

# The First Six Weeks of School

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STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS SERIES



# Week One

## CHAPTER ONE

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*rom the moment students arrive at school I try to give them "instant ownership of their room." They need right away to feel known and liked by their teacher. They need to make an impact on the environment, to see that the fact that they are there makes a difference. The children also need to feel comfortable within that environment. The focus of the first week of school is upon getting to know each other and the routines and layout of the school.*

**Week One**

DEBORAH PORTER, *first-grade teacher*

Deborah is speaking about first-graders, but her statements ring true for learners of all ages. In the first week of school, teachers must provide plenty of safe, comfortable ways for class members to get to know each other, to share their ideas and interests, and to feel a sense of safety and comfort in their classroom. This requires careful planning and direction of nearly every moment of the first few days.

During the first week of school, when we are getting to know each other and learning basic procedures (such as lining up and lunch routines), there are no general class rules. Those rules will be generated and articulated by the group later. It is critical, however, that children have a clear understanding of our expectations and boundaries from the moment they enter the classroom.

Paula remembers well her son's first day of kindergarten. As they drove home at the end of the day, she asked him how he liked school. He burst into tears. "I don't know what the rules are!" he sobbed. His teacher's expectations were not clear to him. He was afraid he would discover the rules only by breaking them and "getting in trouble." The start to his school career was filled with anxiety!

In contrast, we want children, from the first day of school, to feel secure and successful because they know the rules of the culture. Teaching proactively is essential during these early days. Teachers must discuss and model new routines and experiences and let students practice them before they are actually performed.

At this point, rules are very specific and are related to the concrete actions of each activity—"In our meetings, one person speaks at a time," or "When the bell rings, everybody freezes." Behaviors are modeled and practiced, modeled and practiced, over and over in each new situation. A rhythm of practice and learning is established when children learn how to "freeze" at the bell signal, and it continues as they learn to arrange themselves for Morning Meeting, line up to go outside, use the name tag system to go to the bathroom, etc.

## Overview

As adults, we often forget how much knowledge and attention it takes for a child to walk quietly in the hall, invite a friend to lunch, choose a book from the library and settle in to read for half an hour, or pack a bag to get ready for dismissal. In the early days of the school year, we need to break down the steps for each classroom procedure. By involving the children in discussion and by modeling what to do in each situation, we alleviate anxieties about *not* knowing and clarify the teacher's expectations.

All of this teaching and practicing must occur in a rich and meaningful context. As you will see in the lesson plans themselves, much of the content of the first week's curriculum focuses upon and grows from the children themselves. Rather than beginning work in textbooks and workbooks right away, students are learning morning greetings, bringing in and studying family photographs, talking about favorite books, and sharing their hopes and dreams for the upcoming year. Through "guided discoveries," students exchange and extend the good ideas and knowledge they have about using school materials and tools such as math manipulatives, crayons, and dictionaries. These activities form the core around which skills are learned and developed. As students reveal their strengths, and generate and share ideas, they become active participants in their learning and assume increasing responsibility in small, incremental steps.

During the first week, all students are doing the same thing at the same time, though students may be in small groups, with partners, or by themselves at times. The teacher is highly focused upon the process of the group and, when not engaged in active instruction, is observing students and giving them frequent feedback.

In her book *Teaching Children to Care*, Ruth Charney writes about the importance of seeing children and letting them know that you see all that happens in the classroom during the early weeks of school: “My chair, my table or desk is where I can see the entire classroom. When I work with a small group, my chair is turned so that I see the room. I often gather the whole group in a circle so that everyone sees everyone else. I walk in the back—not the front—of the line. I see everyone. And everyone knows that I see because I let them know with my comments, over and over.” (Charney 1991, 21)

While the open-ended nature of many activities encourages discovery and presents cognitive challenges, we do not give direct instruction in new skills or introduce content that will be highly demanding for many in the group during this time. We want students to begin the year reminded of all they have learned, not overwhelmed by what they do not know.

Even more importantly, we want to focus our energy and attention on teaching behavior and establishing a tone. Teachers must be free to see—and to let children know that we see with our comments—the carefulness of work, the kindness of interactions, the attention to cleaning up a table. They must be free to notice also when work is not careful, interactions are not kind, and a table is not cleaned—and to demand a higher standard.

