

# GOTD

**GREJ OF THE DAY**

Knowledge is cool!




👉 Micael Hermansson 👈

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## Wow!

For the past ten years I have started most school days with Grej of the Day (GOTD). These micro lessons last eight to ten minutes and set the tone for the rest of the day. The interesting and exciting topics of GOTD are meant to inspire and arouse curiosity.

The Grej of the Day method is used throughout Scandinavia. It is also growing popularity in the Netherlands and Belgium, and beyond the borders of Europe. You can apply it to all ages and in all classes of primary school, secondary school, special education and adult education. Teachers exchange their own *grejs* in Facebook groups and on various websites.

Everyone can work with GOTD. This method fits into all lesson plans and they are fun! Whether you already use Grej of the Day, or are hearing about it for the first time, this book explains the method and how to achieve maximum impact: Students who say *Wow!* in class.

I hope you get a lot out of this book.



*Micael Hermansson*

UMEÅ / TARNABY, MARCH 2020

Micael worked as a teacher for thirty years (1986-2015). 2009 he started exploring the power of micro lessons and soon GOTD started spreading.

In 2015 Micael received the title "Best teacher in Sweden" and in 2019 "Best public speaker in Sweden".

The last six years Micael has been working fulltime as an author - writing e.g. six GOTD-books - and as an international key not speaker, including TEDtalks.

# What will you find in this book?

The word "grej" means "one thing" in Swedish. Grej of the Day – also known by its abbreviation GOTD – is quite simply 'thing of the day'. It is an inspiring micro lesson based on a specific approach. I have chosen to call this concept Grej of the Day, or GOTD, in English as well.

This book is made up of four short parts.

## 1. Background

I explain how Grej of the Day came about and developed.

## 2. What is GOTD?

I tell you what characterizes GOTD. In a nutshell: You send children home with a clue about tomorrow's *grej*. The following day, you give them the eight to ten minutes long micro lesson, you discuss it together with your students and you give them the next clue.

In this section of the book, I share my experience regarding the impact of GOTD on students.

## 3. Working with the GOTD model

Here you find the step-by-step model that I believe provides the fastest and most efficient approach and best results.

- What to take into account during the preparations and planning
- What to do during the micro lesson itself
- How to extend the lesson with follow-up questions
- How students can work with the material

... and finally some valuable tips



GOTD

#### **4. The micro lessons**

Every Grej of the Day lesson is clearly presented on two pages. Here you find everything you need before, during and after the micro lesson. All the GOTDs in this book have the same build-up:

- 1.** On the left-hand side, a summary of important facts with a clue.
- 2.** On the right-hand side, alternative clues, facts, particulars, questions and tips for further topics.

This book includes a step-by-step manual for working with Grej of the Day and 15 sample lessons.

# 1 Background

The idea for Grej of the Day came to me one day in 2009, totally out of the blue. It was indeed at one of those moments when I needed it most.

I had been in the profession for quite some time (twenty-five years) and had already had a number of more or less successful ideas to increase student involvement and maximize the transfer of knowledge. I had been struggling for a while with how to reach out to the entire class in the best way possible. I wanted all the students to be enthusiastic, not just a few!

It was frustrating. No matter what method I tried, there were always a significant number of students who could not answer the simple question 'What did you learn today?' Instead they answered "Nothing special". This was painful to hear.

## The first grej

In autumn 2009 I had a new class and decided to try out my brand new idea. I remember my first GOTD very well. The students came in. I had written a question on the black board: "Why don't polar bears eat penguins?"

My students started the day with 20 minutes of independent reading, and I saw many of them peeking at my question wondering about it, instead of reading their books. I explained that we were trying out a new idea, called Grej of the Day. Every morning I would tell them something new and interesting and I wanted them to keep notes in a special GOTD notebook.

The students were not overly enthusiastic, but I pushed ahead with it.

The answer to the question was that the polar bears live at the North Pole and the penguins live at the South Pole. This answer led me to our first GOTD-topic: The South Pole. I showed a few photographs, pulled out a map, spoke about low temperature records, thickness of ice and gave an abbreviated version of the race to the South Pole involving Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott. I had finished in less than nine minutes.

