a "why" file of thank-you notes, drawings, and good memories, and read it on hard days.
- Eat, sleep, move your body, and see a doctor when you need to.
- Use your employee assistance program or a counselor if you're struggling.
- Remember that you're one person. You can't fix everything.

Your health is number one. Without it, you can't teach, coach, or care for anyone. Take care of yourself the way you'd want your students to take care of themselves.

MR. O'S MIC DROP: You can't pour from an empty cup. Your health is number one.

Conclusion: You Are Raising Future Leaders

If you remember nothing else from this book, remember this: the students in front of you are the future leaders of the world. They're the doctors, lawyers, business owners, artists, engineers, teachers, and parents of tomorrow. The way you run your room teaches them how to run their lives.

When you're serious on day one, you teach them that leaders set clear expectations. When you explain the why, you teach them how society works. When you give them jobs, you teach them responsibility. When you handle conflict calmly, you teach them how to solve problems. When you call home for the good, you teach them that their effort matters. When you take care of yourself, you teach them that their health matters, too.

Classroom management isn't about control. It's about building a team, running the plays, and getting every student ready for the next level.

Show up. Give 100 percent. And run that room.

I'll see you in the hallway.

Mr. O

The Toolkit

Toolkit 1: School Visit and Interview Checklist

Use this before you accept a job.

- ☐ I visited during a peak time: class changes, lunch, arrival, or dismissal.
- ☐ I watched how students move in the hallways.
- ☐ I heard how adults and students talk to each other.
- ☐ I asked about the school-wide behavior system and how referrals are handled.
- ☐ I asked about mentor support for new teachers.
- ☐ I asked how many teachers left last year, and why.
- ☐ I asked about protected planning time and meeting schedules.
- ☐ I found out whether there's a teachers' union or association.
- ☐ I found out whether there's a district HR office and a grievance process.
- ☐ I asked about testing schedules and pacing guides.

Toolkit 2: First-Day Script

Adapt the words to your grade level and your voice.

At the door: "Good morning. I'm Mr. or Ms. _____. Find your name on the seating chart and start the task on the board."

Opening (serious, calm): "Welcome. This is a classroom where everyone learns, everyone is respected, and everyone is part of the team. My job is to get every one of you ready for next year and ready to lead. Your job is to show up and give 100 percent."

The law: "We have five expectations in this room." Read and explain each one, including why it matters in school and in the real world.

The team plan: "Just like a basketball team, every person in this room has a role. Soon, you'll have class jobs, and this room will run like a team."

Procedures: Teach and practice entering the room, getting your attention, and leaving the room.

Learning activity: A short, real academic task.

Dismissal: "When I say so, the line leader will stand, followed by row one. We'll practice until we get it right."

Toolkit 3: Class Jobs Chart

Job	Responsibility	Student
Teacher's Assistant	Chooses readers and answerers in order	
Line Leader	Leads the line, stops at checkpoints	
Caboose	Last in line, makes sure no one is left behind	
Door Holder	Holds and closes the door during transitions	
Classroom Cleanup Crew	Checks floor, desks, and shared areas	
Cafeteria Crew	Makes sure lunch area is clean	
Equipment Manager	Gets and returns recess equipment	
Office Liaison	Carries messages to the front office	
Paper Passer	Hands out and collects papers	
Supply Manager	Keeps supplies organized and stocked	

Toolkit 4: Procedures to Teach in the First Two Weeks

- ☐ Entering the classroom
- ☐ Starting the warm-up or bell work
- ☐ Getting the teacher's attention
- ☐ Asking to use the restroom
- ☐ Sharpening pencils and getting supplies
- ☐ Turning in work
- ☐ What to do when you finish early
- ☐ What to do when you're absent
- ☐ Working with a partner or group
- ☐ Reading aloud and being called on by the Teacher's Assistant
- ☐ Lining up and walking in the hallway
- ☐ Going to and returning from specials
- ☐ Lunch and cafeteria cleanup
- ☐ Recess and equipment
- ☐ Fire drills and emergency procedures
- ☐ Cleaning up after activities
- ☐ Packing up and dismissal
- ☐ Car line, bus line, or walker dismissal

Toolkit 5: Transition Timer Log

Time each transition for one week. Then set a goal.