These are the teachings of the early weeks of school—not the new hard math concepts or vocabulary lists. New content and skills are certainly important, and we love teaching them, but they will wait. Teaching the skills of cooperation and collaboration and establishing a productive learning climate allows, enriches, and enhances the academic and social learning that comes later.

It is not always easy to restrain ourselves during these early weeks from leaping ahead and unfurling the year’s full-blown curriculum which has been incubating in our heads all summer. “Teachers who come to believe in this approach,” writes Chip Wood in *Time to Teach, Time to Learn*, “talk about how hard it is to follow it as they watch their colleagues zoom ahead in the curriculum, how much they worry they will never get their children to catch up. But like the tortoise and the hare, slow but sure wins the race.” Teachers who devote time during these early weeks to setting goals, generating rules, exploring materials, and building a trustworthy space for learning find that in the end the approach pays off greatly. “In the long run, time is gained and enriched for teachers and students alike. Discipline difficulties are fewer and less time-consuming than in other classrooms where the social expectations were not a

## THE FIRST SIX WEEKS OF SCHOOL

clear focus. There is greater understanding of academic expectations and academic outcomes are improved.” (Wood 1999, 205)

The first week is a time to help children see their school as a place where they belong and where they know and can meet expectations. They need to feel comfortable and supported, excited and challenged. By the week’s end, the classroom walls display students’ work; the air holds echoes of their voices offering a hope, venturing an idea about those curved lines on a globe, singing a new song, or laughing at a lunchtime joke. A new community—with a sense of purpose and with rules, routines, and responsibilities that support that purpose—is forming.

## Goals for Week One

Though the details of our plans differ with different grade levels (as you will see in the sample lesson plans that follow), the following specific goals for the first week of school pertain to all grade levels:

- Students and teachers will know each other's names.
- Students and teachers will be able to name some interests and out-of-school activities or experiences of members of the class.
- Students will know the basic expectations for and will successfully perform the following basic routines of the school day with close teacher supervision and reinforcement:

### Goals for Week One

Arrival	Lunch
Transitions	Signals
Lining up and moving through halls	Work-sharing
Bathroom procedures	Whole-group meetings
Recess	Quiet time
Activity/work times	Cleanup
	Dismissal

- Students and teachers will name and share their hopes and dreams for the school year.
- Students will generate ideas and procedures for using basic tools and materials for reading, math, art, recess, and writing, and will explore their use further in open-ended activity times.
- Each child will present her/his work to the group at least two or three times (with exceptions made for very shy children).
- Children's art, writing, and personal artifacts will be displayed around the room.

Day One	Day Two	Day Three
<b>1:30 Greet each child at the door</b> Name tag and label making Teach freeze signal (bell) by playing "The Freeze Game"	<b>8:30 Arrival and morning message on chart</b>	<b>8:30 Arrival and morning chart</b>
<b>7:00 Morning Meeting</b> Teach signal for silence (raised hands) Teacher introduces each child, and child announces favorite color Singing: "Peanut Butter, Grape Jelly" Teach morning chart: read together, then write each child's name on the chart as he/she says it	<b>8:45 Morning Meeting</b> Practice silence signal Introduce Morning Meeting and generate meeting rules Greeting: teacher greets each child and presents a naming challenge—"Who can name two classmates? Three? Four?" Singing: "This is a Song (Not Very Long)" News and announcements: read morning chart together and discuss children's written input	<b>8:45 Morning Meeting</b> Greeting: each child says her/his name and favorite food, with teacher modeling first Sharing: teacher shares something from family life Song: "I'm a Little Piece of Tin" News and announcements: read morning chart together and discuss children's written input to the chart
<b>7:30 Teach bathroom procedure</b>	<b>9:15 Outside: play "Octopus"</b>	<b>9:15 Outside</b> Introduce "safe tagging" Play "Octopus" and "Fish Gobbler" with children taking turns as taggers
<b>7:45 Snack</b>	<b>9:45 Snack</b>	<b>9:45 Snack</b>
<b>8:00 Introduce outside time</b> Model lining up Walk boundaries of playground Teach and play "Octopus"	<b>10:00 Guided discovery: pattern blocks</b>	<b>10:00 Math</b> Introduce math studies with discussion questions such as, "What are numbers for?" and "What do mathematicians do?" Read a counting picture book Sing an active counting song, such as "This Old Man"
<b>8:45 Guided discovery: crayons</b>	<b>11:00 Teach and practice fire drills</b>	<b>10:40 Guided discovery: scissors</b>
<b>1:30 Tour of school</b> Office, library, gym, cafeteria Play "Cafeteria" (modeling and practicing lunchtime routines)	<b>11:30 Outside: playground equipment</b>	<b>11:30 Outside: introduce sandbox play on the playground</b>
<b>2:00 Lunch</b>	<b>12:00 Lunch</b>	<b>12:00 Lunch: assign seats</b>
<b>2:30 Story time (read-aloud)</b>	<b>12:30 Story time</b>	<b>12:30 Story time</b>
<b>1:00 Quiet time</b>	<b>1:00 Quiet time</b>	<b>1:00 Quiet time</b>
<b>1:15 Guided discovery: pencils and paper</b>	<b>1:15 Guided discovery: books (classroom library)/drawing assignment</b>	<b>1:15 Begin work on "hopes and dreams":</b> model, discuss, then draw a picture of an important hope for school this year
<b>2:00 Guided discovery: playground (swings, slides, jungle gym)</b>	<b>1:45 Outside: teach "Fish Gobbler"</b>	<b>2:00 Introduce activity time and assign each child to one of three activities:</b> pattern blocks, crayons, or independent project (scissors and paste)
<b>2:45 Teach dismissal routines</b>	<b>2:15 Guided discovery: books (classroom library)/drawing assignment</b>	<b>2:45 Closing circle</b>
<b>3:00 Dismissal</b>	<b>2:45 Closing circle</b>	<b>3:00 Dismissal</b>
	<b>3:00 Dismissal</b>	<b>3:00 Dismissal</b>



