

## THE MYSTERY OF MISSING PENS: TEACHER EDITION

*by:*

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There are many great moments and important accomplishments in the teaching profession, as well as everyday puzzles like: where did my pen go? It might seem like a small problem when a stack of pens disappears from a desk in a week. But when you look at it in the bigger picture of a teacher's daily life, it shows how complicated their job really is.

Every day classrooms are shared, dynamic spaces where many students interact with one another. Students are always using, losing, or repurposing basic school supplies like pens, pencils, markers, and more. This small problem is similar to a bigger problem that teachers face: having to deal with resources, attention, and the classroom climate all at once. Studies show that teachers have to do a lot of different things, from teaching to disciplining to doing paperwork. A lot of teachers say they don't have enough time during the day to do important things like grading and planning lessons, let alone keeping track of supplies and organizing the classroom. According to the Pew Research Center (2024), teachers say their days are very busy with many different tasks that go beyond just teaching.

The missing pen also reminds us that teaching is hard work that people don't always see. Classrooms are social places where things and attention move quickly. A teacher might stop in the middle of a lesson to get a student a pen, read a message from a parent, or help a student who is unsure of what to do. Individually, each of these actions is small, but they all take time and emotional energy. Research on teacher wellbeing emphasizes that the emotional labor of educators is a fundamental aspect of their

profession. They are in charge of more than just the curriculum and materials. They also have to deal with relationships, behaviors, and emotional self-care, especially when things get tough (RMIT University, 2023).

Even little things like losing a pen can teach you to be patient, flexible, and pay attention. Teachers often have to think outside the box to solve small problems, like finding new ways to organize materials, sharing resources with other teachers, or showing students how to solve problems. These moments, even if they are small, help a teacher become more skilled and resilient in their job.

The seemingly trivial mystery of missing pens also serves as a metaphor for the complexity of teachers' engagement. They help students grow, keep order, organize materials, and make sure that students feel safe and supported. These contributions, even though they aren't always obvious, cumulatively shape the classroom experience.

We also recognize the daily dedication of teachers when we talk about everyday problems like losing pens. It's easy to overlook a missing pen, but teachers see what happens in between those small moments. They see how busy a classroom can be, how a student holding a borrowed pen can be nervous, and how a teacher can make space for thought when they stop to help.

Even the smallest things, like a pen, can stand for learning, creativity, and care. When a teacher notices, helps, and supports, they show how to solve problems, be responsible, and work together. The mystery of the missing pens reminds us that teaching is more than just teaching facts; it's rewarding, human, and very relational.

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