

A decorative border of red glitter particles surrounds the central text. The particles are small, round, and have a sparkling effect, creating a shimmering frame around the white background.

The Glitter Virus!

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Amal was a dedicated science teacher working at a school in Beirut. She had been watching her 5th Grade science class students closely since they started school in October. She wanted to make sure that they learned the content effectively but that they were also abiding by safety measures imposed by the school because of the COVID pandemic. Amal had been disappointed with the fact that students were not practicing safety measures. She overheard some saying that they were tired of all the restrictions imposed in and outside the school and how they wanted to get back to normal. So today, she was taking her students to the science lab to learn about cells and she intended to also include a short lesson on the COVID virus and how to stay safe. She had four sections in the 5th grade and the first three sessions went very well. The students were very impressed with the lesson on cells and she used a fun experiment to remind them of the importance of washing their hands to stay safe from viruses. It was now time for her Grade 5D learners. She started with the lesson and covered the basic about cells.

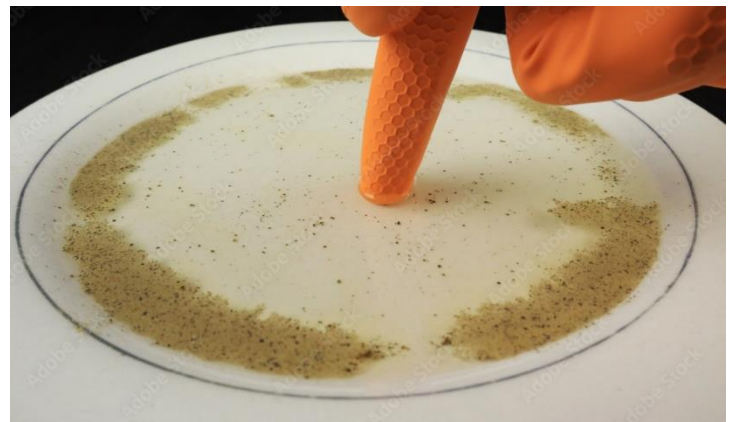
“Class, as you all know, we are battling with a tricky virus that has several mutations and is highly contagious. Now that we have all learned about how small viruses can be, it’s important to remember that we need to follow safety measures to make sure that we don’t catch any diseases and infect others.” She told her students.

“But Miss,” objected Marc, the class clown. “Getting sick is not only an issue of washing our hands. It is like fate. Destiny...” He laughed and the whole class joined in.

“On the contrary, Marc. We have a very important role in making sure we stay safe and keep everyone around us healthy. One of the easiest things we can do is washing our hands frequently. I will demonstrate to you now the importance of using soap to wash our hands.” She took out a plate and filled it with water as the students looked on, some of them laughed to themselves. She chose to ignore them and continued. “Ok class, as you can see here, I have a plate full of water. Can you guess who it is for?”

“For your pet cat?” Marc joked again and the whole class erupted in laughter.

“Well, my pet cat likes his water dish but he’s not here right now, so let’s get back to our lesson.” She said sternly. The class quieted down. “Let’s pretend that the pepper I’m sprinkling on the surface of the water represents the virus. As you can see, the particles are very small and spread along the surface.” She passed the plate around the class so they could all see. “I will now dip my finger in soap and touch the surface of the water. What do you think will happen?”



“The virus will blow bubbles.” Marc joked again and his classmates laughed again.

“Marc, you’re not taking this seriously. You need to listen or I will ask you to report to the principal’s office.” Marc nodded in understanding and bit his lip to suppress a smile. “So I have dipped my finger in the soap and I will touch the surface of the water.” Once she did that, the layer of pepper on the surface shrunk to the edges of the plate. She heard a few impressed students as they said “Wow!”

“I did this experiment to show you that we can’t under-estimate nature. While cells and viruses are microscopic in size, we cannot under-estimate their impact on our bodies. They can make us seriously sick if we do not take proper precautions like washing our hands and wearing our masks. I have noticed that not all of you are wearing your masks.” Some students avoided her gaze and she knew that they were feeling guilty about not wearing their masks. So, she continued, “You all know that we have a responsibility to keep ourselves and others safe. We do our part by making sure not to crowd you in small classes, by wearing our own masks all the time, by providing hand sanitizers and ensuring that you always have soap and tissues in the bathrooms. I know it’s frustrating but let’s try harder so we can avoid catching the virus.”