## Chapter One

### Day Four

**8:30** Arrival and morning chart

**8:45** Morning Meeting

Greeting: teach simple greeting and practice around the circle

Sharing: specialist teacher shares something from her family or personal life

Song: review songs learned so far

News and announcements

**9:15** Outside

"Fish Gobbler"

"Category Tag"

**9:45** Snack

**10:00** Math: activities with pattern blocks

**10:45** Guided discovery: clay

**11:30** Outside: playground activities

**12:00** Lunch: assign lunch partners

**12:30** Story time

**1:00** Quiet time

**1:15** Hopes and dreams drawings: complete, mount, and assist children in writing captions for their drawings

**2:00** Activity time (add clay to activities)

**2:45** Closing circle

**3:00** Dismissal

### Day Five

**8:30** Arrival and morning chart

**8:45** Morning Meeting

Greeting: repeat simple greeting around the circle as practiced on Day Four

Sharing: another specialist teacher will share something about himself/herself

Song: "Apples and Bananas" or "Sandwiches"

News and announcements

**9:15** Outside: "Captain's Coming"

**9:45** Snack

**10:00** Math: pattern block activities

**10:45** Activity time

**11:30** Outside: playground activities

**12:00** Lunch

**12:30** Story time

**1:00** Quiet time

**1:15** School tour: classrooms

**1:45** Model work-sharing, and students share hopes and dreams

**2:15** Fire drill practice with entire school

**2:30** Outside: "Category Tag"

**2:45** Closing circle

**3:00** Dismissal

## Sample Schedule

## Week One

## Primary Grades (K-2)

# Week One

## PRIMARY GRADES (K - 2)

### **Community Building and Tone Setting**

#### **First greetings**

#### **Community Building and Tone Setting**

At the Greenfield Center School, the K-8 laboratory school for Northeast Foundation for Children, the value the community places upon warmth and welcome is evident even before children enter their classrooms. On the first day of school, kindergarten and first-grade children are greeted outside the front door by fifth- or sixth-graders who introduce themselves and then escort the younger child (often along with a parent) to the proper classroom. Over the next few days, the older children continue to meet the younger ones before school starts and walk them to their room.

This accomplishes many goals. It increases the sense of comfort for the younger child entering this large building full of big kids, unfamiliar teachers, and many rooms. It offers older children an opportunity to practice responsibility and to build connections beyond their own age group. And it helps more reticent children separate from parents and become involved in the activities of the classroom.

#### **Making name tags**

As students arrive in the classroom on that first day, I greet them one by one at the door. Children then set to work with crayons making name tags for themselves and labels for coat hooks and storage cubbies. For kindergartners, I prepare the name tags with the students' names printed ahead of time and have them find and decorate the tags.