To my great surprise and joy, the students were fascinated. They listened attentively and took in the information. When I had finished, they had so many questions and thoughts. The best part was how they cheered when I announced that Grej of the Day was to become our new morning routine. They really liked the idea. I wrote a new clue on the board for the following day and felt that this might be the beginning of something very exciting.

More than ten years later, I am still not exactly sure what happened. The micro lessons were all my pupils ever spoke about. They rushed up to me in the schoolyard with their answers to yesterday's clue, and went home in the afternoon with a burning desire to show and tell their families what they had heard and learnt at school. 'Dad, we spoke about cheetahs today. Did you know that...' or "Mum, have you heard of Marie Curie?"

A couple of weeks later I put up a sign in our classroom with a slogan that was to become our motto: "Knowledge is cool".

## Unexpected impact

The impact of the micro lessons exceeded all my prior successes. The reactions and enthusiasm of students were truly exceptional. In just a few weeks' time I noticed that the children not only loved this new routine in the morning, but also started dealing with school differently. They had become curious and some took school more seriously. They also appeared happier. The students were proud of their newly acquired knowledge, something I had never seen before. I also noticed another positive impact: Class cohesion increased because this new 'thing' belonged to all of us.

I enthusiastically told colleagues and friends about Grej of the Day and the positive reactions of students, but I guess it sounded too good to be true. No one really believed me and no one tried it out for themselves. Four years later a colleague tried GOTD with great success and then it spread from colleague to colleague. GOTD started spreading fast.

Personally, I knew and felt from the start that GOTD was something special. I saw students who had never given much attention to school suddenly making their own GOTDs in order to surprise their parents and me. I noticed how incredibly motivated they became and how they loved this concept:

1. The clue - get them exciting the day before.
2. The micro lesson - keep it short.
3. End the lesson with a "WOW" to increase the curiosity and interest in the subject.
4. Retell from heart at home - the students would blow their parents' minds with amazing facts.

Still, I did not realize at the time, November 2009, that the idea would spread outside Sweden, all over the world.

## 2 What is GOTD?

What is Grej of the Day? I will give you my own description and that of my students.

**My own description:** Grej of the Day is a WOW-fact micro lesson that lasts eight to ten minutes and that I generally give every day - hence its name. I switch randomly between three categories: *people*, *places* and *events/other* of importance that have somehow changed the world, or have had an influence on it. A *grej* is a short stand-alone story that is told succinctly. Over the long term, you start to notice how you can tie together knowledge from different domains. After a while you can see a world wide web of knowledge growing in front of your eyes.

**My student's description:** Grej of the Day are super short lessons that we get nearly every morning. Micael comes up with an interesting or unusual topic, usually something we know little or nothing about. He tells us a short fairytale



of facts, and we listen and take notes in our GOTD notebooks. We usually have many questions or comments afterwards. Micael often uses pictures with a few key words, and complements these with additional info that is particularly fun to know. We are always asked to tell about today's GOTD from heart at home, so we will remember it better. All of our GOTD's are gathered on a big "GOTD-wall" - a world map surrounded by pictures of all the "grejs". The "grejs" are pinpointed on the word map with a thread.

## What is the impact of GOTD?

When I started doing this in 2009, I wanted to share all sorts of interesting and inspiring knowledge so the students would become acquainted with new and exciting domains. My mission was to guide them and to point out the interesting things that would tickle their curiosity and stir their imagination. From now on they would want to know as much as their teacher!

However, after a while I noticed that this approach had far more to offer:

- \* We developed a fun morning routine. Every day had a clear beginning. My students learnt something new and exciting first thing every morning and therefore felt empowered by knowledge.
- \* My students knew all sorts of interesting facts about just about everything: from Cleopatra to Yuri Gagarin to tsunamis and the atomic bomb.

But the gains went far beyond these two aspects. GOTD turned out to have side effects that were more important still.

## Everybody participates

I soon noticed that all students tended to become involved in these lessons, rather than just the talented and high performing few. It is even possible that less interested and weaker students were those who benefitted most. How could this be? Was it the short and fast presentation? Or the repetitive character of the working model? Were they finally getting the feeling of having learnt something useful or new?

## Stimulating follow-up questions

The micro lessons always elicited other exciting follow-up questions and thought experiments in both the students and myself. 'Why did she think that?' 'What if he had done this instead of that?' 'What similarities and differences do you see between...?'