Amal heard some laughter in the back and noticed that Marc is playing an imaginary violin in the back. The bell rang and she dismissed the class. She called out to Marc to stay behind. After his classmates left, she said, “Marc, I don’t appreciate the distraction from you today. You diverted the attention of your classmates and did not take this topic seriously. You can’t keep disrupting my classes otherwise I will have to call your parents.”

“I’m sorry Miss Amal. We had a long morning and I was just trying to blow some steam. You remember what it is like to be a student. I just wanted to have some fun.” He replied.

“You can have fun but not at the expense of your classmate’s learning. You can go now.” Marc nodded his head and walked out.

Amal was not happy with how the class had ended. She completed the lesson but the students were distracted and not everyone took the lesson seriously. She needed to find a way to help her students understand how dangerous the virus was and how to keep themselves and others safe.

Suddenly, an idea popped into her head! One that would help the kids learn the concept better. By the time the day had ended, she was already waiting outside the principal's office.

"Ms. Issa!" she addressed her principal, "I wanted to ask you about an idea I had for my science class." She began to tell the principal about what had happened that day and how the students were not as cooperative as she had hoped. She told her the idea she had in mind. Ms. Issa's eyes grew wide when she heard it.

"Miss Amal, I love the way you think. But, I need you to speak to the school nurse to make sure this is safe. I will also need to run this by the parent committee to see what they think." Ms. Issa suggested.

Amal got to work. She called the school nurse who gave her some tips and her permission when she heard how Amal planned to keep her students safe. She then wrote a letter to the parent committee. Despite some initial objections, they quickly changed their minds when they heard how it can help the students and how Amal would maintain the safety of the children. They asked her to write another letter to the parents of the Grade 5 class explaining what she wanted to do. Lastly, she informed all the school team about the plan so they would know what to expect and avoid exposing her.

Just two days later, Amal welcomed her Grade 5D learners early in the morning. She was waiting for them at the door with a large bottle of hand sanitizer. The bottle was black and it had the name of the class on it in red. It said Grade 5D to remind her and others not to use the bottle in other classrooms.

“Good morning,” She greeted her students as they walked in the door. “Don’t forget your sanitizer.” She told each one. She squirted a generous amount into the waiting hands of each student as they entered the classroom. Once the class was full, she turned to them to start.

“Today students, we will review what we learned a few days ago about viruses.” She heard a few students complain. One said, “Not this again!” Another one said, “Here she goes again!” There was a general mood of disappointment in the classroom.

“Today you will all be part of a social experiment to show you and everyone else in school how important it is to abide by the safety measures the school has in place to protect you and others from the COVID virus.” She said loudly, “I want each of you to look down at your hands.” As she said that, she heard a few gasps of surprise.

“What happened to my hands?” said one student.

“Why are my hands red?” wondered another.

“Is this... glitter?!” another one asked.

“Calm down students.” She said aloud.



“In the bottle of sanitizer I used earlier was some red glitter that I added. Before you panic, it’s hypoallergenic, it won’t cause any reactions on your body. I already have the permission of the principal and the school nurse.”

“Is this a joke?” asked one of the students.

“Seriously Miss Amal, you should have warned us about this.” One of the others said.

“Do my parents know about this?” another student asked.

“Yes, we informed the parents of the Grade 5 class and we asked them not to tell any of you of these plans. I have to be honest, we as a school team are doing the best we can to maintain your safety in the school. We cut the class size to half to avoid crowding you. We have sanitizer stations everywhere. We wear masks all the time. We're tested weekly for COVID. But, it's so disappointing to see you all not abiding by these same measures. Do you know that if you catch the virus, you can easily pass it on to your friends, parents, grandparents and even complete strangers! Even if you don't get seriously sick, others can.” This made the students quiet down. So, she continued, “As I was saying, this class will be part of a social experiment to show how quickly and carelessly we can spread the COVID virus. Your hands are now covered in glitter. You will spend the day with this on your hands. You can try to rub it off, wipe it with a tissue or whatever, it will not completely go away. You will be able to see the red specs of glitter on everything and anyone you touch. So, it's up to you today. Can you control the spread of the virus? Can you keep yourself and others safe?” She heard the bell ring; it was time for recess.