Ideally, there will be extra teachers available to help the students with this activity, freeing me to greet and roam about, speaking to individuals and helping any child who might be having difficulty with the transition. Specialist teachers such as librarians, special educators, or art and music teachers are usually free and willing to join classrooms for the first fifteen to thirty minutes of the day this first week to help with early morning activities.

As the students work, their anxiety and self-consciousness begin to fall away. Drawing with crayons and writing their names are familiar activities. This is work they can do! In this comfortable atmosphere—with a success-insured task and plenty of adult support—students make reassuring, fledgling connections with other students and with their teachers.

### Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting begins right away. Ahead of time, I have assigned seats by placing cards with names on them around the circle. During the first meeting, I introduce each child to the class and ask each child to answer a simple question, such as “What is your favorite color?” or “What is your favorite food?” as I introduce him or her. This is the very beginning stage of the children’s learning to share information about themselves with the class, a practice which will become an important component of our daily Morning Meeting.

“This is my new friend, Maggie,” I announce as I stand beside Maggie. “This is my new friend, Alex.” The use of the word “friend” is quite intentional and conveys several messages: that the teacher is a friend (albeit a grown-up, in-charge sort of friend); that school is a place to make new friends; and that the teacher expects all classmates to behave in a friendly manner. Although with older students, we would tailor our language to honor their increasingly sophisticated distinctions between friendship and respectful, friendly behavior, this phrasing works well in primary grades.

I might instruct children to respond to each introduction with a group “Hello” or to simply listen and wait their turn to be introduced. After introductions, if time and attention span allow, I ask, “Who thinks they can name two (then three) classmates?”

Next we sing a simple song, “Peanut Butter, Grape Jelly.” While the words are available on a large chart, knowing the song is not necessary for participation. I have deliberately chosen a song that is repetitive, easily learned by all, and fun to sing.

The first Morning Meeting ends with the introduction of the morning message chart, a chart that will greet the children each day as they enter the room. Today’s morning message contains a heading and two sentences:

**Week One**

**Primary  
Grades  
(K-2)**

News and Announcements

Good Morning!

Today is Tuesday,  
September 5, 2000.We will learn names  
today.**Community  
Building and  
Tone Setting***Sample Morning Message Chart  
Primary Grades, Day One*

\* I read the chart, then ask the children to read along with me as I repeat it. Each child says her or his name and I write it on the chart. Later, I will make a more permanent chart of our names to go on the classroom wall. Less than one hour into the school day, each child has been named publicly at least three times.

*ay Two* Subsequent Morning Meetings this week will build from this base. On Day Two, I plan to model how to greet someone by ritually greeting each child myself: "Good Morning, Jesse," "Good Morning, Anna." I tell students that they may return my greeting by saying "Good Morning" back to me, and I let them choose whether or not to do so. This gives me an idea of their readiness to move to the next step in morning greetings.

*y Three* On Day Three, children speak for themselves. Going around the circle, each child says her/his name and the name of a favorite food. They are learning to speak to the group and to share information about themselves.

Assuming most children demonstrate a reasonable comfort level with these first greeting activities, I teach them a simple greeting on Day Four. I first describe and then model the greeting. "Watch and listen carefully," I instruct.

"Good Morning, Nicole." I speak clearly, looking straight at the sturdy, outgoing child I have deliberately chosen across the circle.

"Good Morning, Ms. D.," she responds cheerfully.

"What did you notice I did with my voice, with my eyes, and with my body?" I ask, and the children share their observations.

"You spoke loud so Nicole could hear you."

"You looked right at her."

"You smiled."

"You said her name."

"You noticed a lot," I say. "Now it's your turn to try."

We practice sending the greeting all around the circle, remembering names and all the details we noticed about how to greet someone. We talk about what to do if you forget someone's name. And for the children who are still uncomfortable speaking in front of the group, I offer to say the greeting with them. I know from experience that this simple greeting will take young children some time to master. We will practice daily until most, if not all, can complete it comfortably and respectfully.

### **Singing in week one**

We continue to sing simple and familiar songs as the activity during Morning Meeting all week. The best songs for these first few weeks are simple and familiar and involve some physical activity: hand motions, sign language, stomping, clapping, etc. Songs that require children to practice vowel sounds double as language arts instruction, as do songs with simple words that can be followed on a large chart.

