

The Letters in Her Mouth

Facilitator note: The skill is the honest edge - when asked to teach what you can only do, neither bluff with someone else's recitation nor decline flatly, but name what you know, learn the why, and teach from that. Keep the frame on the hand/mouth split: Nachama is never exposed as a fraud - she is genuinely the best hand in the school - and the bluff fails not with humiliation but with one reasonable question. Morah and Bubby both affirm learnable actions (the honest sentence, the watch-the-hand method); nobody ranks hands, and Tilley's shaking B is treated as a diagnosis puzzle, never a defect. Do not let this become "never teach unless you're a master" (the session works BECAUSE she says she's learning to teach) or "natural talent is worthless" (her hand is the reason she can learn the why so fast). Students are not asked to disclose real skills they lack; Activity 7 is a fictional case.

Teacher answer key

1. The hand knows the letters - angle, pressure, breath, all of it, unconsciously, "because nobody had to" tell it. The mouth knows almost nothing: she cannot say why a B shakes. The mouth learns like the hand did - slowly, with practice - because explaining is itself a skill with miles in it, not a download from the hand: "the mouth learns in miles too."
2. Angle - when it drops below four degrees, the nib drags, and the drag wobbles. Pressure - beginners press "like they're angry at the paper," the hand tires, and tired hands shake. Breath - you exhale on the downstroke ("everyone steady breathes out on the pull"). Tilley's fix starts with the angle ("tilt the pen back up toward six degrees"), then pressure ("You're pressing like the paper insulted you"), then breath (the audible exhale on the downstroke) - and the shake stops.
3. b, a, d, c, e. The collapse (b) proves the stack can't teach; the honest sentence (a) must come before the learning, or the learning is still in service of the bluff; Bubby's table (d) fills the mouth; the rehearsal (c) tests the why on one real question before twelve; and the session (e) is the proof, complete with two interruptions she is glad of.
4. (a) Bluff: 7 hours / 4 students = 1.75 hours per student reached. Honest: 4 hours / 9 students = about 0.44 hours per student reached. (b) The hours do not count what the students walk away owning: recitation-reached students can copy, why-reached students can diagnose ("I dropped the angle"), and only the second keeps working after the teacher leaves the room. They also do not count the teacher's own learning. Steps shown.
5. The session's real content is not the letters - any book has the letters - but a working model of how HER hand succeeds, which is the only thing that answers "why does MINE fail." A stack of sheets shows the destination; the why is the map, and only the map answers a shaken B.
6. The drawing should show: two pens, "watch my hand, not the paper," and the three whys with chains - angle/drag/wobble; pressure/tired hand/shake; breath out on the downstroke.

Strong captions quote "The shake is not in the letter. It's in the hold" or "My hand knows. My mouth doesn't." Any honest rendering counts.

7. Sample: Question - "One of the boys asks, 'Why do I always fall to the left?' and Michael realizes he has no idea what his own body does to stay up." Person - "He spends Sunday with the block's old racing coach, who makes him ride slow and name what his weight does." Sentence - "He tells the boys: 'I'm learning to teach this, so when I say something that doesn't work, tell me fast.'" All three parts, with names or roles; wording may vary. (Case name Michael is fictional; the coach and the two boys may be named or given roles.)

8. LETTERS row 1 columns 1-7; STROKE row 2 columns 1-6; ANGLE row 3 columns 1-5; PRACTICE row 4 columns 1-8; TEACH row 5 columns 1-5; PRESSURE row 6 columns 1-8; BREATH row 7 columns 1-6; WOBBLE row 8 columns 1-6. What Nachama was asked to do is TEACH; the symptom only the why could fix is the WOBBLE (accept WOBBLE; SHAKE with reasoning - the shaking B).