“Just in time for recess. You are free to go. Your last session today will also be with me. We will all meet up and see what happened with you all today. Class dismissed.” She watched as the students walked out. Some looked at their hands curiously, others didn't seem to care. By the end of the day, they would be able to see with their own eyes what their actions could cause. That was the ultimate lesson she wanted to teach them.

“What does Miss Amal think she's doing?” Sara asked Mia as they walked down the stairs.

“How can I eat my sandwich? How can I fix my hair with this stuff on my hands? It's everywhere!”

“Chill out girls,” Marc said behind them. “Let’s just go wash our hands and it will come right off.”

“You probably don’t have much experience with glitter!” Mia answered. “It doesn’t just come off, it gets stuck on your skin and clothes for days, if not weeks.”

As they walked down the stairs, Rami from Grade 5A walked towards Marc with a basketball in his hand. “Catch!” He called out. Marc caught the ball easily not realizing that the glitter on his hands were now on his friend’s basketball. He threw it back and absent-mindedly gives Rami a high five.

“What’s that on your hands, man?” Rami asked.

“Just some glitter, don’t worry about it.” Marc responded.

“What do you mean? It’s all over me now.” Rami said in shock at Marc’s careless attitude. He noticed how the glitter was now all over his hands and looked up in confusion. “I’m not sure I want to spend recess with you today, man. Maybe tomorrow when you get this stuff off you.” Rami said as he walked away.

“Whatever!” Marc replied and walked away.

Sara and Mia head to the bathroom to wash their hands. They tried and tried but they could not get much off. “It’s on my mask now!” Mia complained loudly.

“It’s on my shirt!” Sara whined. “Ugh, this is so annoying!”

Back in the playground, Carla walked towards the vending machine to get a water bottle. She inserted her cash in the slot and presses the buttons, covering them with glitter in the process. She took out the bottle and opened it just as her twin brother in section B walked by.

“Thanks sis,” said Adam. He drank some water and handed the bottle back but noticed the glitter on his hand. “What’s that stuff on the bottle, have you been messing with the art supplies again?” He joked.

“No, this is Miss Amal’s way of showing us how we can spread viruses if we don’t follow safety measures. I basically just infected you. Congratulations!” Carla said in frustration.

On the other side of the playground, a learner in another section drops her lunchbox. Nadeem tried to be polite and picked it up for her but then noticed that he covered it with the glitter on his hands.

All the students in Grade 5D spread the virus accidentally around the recess area. Word quickly spread about the glitter and soon the students in other sections started avoiding Grade 5D learners. But, by the end of recess, everyone was able to see the glitter on the masks and clothes of many of the students in the recess area.

Ms. Issa and Miss Amal stood around and watched what was happening.

“Do you think they learned their lesson?” Miss Issa asked.

“We’ll have to see by the end of the day I guess. They don’t seem very happy.” Said Amal.

“None of us are happy we are in this pandemic but we need to teach them how to be safe. I’m glad you thought about this. They are going to be very upset by the end of today but this is a lesson they won’t soon forget.” Ms. Issa reassured Amal.

The bell rang indicating that recess had ended and the students head back to class. During the rest of the sessions, the students continued their day normally but noticed how the glitter got in the way of everything. It got all over their bags, pencil cases, copybooks and even the other

teachers. The teachers didn't seem to mind and even pretended not to notice. During the second recess, the students in the other sections were more careful about avoiding the Grade 5D learners. It almost seemed as if they were isolated in one part of the playground while the rest of the students were in the other area. They whispered quietly to each other about the glitter virus and tried to discretely point to some of the learners in Grade 5D who had the glitter all over their bodies and faces.

“Thank goodness the day is almost over!” Said Sara.

“We just have to go to the auditorium to the assembly and then I'm going home to try to get this stuff off me.” Carla replied.

The students head to the auditorium. They were seated by section and make sure to keep an empty seat between them as per the safety guidelines the teachers kept reminding them about. Once they were seated, they saw Miss Amal on the stage.

