

# Volunteer Tutor Finds the New Normal

Hande Guzey

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share a time you worked as a volunteer. What did you do?

It was late January 2021 when I received a text asking if I would be available to work on Monday. I couldn't believe my eyes. Did I read the message correctly? After all these months of remote school, was I finally being called in as a substitute teacher? I looked at the message again. It said I needed a Covid-19 test, and if the result was negative, I could start next week.

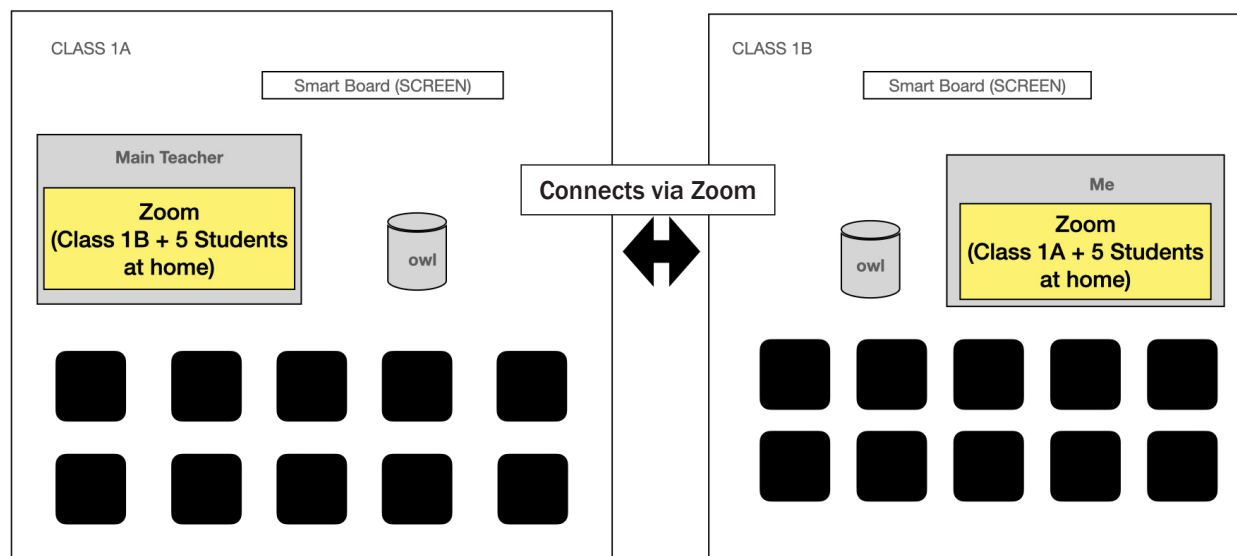
My heart was beating so hard! It felt like it was going in and out of my chest like in a cartoon movie. My soul couldn't fit in the small room where I was sitting. There were no words to explain my feelings. Working with children in-person again! My eyes filled with tears of happiness. How I missed the good old days!

Very quickly, the happiness was replaced by apprehension. Where was the nearest testing point? Would it be free? Would I get the results in

time? I searched online for the testing points near my home.

The test that the school required was not free, but I didn't let myself sink into despair. I talked to the agency that scheduled the substitute teachers. Good news! If I could get to the school before 4:00 pm, they would pay for the test.

I quickly walked to school and gave my documents to the person at the table. I watched children getting tested. How brave they were! When it was my turn, I closed my eyes as if I were in the



Let's say this class has 25 students. During the pandemic, about 20 attend in person. They are split into two classrooms. Five students attend by Zoom. The two in-person classes connect with each other via Zoom and with the students who are attending from home. They study all together at the same time. Owl is a 360 degree camera, mic, and speaker.

dentist chair. The nurse made me feel relaxed and calm. Her confident voice explained what she was doing. It was quick. My nose tickled a bit afterward. I took a deep breath and walked back home with my excitement continuing to grow.

The test result arrived the next night, which was on Friday. I tested negative for Covid-19. The weekend couldn't finish soon enough! I couldn't wait to be back at school again.

On Monday morning, I woke up early and checked my bag of school supplies, which were different from any other year: masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes. And then I was off to the school, lots of butterflies fluttering in my stomach.

When I arrived, the security guards checked my ID and took my temperature. Then they let me in with smiles on their faces. During the pandemic year, I have learned how to see someone's smile behind their mask. We have all learned the new skill of hearing the smile in someone's voice and seeing the smile in the wrinkles around the eyes.

At the office, the school director came out to meet me. He asked me to teach kindergarteners instead of first-graders. Of course I accepted immediately. "I miss all of them so much. I can't wait to teach *anything* to *any* children! The age is not important." Being at school among the children made me feel alive again. The feeling was like a bear waking up from a long winter sleep.

Everyone was wearing a mask, even kindergarteners. It was challenging, but also it was adorable to see how they adapted to the new normal. We did most of our lessons outdoors, and it was quite chilly. None of them complained, even when it was rainy one day. We all just wore more coats, and sometimes we did lessons in the gym.

The following week, I was with first-graders. A boy crossed his arms and gave me an annoyed look. He said, "I hate wearing a mask."

"Me too!" I responded. "None of us likes it. But it's just temporary. We all need to be patient and do our best to take care of each other. Your mask protects your friends and our masks protect you from the virus. The good days will come soon

## Why Volunteer?

Volunteering can be a useful way to explore careers and gain work experience. Learn more with this packet of articles and activities under "Extras" for **Issue #53**.

if we all follow the mask rules." He sighed, and continued with his day with the mask on.

In the past, I welcomed students either with a handshake, or a high five, even with a hug. However, in this new normal, I welcomed them with a squirt of hand sanitizer. In the past, they sat together at tables, but in the new normal, they settled into individual desks surrounded by plexi-glass dividers. Each class used to be a large and noisy group, but now, some students participated from home, some were with me in one classroom, and some were in another room with the main teacher. Those three parts connected to each other via Zoom (see diagram, p. 16). We all did our best to connect with each other. It was hard work, but it was also exciting — to be back in-person with the children, in our new normal world.

*Hande Guzey takes Adult Literacy Zoom classes from volunteer tutors at the Los Angeles Public Library. Hande is originally from Istanbul, Turkey. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics. She works as a substitute teacher and a mathematics tutor in Los Angeles, California.*



### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Using details from the text and from the graphic on p. 16, what are some elements of the new normal in classrooms?
2. We underlined three examples of Hande's use of figurative language. Explain what she means in each of those sentences. Does figurative language help get her message across? Why or why not?