

Posted on **February 11, 2014** by **Karen Fasimpaur**

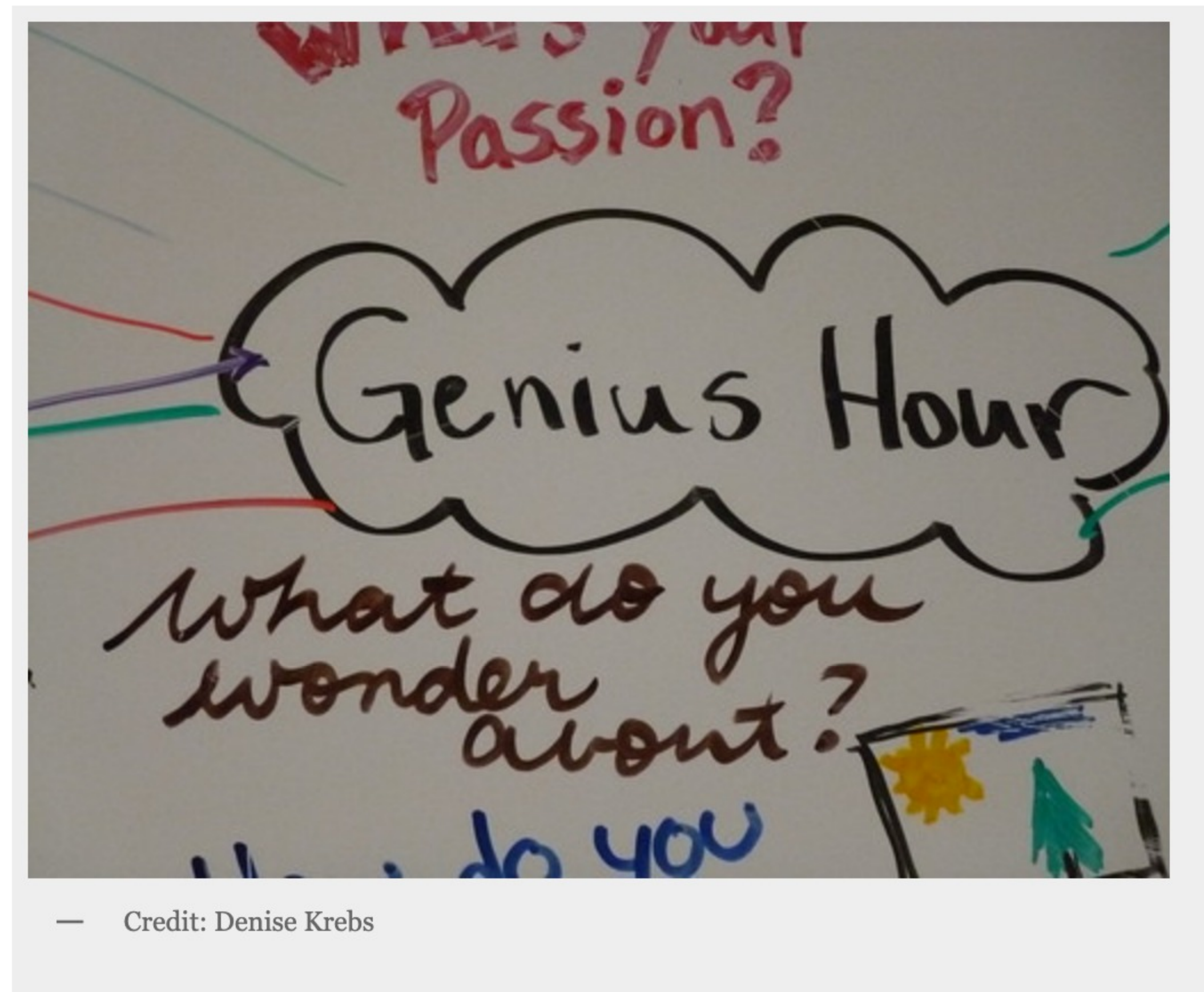
[← Previous](#) [Next →](#)

Student Choice through Genius Hour

(This is a guest post from Joy Kirr, adapted from her blog post "[Genius Hour: An Avenue to Better Teaching](#).")

[Genius Hour](#) is a project in which students are empowered to explore their own passions. The idea is to give students time to work on projects that are important to them.

The idea of Genius Hour and giving student choice has really affected how I teach. I focus on CHILDREN first, and then curriculum.



