

## Look the Part

My dress sense around the time I began life as a maths teacher might best be described as charity shop chic. At university I had amassed an array of fifties jackets that had served me well, and I innocently thought my new proteges would be impressed by my stylish brand of retro cool. How wrong can you be. My pupils fell silent as I walked in, before sharing a communal ‘Ouch!’ and finishing with shouts of ‘Oxfam was it, sir?’ (this was quite a tough school.) A student called Mavis took me on one side in a motherly way at the end of the lesson. ‘Give yourself a treat, sir,’ she said. ‘Go to a proper shop and buy yourself something really nice.’

‘What should I wear?’ is a question that (almost) every mathematics teacher has to grapple with (presumably naturalists need to learn maths too). Should one try to be impeccably smart, or is that a losing battle? Is mufti okay? Ties? Heels? Every teacher will have their own more or less conscious take on the issue, and that take will be clearly visible to everyone else.

Sometimes I fantasise about being given the perfect clothing in which to teach maths. My daydream goes like this:

*Q, the greying Head of M16, eyed up the two men. ‘Jonny, I’d like you meet Dr Leonard Hoffstein – he’s been working on an ingenious new*

*'Maths Suit' for your next assignment. It comes with a full range of accessories, of course.'*

*Jonny, slim and tanned after a week lecturing in California, smiled broadly as he shook Dr Hoffstein's hand. 'Delighted to meet you, Dr Hoffstein. The name's Gee. Jonny Gee. Licensed to teach mathematics.'*

*'Would you like to try your suit on, Mr Gee?' said Dr Hoffstein in flawless English. A few minutes later, Gee looked at himself in the mirror. The fit was perfect. Looking more closely, he could see that his suit was covered in carefully tailored pockets. There was a semi-circular one containing a protractor, a right-angled pair for setsquares, and a neat 12-inch by 1-inch one where a metal ruler could be neatly secreted. Gee sighed with satisfaction and checked his TI-84 carefully before slipping it smoothly into the under-arm calculator holster.*

*Q and Dr Hoffstein purred over their sartorial creation. 'Now to explain a few little extras,' said Dr Hoffstein. 'These soft leather patches on the elbows are actually detachable mini-frisbees, excellent for giving someone in the back row a gentle wake up call.'*

*'Your left cufflink,' explained Q, 'is a laser pointer when pressed, while your right moves your Powerpoint on by one slide.'*

*Dr Hoffstein reached into a small reinforced pocket by Jonny's chest.*

*'This may look like a pair of compasses, Jonny, but if you just break someone's skin with its point, it will administer a dose of Ritalin sufficient*

*to sedate a rowdy student of average build for an entire 90-minute lesson.'*

*'Well, good luck, Gee,' said Q. 'You have a tough assignment ahead. Spectre, as you know, is committed to ridding the world of enjoyable mathematics once and for all...'*

We are all allowed to dream. But until Q and Dr Hoffstein knock on my door, I will stick to my current rules for teacher kit: nothing too flash, nothing too staid, and above all, everything built to last. I even wear a tie – that I can still buy at charity shops without people noticing...

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