“Good afternoon students. Today you were all part of a social experiment. As you have all heard, one of the four sections in Grade 5 spent the day with glitter all over their hands. The glitter is food grade and hypoallergenic so it's completely safe don't



worry. To answer some of the questions I heard during the day, we got permission from your parents before we did this and asked them not to tell any of you so the experiment is not jeopardized.” She was quiet for a few minutes to allow the students to absorb what she had just said. Some were shocked that their parents didn't tell them. Others laughed and called the experiment silly. Miss Amal waited for them to quiet down and continued.

“I have been watching you all since we started the school year. I know you are all frustrated with the safety measures imposed on us. But believe me, we are too. However, that doesn’t mean it’s ok to be careless. If we abide by these measures, we can get over this pandemic quicker and without causing unnecessary illness. You are all young and healthy children but if you catch the virus, you can take it home and spread it to your family. I know many of you have at least one family member who has other illnesses and whose health can be gravely compromised by this virus. Do they deserve to catch it? Did they expose themselves? Do they deserve to pay the price for your carelessness?” The students went silent as they listened to what Miss Amal has to say.

“The glitter virus we released all over school today is visible, the COVID virus is not. I watched how you all reacted when you thought you caught the glitter virus. How shocked and surprised you were... and how you isolated your friends in 5D.” She looked around and nodded to Ms. Issa who was standing in the back of the auditorium.

“This morning, I “infected” 20 students in 5D, there are 80 of you in all 4 sections and all of you are here today. In a moment, I will switch off the lights and shine a flashlight on you. We will count how many students in total have been infected with the glitter virus.” As soon as she finished what she had said, the lights in the auditorium were switched off. Miss Amal then took out a flashlight and shone it around the auditorium. “Look around,” she says, “can you see the light from the glitter reflection on you and others around you? Nurse Samar will help me count how many of you are now covered in glitter.”

The students whispered in awe as they looked around. Most of the students in the auditorium were covered in glitter. After she was done counting, Nurse Samar joins Miss Amal on the stage and informed her of the total number of students “infected”.

“So Nurse Samar has informed me that we have 58 students from a total of 80 who have caught the glitter virus. That means about 3 in every 4 students have caught it.” She quieted down as the students murmur in shock. “Now do you see how fast viruses spread? Do you understand how something so small and insignificant can spread if we are not careful enough?”

“But Miss Amal, it’s like being in jail! We can’t share stuff. We can’t hug.” Sara objected.

“I can’t toss a ball to my friend.” Marc continued.

“I can’t even give my brother a water bottle.” Carla added.

“Calm down guys. You can do many of these things if you make sure to wash your hands first. Unlike glitter, viruses are killed by sanitizers and simply washing our hands. You don’t need to panic. I’m sorry Sara, you can’t hug, but you can give each other a high five after you wash your hands. We prefer that you limit sharing your items but if you want to do that, make sure they are clean and that your hands are clean. I wanted to avoid distressing you all, but it seems you needed a visual incentive to really understand.”

“Now what Miss Amal?” asked Rami. “How do we get this stuff off us?”

“Like I said, it’s food grade so it washes off after a few times. For the students in 5D, it will take a few days since they had a larger amount on their hands, but for the rest of you, I think you should be fine by tomorrow.”

“Miss Amal?” Marc spoke up.

“Yes, Marc.” Amal replied.

“I think I owe you an apology.” He said, “I was the one who didn’t take you seriously enough. I was always clowning around in your class. I promise I’ll take your class more seriously from

now on. Plus, I think I can speak for the rest of us when I say thank you for going to all this trouble to teach us about COVID safety measures.”

“Thank you Marc. Thank you everyone for being part of our experiment for today. I hope we can continue to work together to keep the school a safe environment for us all.”

The students all stood up and applauded their teacher. It was a long and eventful day and they couldn't wait to go home and tell their parents about the event.

As she walked out of the auditorium after the last student had left, Ms. Issa stopped Amal and said, “Thank you Amal, what you said was very inspiring and I'm sure it will change the way our students will think about the safety measures we use.”

“Thank you Ms. Issa. I'm glad I was able to help my students.”

As Amal walked home after school, she smiled with satisfaction knowing that she was able to change the life of her students and the lives of their families after the valuable lesson they learned.