Transition	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Goal
Settling after attendance						
Returning from specials						
Returning from lunch or recess						
Cleaning up after an activity						
Packing up for dismissal						

Toolkit 6: Parent Contact Log

Date	Student	Parent or guardian	Phone, email, or meeting	Positive or concern	Summary	Follow-up

Toolkit 7: Behavior Documentation Log

Date and time	Student	What happened (facts only)	My response	Who I contacted	Outcome

Toolkit 8: Observation-Ready Checklist

- ☐ Standards are posted on the board.
- ☐ The learning objective is posted in student-friendly language.
- ☐ Today's agenda and assignment are posted.
- ☐ Class jobs are posted and students know their roles.
- ☐ My lesson plan is printed and ready to hand over.
- ☐ Materials are prepared and organized.
- ☐ My lesson includes review, direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice.
- ☐ I have planned questions that check understanding and ask for evidence.
- ☐ I have accommodations ready for students with IEPs or 504 plans.

Toolkit 9: Weekly Self-Check

Take five minutes every Friday.

1. What went well this week?
2. Which procedure or transition needs more practice?
3. Which student do I need to connect with next week?
4. Which parent should get a positive call?
5. Is my documentation up to date?
6. Are my grades entered before the deadline?
7. How many nights did I take work home? Is that sustainable?
8. How's my health: sleep, food, movement, and mood?
9. What's one thing I'm proud of?

Toolkit 10: SCEPS Story Map

Title: _____ Author: _____

SCEPS	My notes and evidence from the text
Settings: Where and when?	
Characters: Who, and what are they like?	
Events: What happens, in order?	
Problems: What is the conflict?	
Solutions: How is it solved?	

Toolkit 11: Movie Viewing Guide

Use with films like *Akeelah and the Bee*, *The Great Debaters*, and *Hidden Figures*. Check your school's film policy first.

Movie title: _____

1. Settings: Where and when does the movie take place?
2. Characters: Who is the main character, and what do they want?
3. Events: What are three important things that happen?
4. Problems: What obstacles does the main character face?
5. Solutions: How do they overcome those obstacles?
6. Which character trait helped them succeed the most? Give an example from the movie.
7. How does this movie connect to what we are learning in class?
8. What is one lesson from this movie you can use in your own life?

Toolkit 12: Future Leader Goal Planner

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. When I grow up, I want to be, build, or own:
2. Why this goal matters to me:
3. Subjects I need to be strong in to reach this goal:
4. Skills and habits I need to build:
5. One goal for this grading period:
6. One goal for this school year:
7. Three things I can start doing this week:
8. People who can help me:
9. How showing up and giving 100 percent will help me:

Signature: _____

Toolkit 13: Kidpreneur Business Planner

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. My business name:
2. What I will sell or what service I will offer:
3. Who my customers are:
4. What problem my business solves:
5. What I need to get started (supplies, money, help):
6. How much it will cost to make one item or do one service:
7. How much I will charge:
8. My profit for each sale (price minus cost):
9. How I will tell people about my business:
10. One math skill and one reading skill my business uses:

Toolkit 14: Seating Chart Planner

Class or period: _____ Date: _____

FRONT OF ROOM (Board and Teacher)

Seat	Seat	Seat	Seat	Seat

Notes: students to separate, students who need to sit near the teacher, and IEP seating accommodations:

Toolkit 15: Rewards Tracker

Track stars, stickers, and positive behavior for a month.

Student	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total

Toolkit 16: Student of the Month Certificate

STUDENT OF THE MONTH

This certificate is proudly presented to

for outstanding effort, leadership, and character during the
month of

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Show up. Give 100 percent. Lead the way.

Notes

Use this page for your own ideas, procedures, and reminders.

About the Author

Kamal Imani, known to students as Mr. O the Hip Hop Teacher, is a veteran master teacher with over eighteen years of experience in New Jersey and Florida. He has taught K–12 honors and general education classes, worked as a substitute teacher, served as an in-school suspension administrator and a career transition coach, and coached basketball for eight years. He has taught students across most of the special education spectrum in urban, suburban, and rural schools.

Mr. O is known for rapping lessons, teaching the history of hip hop, poetry, speech, and acting, and for inspiring young people to set goals and think like entrepreneurs and future leaders. He is also a professional motivational speaker and the creator of Leaders of the Homeschool, a fun, hip-hop-infused learning resource for students, parents, teachers, and homeschoolers.

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