### **News and announcements**

News and announcements time doubles as reading and writing instruction. Each day this week, the morning chart will begin with the same one or two sentences, followed by a request for children's input. Day Two will ask students to put a check under either *yes* or *no* in response to the question "Do you have a brother or sister?" On Day Three, children are asked to "Draw a picture of something you like to do." Day Four, children choose among three or four options: "How many pets do you have? None, one, two, three or more," and on Day Five, children write or draw something they like about school. By the end of the first week of school, the children have shared a great deal of information about themselves and have had many opportunities to make connections with classmates.

### **Closing circle**

Closing circle begins on Day Two. It is a time for reflection and provides a calm, positive tone at the end of the day. This week, class members gather in a circle at the end of the day, and each one takes a turn to share briefly something he/she

## **Week One**

### **Primary Grades (K-2)**

liked about the day. Later, the topic for the closing circle might be varied to include something that the class did well today, or something that you could do better tomorrow, or something that you are looking forward to tomorrow, etc. Though the format is simple and the words are few, this sharing requires students to remember and to sort through the happenings of their day, to make a choice, and to communicate with others.

As the weeks go by, I build reflection into the day in many ways. We might gather in a circle for a few minutes after recess or before Friday's science lesson. The questions vary, prodding students to think about different aspects of their learning:

"Say one thing that worked well at recess today."

"Name one thing that didn't work today at recess."

"Think of one thing that made our play practice fun."

"What is something you learned about spiders this week?"

Reflection is an important tool. As students think together about how their work is progressing, they are actively participating in that learning. As they evaluate and comment, they are building a habit that is key to continuous, lifelong learning. They are learning both from their own reflection and from listening to the contributions of others in the group.

**Community  
Building and  
Tone Setting**

**Exploring  
the School  
Environment**

## **Exploring the School Environment**

### **Outside time in week one**

We spend plenty of time outside playing games together and exploring the playground equipment during this first week. This gives children opportunities to build friendships while learning procedures and expectations for working in a group.

Some careful preparation precedes our actual going outside, beginning with a brief discussion in the classroom. I share my ideas about why outdoor play is important in school and solicit students' ideas. I tell the class, "We will spend lots of time this year working and playing outside. Who can think of something we can do outdoors that we can't do in our classroom?"

"We can run."

"We can yell out loud!"

"We can play games that we don't have room for inside."

"We can take our lunches outside and have a picnic."

"We can bounce the balls really high."

“We can climb on the structure.”

There is no shortage of ideas, and the list grows quickly. I acknowledge, “Yes, there are lots of fun things we can do together outside. And being able to run and shout and get fresh air helps us think better when we come back inside, too. There are a few things we will need to pay attention to so that our outside time is safe for everyone.”

We diagram the boundaries of the playground on chart paper and describe the route we will take on our first trip outdoors, when we will walk the boundaries of the playground together. While still indoors, I show the children how to play a simple game, and I mark where we will play on the chart diagram. I then model procedures for lining up, and the children line up as I watch.

All this preparation ensures that, once outdoors, there is little need for talk and instruction—important, since the children will be excited to be outside and preoccupied with taking in the new surroundings. To add some fun and keep the children’s attention as we walk the boundaries of the play area, we make our line into a “snake” or play “Follow the Leader.”

**Week One**

**Primary  
Grades  
(K-2)**

### **Choosing games for week one**

During the first week, I choose games that are simple and familiar. Tag games are often a good choice. For the first day or two, especially in the younger primary grades (kindergarten and first grade), I am the only tagger. While I model safe tagging, the children are free to run and concentrate on the rules of the game. By Day Three, we discuss and demonstrate safe tagging procedures before we go out. A few students at a time are taggers in that day’s games.

### **Touring the school**

For primary-grade children and especially kindergartners, school can often seem big, complex, and full of large people. A tour of important common areas on the first day helps children feel at home. A trip to the office to meet the school secretary and the principal as they work alleviates anxiety and helps students to know and be known in the building. Other useful places to visit might be the school nurse, the library and librarian, the gym, the custodian’s office, and, most particularly that first morning, the cafeteria.

### **Playing “cafeteria”**

I always plan to end the school tour in the cafeteria. Children meet cafeteria

workers, watch the teacher (or perhaps a cafeteria worker) model the procedures for getting and eating lunch, and then practice the procedures themselves. We call this “playing cafeteria” because we do not really eat at this time. However, when it is time for real lunch and there are lots of other kids and grown-ups around, the children will be confident that they know what to do.

