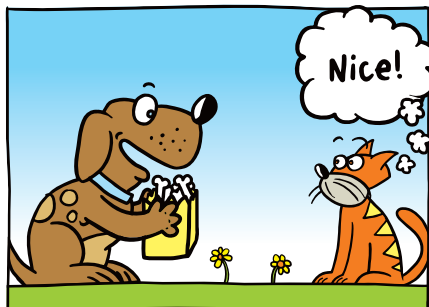


Using Humor Pedagogically

When Ron Larson and Laurie Boswell began work on their new Focal Points program for middle school, they started with one overriding idea. “Let’s think outside the box. Let’s not do things a certain way *only* because they have always been done that way.”

One of the results of this approach has been the creation of two math cartoon characters: Newton, the dog, and Descartes, the cat. For the new series, Ron Larson wrote more than 160 original cartoons.

As soon as we started to test the materials with students, we knew the cartoons were a huge hit! Students were flipping through the pages, hunting for the next cartoon... and *reading* each cartoon. Because students want to “get” each joke, they not only read the cartoons, they read them carefully. Isn’t that amazing?



“On the count of 5, I’m going to give you half of my dog biscuits.”



“1, 2, 3, 4, $4\frac{1}{2}$, $4\frac{3}{4}$, $4\frac{7}{8}$, ...”



“I have a secret way for finding 21% of 80.”



“10% is 8 and 1% is 0.8.”



“So 21% is $8 + 8 + 0.8 = 16.8$.”