— Credit: Denise Krebs

A big idea behind this time given to students is to show them that we value them. We think they should be learning what THEY want to learn, in addition to what we are expected to teach. This idea of letting students own their own learning and giving [60 minutes a week to "electrify your job"](#) also comes from [Daniel Pink's book, Drive](#). Whether or not Google gives their employees 20% of their time to work on personal projects, this time can be given to children if administration is supportive of the idea.

I'd like to tell you what's happened in my class this year, as a result of spending FORTY minutes talking about what genius is, and what it is not. We spent time discussing the seven "habitudes" of geniuses that [Angela Maiers](#) teaches about in [Classroom Habitudes](#).

Here are some quips from my 7th graders that I've actually written down for a post such as this.

- "These are great! We have some really creative people in this class!"
- "That must be his genius!!"
- "Look at what I did – it's genius!"
- "He's got perseverance, creativity, AND imagination."
- "I worked on being 'adaptable' yesterday after school..."
- "Please add me to the 'resident expert' list under 'neat & organized.'"

My students are realizing what they're skilled at, and with what skills they may need help. They have already started asking each other for help during our creative days (Dot Day being the most recent). They are relying on me less this year than any other group I've had, and instead going to each other. We have already started building a wonderful community of learners. I'm going to continue telling my students that they have genius in them. We all do.

Regarding the "20% time" we are giving students, first I have to say that I'm very fortunate to work where I do. Many teachers do not have any time to spare – to hand over to their students. Others who are allowed time for this need to make sure it ties to standards, and that students are graded on it. I have the luxury of attaching it to standards my way (see [this LiveBinder and specific plans I'm using in 7th grade ELA](#)), but I am also allowed leeway on how to use the rest of our time during the week. Here is a list of how, by implementing Genius Hour ideas in my classes, the concepts have seeped into the other 80% of our time.

- Students can choose where (and how) to sit, as long as it's safe and not distracting to them or others.
- Students can write in response to a prompt of their choice, as long as they write in relation to our goal or focus for the day.
- Students decorate the room. Many put up their own ideas made at home.
- There is no teacher desk. It is converted into a student station, with supplies for students to use whenever they have a need. (They can also sit there!)
- The only front of the room is when we have the projector on. The rest of the room is fair game for where the speaker (me or a student) stands. (I'm actually always on the move.)
- Student passions are used as catalysts for discussions or writing, or reading, or...
- Students give book talks.
- Students read what they choose.
- Students take pictures for our movie updates for parents.
- Students have blogs for authentic purposes – not for grades.
- Students are asked, "Why not?" more often than they hear the word, "No."

I am no longer the "sage on the stage." I am truly the "guide on the side" for most of our lessons. Implementing Genius Hour in my classroom has made me ask these questions (from p34 of [The Passion-Driven Classroom](#)) every day: Who is in charge of learning at our school? Who does the most work in our classroom? Who does the creating, constructing, producing, performing? The answer must be: The learners.

Many teachers remain disconnected from their students. As Angela Maiers and Amy Sandvold share in [The Passion-Driven Classroom](#), "96% of teachers reported that creativity should be promoted in the classroom. However, when asked which students they actually preferred to teach, teachers chose the students who were most compliant" (5). "Messy" learning, which is what Genius Hour is, and times when the learners are working the hardest, is difficult for me to see with my "old school" eyes. I like order. I appreciate quiet. ... But the things I HEAR from students during these "messy" times are precious gems. They alert me to the fact that students are learning, and enjoying the process simultaneously. That's what it's about. And that is how implementing Genius Hour has affected my teaching during the other 80% of the week.



— Credit: Denise Krebs

This entry was posted in [Uncategorized](#) and tagged [genius hour](#), [PIP](#), [student choice](#), [student voice](#), [student-centered learning](#) by [Karen Fasimpaur](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

ONE THOUGHT ON "STUDENT CHOICE THROUGH GENIUS HOUR"



Michelle Sadrena Clark on **February 14, 2014 at 1:45 am** said:

Thank you for introducing Genius Hour to the G+ Community. There are so many nuggets of classroom wisdom from you and your students. I don't know when you find the time to read all of these great books full of effective ideas, but I appreciate that now I too can benefit. It actually seems like an efficient and purposeful use of time for our Advisory program. Often times Advisory tends to be the last class teachers remember to plan for at our school, so it can deteriorate into Starbucks runs or "work time". Whereas Genius Hour would be a legitimate and fruitful way to approach personal development!

[Reply ↓](#)

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

- Notify me of follow-up comments by email.
- Notify me of new posts by email.

Post Comment