To alleviate anxiety and competition over where to sit and with whom, as well as to minimize misbehaviors, I assign lunch seats to the children for the first few days of school. This practice allows classmates to sit next to a wider range of peers than they might otherwise choose. As they compare lunches and chat, they establish the groundwork for new friendships.

## Rules and Routines

### Exploring the School Environment

### Rules and Routines

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#### Basic signals

Early in the first morning, I introduce two signals for getting the children’s attention—the hands-up signal and the bell signal (this refers to a small bell or chime within the classroom, not the school-wide bell that is used in some schools to indicate various schedule change times throughout the day). While I introduce these signals with an upbeat, playful tone, I also convey that they are very important, to be taken seriously and obeyed immediately.

First, I demonstrate how the bell signal works. I strike the chime and tell the children, “When you hear this sound, you must stop whatever you are doing and look at me. This is called freezing. When I am done speaking, I will say ‘melt’ and you can return to what you were doing.” Later in the year, children will be allowed to use the bell signal to get the attention of the class to make an announcement. For now, it is reserved for the grown-ups in the room. At the beginning of the year, I ring the bell from the same spot in the room each time, making it easy for students to know where to look.

Next, we practice this in a fun way by playing “The Freeze Game.” The children mill about and talk. I ring the bell and see how quickly they can hold their bodies still (freeze) and look at me. I count slowly to measure the time. Once they have all frozen, I give them a simple instruction, such as “Touch your nose,” and then say, “You may melt.” We play “The Freeze Game” often this week, whenever there is a bit of time and the group could use a stretch. The goal is for the entire group to freeze more and more quickly, and to learn to listen carefully to the teacher’s instructions once they are still.



## Chapter One

I teach the hand signal for attention in a similar way. Once I raise my hand, children are to stop talking and raise their hands as well. This visual cue gets the message to the entire group quickly and quietly.

### Bathroom visits

Early on the first day, young students, and especially the kindergartners, need to learn where the bathrooms are and what the routines are for using them. We take a little “field trip” to them, letting the boys see what’s in the girls’ room, and letting the girls see what’s in the boys’ room. The less mystery here, the better!

I model the procedure we will use for leaving the room to go to the bathroom—placing my name tag on the bathroom hook, going directly to and from the bathroom, and remembering to take my name tag down when I return. I anticipate that questions will arise, such as “What if you have to go to the bathroom and someone’s name tag is already on the hook?”

I want children to understand the significance of the steps in this procedure, so I will ask, “Why is it important that you put your name tag on the hook when you leave the room?” We will talk about safety. “It is my job,” I tell them, “to make sure I know where you are and that you are safe at all times. When you put your tag on the bathroom hook, I know that you are in the bathroom.”

### Meeting rules

Meeting rules need to be established quickly, since our class will frequently come together in whole-group circles. Once children have experienced a Morning Meeting (on Day One), we create rules for it (on Day Two). These rules are very specific to meeting times and are different from broader class rules, which we will establish in the second week.

To create meeting rules together, we begin with a question that, in an age-appropriate way, prompts students to think about the purposes of meetings: “What do people do at meetings?” Or, more specifically, “What did we do at our meeting yesterday?”

“We learned people’s names.”

“You told us what we were going to do next in the day.”

“I got to sit with my friends.”

“We sat on the floor.”

“We sang a song.”

Students will provide a range of answers, generating a list that includes both

**Week On**

**Primary  
Grades  
(K-2)**

*Day Two*

the concrete details and the broader concepts about meetings. I will add any important meeting goals which they have missed.

I then ask, "If we are going to accomplish these things at our meetings, how will we need to act? What rules will we need?" This approach reflects our view of rules as a social necessity, guidelines that help us achieve our purposes. They are not some whimsical, arbitrary list manufactured and imposed by the teacher.

I guide the children to rephrase negatively stated rules as positive statements and to articulate specific behaviors. "Don't interrupt a person," offers Kate. "Yes," I nod. "Does 'Wait until a person finishes speaking' cover what you mean?"