There were always new opportunities to analyse, imagine, discuss and debate.

## Teasers and cliffhangers

I soon realised that it was smart to work with both teasers (tantalizing advance information like clues that make you "prethink") and cliffhangers (sometimes stopping halfway through something exciting to keep the interest alive). During a GOTD I would sometimes take the opportunity to "introduce" topics that we would work with later. This early "sowing technique" proved useful. Students were

# **4** Fifteen micro lessons

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## Anne Frank

**The Netherlands was occupied by the Germans during the Second World War. The Jewish Anne Frank went into hiding from the Nazis in 1942. She kept a diary during the period she was in hiding. The diary received world fame following Anne's death.**

Anne Frank was born on 12 June 1929 in Frankfurt am Main in Germany. There was little work and much poverty in Germany and the country's leader Adolf Hitler blamed Jews for these problems. To escape Hitler's Nazis, Anne Frank's family moved to Amsterdam, the Netherlands in July 1933. The family consisted of her father Otto, her mother Edith and her older sister Margot. In 1941, Anne switched from primary school to the Jewish Lyceum. Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend non-Jewish schools.

Life became increasingly difficult for Jews in Europe. They were banned from parks, cinemas and shops. Anne's father was forced to give up his company. When her sister was summoned up to go and work in Germany in 1942 her parents were alarmed and decided to hide to escape persecution.

The company of Anne's father was situated at 263 Prinsengracht in Amsterdam where he prepared a hiding place in a Secret Annex. The door between the front of the house and the Secret Annex was hidden by a bookcase. Other people were also hiding in the building. Anne and her family lived there for two years.

Anne kept a diary during the years she lived in the Secret Annex. She wrote about every-day events, but also her ambition of becoming a writer. After more than two years the family was discovered. In August 1944 they were transported, first to Westerbork in the Netherlands, and from there, onto the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

On 28 October 1944, 1,308 women left Birkenau for the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, including Anne and her sister. Their mother stayed behind and died on 6 January 1945. It is not entirely clear when Anne and her sister passed away, but it was probably in February or March 1945, from typhus.

Anne's father Otto was the only family member to survive the horrors of the concentration camps. He came into possession of Anne's diary which made a deep impression on him. Otto edited his daughter's diary and *The Diary of a Young Girl* was published in Dutch on 25 June 1947. The book was later translated into approximately 70 languages. Anne's father hoped that readers of the diary would become aware of the dangers brought about by a hatred of Jews, discrimination and racism. Anne Frank's paper archive also includes her *Book of Beautiful Sentences*, in which she recorded loose sentences and passages from books she read in the Secret Annex.

The Anne Frank House is a museum and monument to the memory of Anne Frank and her Jewish family. It receives nearly one million visitors per year.

## ALTERNATIVE CLUES

- \* The woman with two Nobel Prizes
- \* She was radio active
- \* Curious Curie

## FACTS

- \* Born in Poland, died in France
- \* 1867-1934
- \* Moved to Paris to study
- \* Taught at a secondary school for young girls
- \* Discovered and named the elements polonium (after Poland) and radium
- \* Received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903, together with Pierre Curie and Henri Becquerel
- \* Received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1911
- \* Is the only person to have received the prize in both physics and chemistry
- \* Examined and treated soldiers during the First World War
- \* Died from a disease probably caused by radioactive radiation

## NOTEWORTHY

- \* Discovered radioactivity
- \* The first woman to receive a Nobel Prize
- \* The first woman professor at the Sorbonne
- \* The element curium is named after Marie and Pierre Curie
- \* Their daughter Irène Joliot-Curie also received a Nobel Prize (in Chemistry, 1935)

## QUESTIONS

- \* In which country was Marie Curie born?
- \* What are the two elements she discovered?
- \* Which Nobel Prizes did she receive, and when?
- \* Nowadays men still receive more Nobel Prizes than women. Why?
- \* Marie Curie worked in a workshop without special anti-radiation protection. How would it be done nowadays?



**Compare with** Aletta Jacobs, Emma Leclercq, Alfred Nobel, Wilhelm Röntgen, Albert Einstein, Ada Lovelace, Chernobyl