



“My child is bored...”

The office of gifted services frequently receives calls from concerned parents who say that their child is bored in school, and who are therefore asking for a gifted referral. Many of these boredom issues can and should be resolved at the school level, whether or not the student is identified as gifted.

Why do students say they are bored?

There are a multitude of reasons why students might *say* they are bored, even though boredom may not really be the primary issue:

1. The students have taken a superficial response to the assignments, and taken the easy way out by doing as little work, and as little thinking, as possible. Without motivation, students may put in little effort to do thorough, thoughtful, creative work. Instead, they finish it as quickly as possible and then say they are bored. This is counterproductive for the students, and will probably not lead to more interesting assignments.
2. The students don't like the work. The work is unappealing and they just don't want to do it, so they say they are bored to try to get out of it. Showing a lack of interest does not accomplish much in real life, and is counterproductive in school, too.
3. The students simply don't understand how to do the work, and say they are bored to save face. It is easier on the ego to say they are bored and won't do the work rather than to admit they don't know how to do it and ask for help. It is helpful to remind students that it is OK to not know everything, and that asking for help early saves a lot of frustration later on when the work gets even more difficult.
4. The students want attention, and just want to be entertained. Rather than taking the initiative to make the work interesting, or putting effort into a project, they take a very passive approach and say they are bored. It is helpful to teach students to take more responsibility for their education – the effort they put into it is directly correlated to the benefits they get out of it.

What are some options?

If none of the above applies, and if the student really is bored because the work is too repetitive and he or she has already demonstrated and documented a comprehensive knowledge of the concepts, there are a number of approaches that parents and teachers can use:

1. Students should be encouraged to take ownership of their responses to an assignment, and to take an active role in their education; students should be given choices when possible. There are many, many boring experiences in life and students need to find appropriate responses to those situations – and video games are not the only answer. Figuring out how to feed one's own mind and entertain oneself in a very polite way is a valuable life skill.

2. Students should be encouraged to have a plan for dealing with “boring” work and situations. The students often can read books (non-fiction, classics, anything reasonably educational) when they have finished an assignment early. This has the added benefit of providing vocabulary development and increased general knowledge. Gifted students I have known have also:
 - a. Memorized poems in their spare time (Shel Silverstein, Longfellow, Poe – again, it increases vocabulary and reading skills as well as exercises thinking skills and memory skills).
 - b. Taken class notes in Tolkien’s Runic alphabet or in Klingon.
 - c. Created collections of Tom Swifities and triple-puns, or written limericks.
 - d. Used routine writing assignments to practice the art of calligraphy.
 - e. Given the assignment of writing the spelling words in a sentence, learned to create coherent and correct sentences using all of the spelling or vocabulary words in one sentence, or turned the sentences into a short but clever story that uses all of the words correctly.
 - f. Used their creativity by taking the initiative to turn the boring assignment into something more interesting, but that still meets the criteria of the assignment.
3. Students should find a passion. What is something they would really like to study about? What are they really interested in? If they have a passion, it is easier to find ways to replace boring assignments with something that connects to their interests and passions – or at least have something fascinating to study after they finish the boring assignments.
4. Students should learn to advocate effectively. Has the student asked the teacher for more challenging work, or has the student just complained to the parent? Did the student ask the teacher for a differentiated or more complex or more creative assignment? Teachers are often very willing to help their more advanced students if they truly demonstrate a desire to learn.
5. Parents should help their students learn how to “play the game.” Students need to be able to demonstrate in a productive way that they need more challenging work, because teachers are not usually persuaded by unfinished homework, lack of effort, and complaints of boredom. If a teacher sees consistent “A”-level efforts on everything, as well as superior test/quiz grades, the teacher is much more likely to be convinced of the need for more advanced work.
6. Truly gifted students very rarely complain that they are bored, because they quickly learn strategies to feed their minds. They usually have passionate interests that they can pursue rather than complaining about boredom and expecting someone else to “fix” the situation.
7. Parents can help by finding ways to help their students explore the world. Rather than teaching multiplication to second graders who will then have to review it in third grade, teach them about geometric solids, NIM games, tessellations, radial symmetry, or mathematical patterns in architecture. Parents and teachers can give students access to books or media that will open new worlds to them – photography, archaeology, cultural history, entomology, paleontology, aeronautics, even computer programming with MIT’s *Scratch*. Teachers don’t have time to explore those concepts in class, so those are precisely the concepts that students need to be encouraged to explore on their own. Students should be encouraged to finish their work quickly and accurately, whether or not it is boring, and then ask the teacher if they can use the extra time to study black

holes or miniature ponies or existentialism – what teacher would refuse those learning experiences?

8. If all of these options have been pursued, and the student really has mastered all of the assigned concepts already, then it may be appropriate to consult gifted services about possible eligibility. But remember, gifted services do not “fix” boredom!

How can parents support the teacher?

Parents can support the teachers in conferences and meetings with specific suggestions and strategies, rather than generalized complaints. Parents can ask how teachers:

1. Give students authentic choices. Not everyone must always do the same assignment, and not all projects should look the same.
2. Make sure assignments include opportunities for students to be creative and thoughtful.
3. Provide assignments that have real world connections, which can be highly motivating.
4. Use strategies for effective differentiation, and plenty of open-ended enrichment activities. Ideas can be found on the gifted department’s website, under the “For Teachers” tab.
5. Include advanced students in the division’s “Every child, every day, whatever it takes” philosophy. Great teachers know how to inspire and motivate their students!