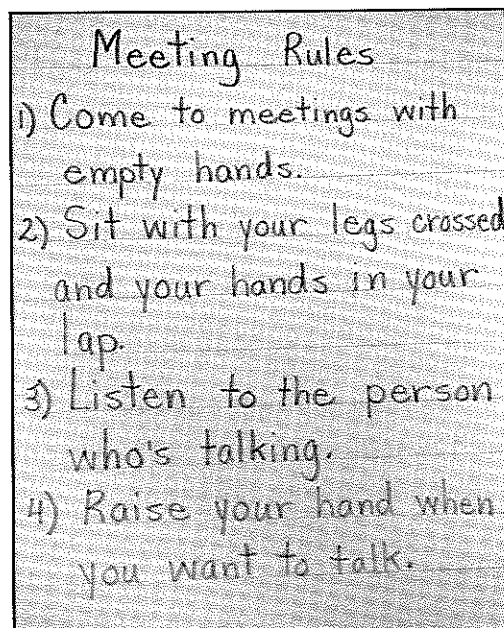
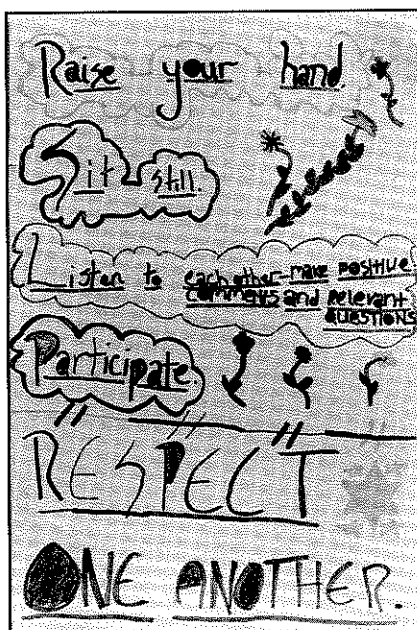
From many suggestions, a few basic rules will emerge. I will neatly print these meeting rules on a poster and display it prominently in our meeting area (see samples below). A final set of meeting rules might include:

### Rules and Routines

- Look at the person who is talking.
- Keep hands and feet to yourself.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Raise your hand to speak.

### Samples of Morning Meeting Rules

*The rules on the left were generated by fifth and sixth graders, the rules on the right by first graders.*



## **Hopes and Dreams**

### **Introductory discussion**

Work on “hopes and dreams” starts on Day Three with a discussion of things we are looking forward to in school this year. I begin by sharing something I am excited about this year.

“This summer I went to school and learned some new ideas about ways to teach reading. I’m looking forward to using some of those new ideas during our reading groups.” While the children watch, I draw a simple sketch of myself seated, holding a large book with pages facing outward.

Next we brainstorm a list of the many different things we might do in school. The list is rich with the children’s ideas: doing math, making new friends, learning to jump rope, reading books with chapters, building with Legos®, doing lots of art projects. Then each child chooses one thing she/he is looking forward to and draws a picture of what that might look like.

Eventually we will mount these drawings on construction paper with captions written beneath the drawing telling what the picture shows. The mounting and writing session is another time when support staff and specialists could be very helpful, especially with the youngest students.

### **Sharing our hopes and dreams**

The hopes and dreams project provides the topic for the class’s first formal work-sharing, a time when the class comes together for the purpose of students’ sharing their work with one another. Before beginning the meeting, I explain the procedures and review meeting rules about speaking clearly and listening attentively. I model holding up my drawing and reading the caption beneath it, asking the children to notice what I did.

After they have noted details, such as the way I turned a bit so that even the people on either side of me could see my drawing and how I spoke “in a big, ‘meeting’ voice,” the children take turns showing their drawings to the group and reading the captions. The drawings are then displayed in the classroom.

### **Guided Discoveries**

#### **Basic materials**

Much of the curriculum this week comes in the form of guided discoveries of

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familiar classroom materials (see Key Terms for a description and detailed example of a guided discovery). The guided discoveries generate interest and creativity, establish a shared classroom vocabulary, and teach children how to care for materials.

I might begin with crayons during the morning of Day One. In the afternoon, we might explore the most standard of classroom supplies, such as pencils and paper. This is a good time to model appropriate pencil grip and use of the pencil sharpener as well, if it does not occur naturally in the course of the guided discovery.

Other guided discoveries I might select for this week are books or the classroom library, pattern blocks (which will help us begin math later in the week), scissors, and clay or Plasticine®. I allow a full thirty minutes for the exploratory play phase of each guided discovery. It is important that the children have time to truly explore. This is also a valuable time for children to get to know each other and for me to observe the class. I learn a lot as I watch them work independently with the materials. Sometimes thirty minutes will be more than they can handle well. If the quality of work and interaction deteriorates early, we stop and sing an active song together, do jumping jacks, or play a game.

**Guided  
Discoveries**  
**Activity Time**

**Sharing guided discovery work**

Sharing the work done during guided discoveries takes ten or fifteen minutes. Convening in a circle, each child takes a turn holding up his/her work and offering a brief response to a question I have posed. One day the question might be "What do you like best about your work?" On another day, "What will you name your work?" or "What was the hardest thing about making your creation?" The children practice speaking and listening to each other while they share their good ideas and work.

**Activity Time**

Activity time begins on Day Three. Children in the class work with a variety of materials, all of which are familiar from previous guided discoveries. I assign a small group to work with crayons, another to work with pattern blocks, and a third to create "independent projects"—constructions of cardboard and various kinds of paper put together with scissors and paste. Activity time prepares the children for future choice times and gives them more practice working independently with classroom materials and with classmates.

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I preview a simplified version of the method children will later use to sign up to do an activity or to work in a certain area. As the children watch, I say the name of each activity as I write it on the chart and draw a box beside it (see sample below). As I assign each child to one of the activities on the chart, he or she places a check in the box beside that activity, then goes to the designated area to begin work.

As the children work, I watch and roam about the room, conversing with individuals and coaching behavior. I make sure I notice the positives and reinforce them with my acknowledgment.

"What an interesting way you are using the crayon to outline your drawing."

"I notice the way you are sharing blocks to make that complicated pattern."

"I hear such nice words at the crayon table."

"You are waiting so patiently for your turn with the paste."

I also remind and redirect when I notice not-so-positive behaviors.

"Remind me. How do we carry those pointy scissors safely?"

"If you need the scissors, what can you say other than 'Gimme those?'"

During the final fifteen minutes of activity time, we gather in a circle, presenting and sharing our work in a format like the one outlined earlier in the guided discovery section.

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### Sample Activity Time Chart

Children place a ✓ in the box next to the activity which they will do.

<u>Activity Time</u>	
Crayons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pattern Blocks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent Projects	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Academics

All academic activities in this first week must be accessible to everyone in the class regardless of skill levels. Specialists often join the class, helping with whatever is going on. They can support special needs students, so that those students are not pulled out of the class during this crucial time for community building and establishment of rules and routines. Specialists are often willing to lead a Morning Meeting, teach a game or song, read a story, or lead an art or outside activity.

Much of the academic curriculum this week is embedded in the Morning Meetings, games, guided discoveries, activity times, and learning of the routines. Children are learning and practicing speaking and listening skills, sequencing, and following directions. They are reading and learning new vocabulary, writing, counting, and observing. They are developing critical thinking skills and skills of artistic expression as well. As they begin to think about the needs of the group and what rules will be needed to help it function, they are grappling with fundamental concepts of democracy.

In addition to the ways mentioned above, the academic curriculum is embedded this week in quiet time and story time as well.

### Quiet time reading

Beginning reading instruction occurs each day at quiet time. At the beginning of the fifteen-minute session, I give each child a quiet time folder containing a book or two, paper and a few crayons or pencils. At first, fifteen minutes of silence is quite a challenge for younger primary children, and I spend much of my attention coaching their behavior to the standards to which I want them to adhere.

I assign each child a place on the rug, on a cushion, or at a table—places separate enough from each other to encourage independent concentration. Once children are settled, I do not allow talking or requests for help from a teacher unless it's an emergency! This frees me to sit with individuals and learn about their reading interests and abilities. As quiet time becomes well established, I can engage in more formal reading assessments with individuals during this time.

Younger primary children are expected to read or look at the books for the first five minutes of quiet time; then they may continue to read or may choose to draw for the last ten minutes. Gradually, the time children are required to read

or look at books will increase, although the time might vary, depending upon an individual's reading comfort and maturity.

### **Story time reading**

Story time builds vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. As I read aloud, I stop often and ask the children for predictions, summaries, and opinions about characters and the decisions the characters make. We might discuss the setting and the difference it makes to the story. We might look at illustrations for clues about how a character is feeling or for details that tell about the character's family or where she/he lives. Sometimes I pose a question and list children's ideas on chart paper.