

September: Setting the Stage



Ahhh! September

Summer has slipped by, and, after countless hours of preparation, you are ready to greet your fresh-faced students. It doesn't take long to resume the frantic pace and experience the joys and challenges of September in the primary grades. As the year begins anew, we reminisce about our class at the end of the previous year. Remember giving directions once and having everyone (well, almost everyone) follow them? Now we return to spelling out each procedure step by step. Luckily, we know how critical the first days and weeks are to establishing routines and setting the stage for a productive year of learning. With this in mind, we patiently model and teach the behaviors we want our young learners to employ, often repeating ourselves over and over and over again. The same holds true for the first month of writing instruction.

September is spent purposefully building a solid foundation for a year of writing experiences while at the same time showing students how writers think, act, and work. As a wise teacher, you know that each lesson you teach at the beginning of the year is as much about setting expectations for myriad behaviors as it is about teaching the content. Furthermore, each time a student draws or writes you have an opportunity to learn about that child's strengths and needs. In order for all of your writers to have a successful year, you build on their strengths and provide personalized instruction to improve their weaknesses, just as Ms. McCaw does for Dudley in *Ms. McCaw Learns to Draw* (Zemach, 2008). This picture book is a must-read because it helps students understand that every child has unique talents and abilities.



Part 1: Morning Message Ideas and Samples

You will find that most of the morning message ideas for September are designed for you to write prior to the students' arrival. As you are well aware, the attention span of young students in September is short. Prewriting the message with a specific purpose in mind allows more time during the message lesson to make teaching points and elicit discussion. When appropriate, invite students to assist in editing the messages to keep the pace quick and the interest high. Depending on the needs of your students, you may consider repeating a message type for a few days or even a week, alternating among messages, or saving the ideas for later in the school year.

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

Use this message to informally assess students' awareness of concepts of print and other language-related knowledge. Prewrite a message about the upcoming day's activities. Begin by asking, "Does anyone notice anything in the message today? You might notice a letter you recognize, an interesting word, a number, a punctuation mark, or some words that look the same." For instance, in the sample message, one student may notice that the words *exciting* and *interesting* end in the same fashion, while

Morning Message Sample

What Do You Notice?

Good morning! Welcome to first grade. We are going to have an exciting and interesting year together. SMILE and MAKE GOOD CHOICES!

another child might remark that some words are written in all capital letters. Both observations will lead you to meaningful discussions about words and the choices authors make while writing. To encourage noticing, invite students to raise hands, individually come to the board or chart, tell the class what they've noticed, and mark it in some way. You can use a message similar to this throughout the year to highlight specific word patterns, conventions, sentence parts, or other language concepts you wish to emphasize.



Morning Message: What Do You Notice?

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: SEPTEMBER WORD CHART

Each month, in addition to teaching students how to spell grade-appropriate high-frequency words, invite learners to help you create a list of seasonal or curricular-related words during morning message. Collect the words on chart paper that you can later display in your room. To aid students in locating the words in the days to come, consider writing each word in a different color or drawing a picture next to each word. For second-grade writers, take a digital photograph of the list, add some blank spaces for students to write their own personal words, and then make copies for students to store in an accessible spot such as their writing workshop folder.

**Morning Message
Sample**

September Word Chart

school	read	lunch
bus	write	pencil
teacher	recess	friend
principal	Labor Day	learn

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: LOOKING AT LETTERS

To support young writers as they begin to distinguish between capital and lowercase letters, prewrite a message alternating between uppercase and lowercase letters. After reading the entire message aloud with your students, begin to rewrite the message, spelling out each word as you write. Invite students to clap each time they see a capital letter in the middle of a word. To make this

**Morning Message
Sample**

Looking at Letters

GoOd mORNING! Do YOu
NOTICE anyTHING strangE in
OUR mESSAGE todAY?

an interactive writing experience, select individuals to share the chalk or marker and rewrite a word or two along the way.

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: SPACES BETWEEN WORDS

Many young children who are beginning to write words find it difficult to leave appropriate spacing between the words. For most students, this skill improves with time and practice. To help students remember to leave spaces between words as they write, demonstrate how to place a



Morning Message: Spaces Between Words

Morning Message Sample

Spaces Between Words

Goodmorningbrainystudents!
Thebreezeischillytoday.
Didyouwearajacket?

craft stick between words as a tactile cue to move their pencil over before writing the next word. For this demonstration, allow ample room below the message to rewrite the same words with spaces in between, or simply draw lines between the words, reread, and invite students to clap each time a word ends.

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: WHERE DO THE PERIODS GO?

Before novice writers develop the concept of a sentence, they have a difficult time determining where to place the ending punctuation. Typically, they place punctuation at the end of every word or line instead of at the end of each complete sentence. To develop students' awareness of proper placement of punctuation, begin by reading the message the way it is currently punctuated (see sample). Point out that the period "signals" (Rickards & Hawes, 2006) the reader to stop. Students will often giggle as you read because it sounds so silly. Continue the demonstration by editing the message with students' help, showing them how to move the ending punctuation and insert

Morning Message Sample

Where Do the Periods Go?

Today is a busy.
day we have a lot.
of exciting things.
planned i can't.
wait to get started.

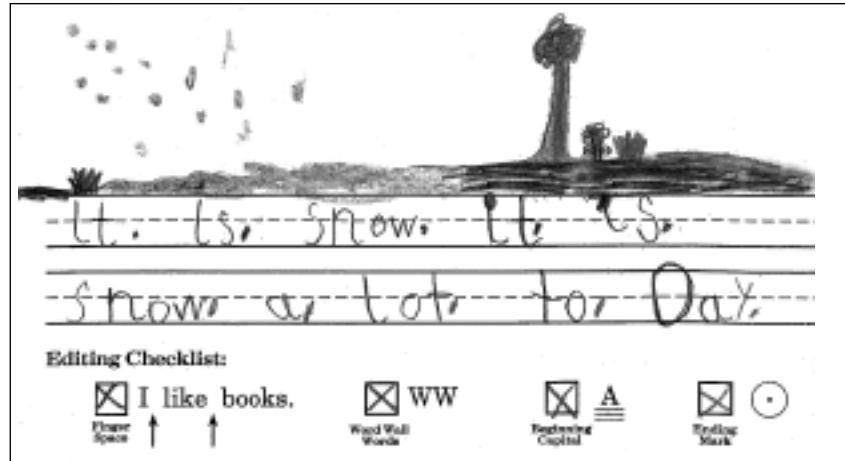
appropriate capital letters. When you reread the sentences with proper punctuation, include an auditory signal for a period, such as a clicker or bell.

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: THINK SMALL!

When telling or writing about experiences, youngsters frequently regale their readers with a “bed-to-bed” story. For example, when writing about their favorite birthday present they begin with, “I woke up. I ate breakfast. I got dressed. It was time for my birthday party. . .” By the time they reach the exciting part, they are tired of writing! For this reason, writers need to learn how to “think small”—in other words, how to focus on one aspect of an event or happening. Try this message to get writers thinking about specific moments instead of writing about the entire day. If you write this message on chart paper, you will be able to preserve it for further discussions about this topic.

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: WORD EXCHANGE

One important aspect of writing is choosing precise words to communicate ideas to your reader. Each time you present a vocabulary lesson, you are teaching young children about word choice. In addition, you strengthen students’ word choice as you read aloud and discuss key words in the text. A quick and easy way to broaden your students’ writing vocabularies is to introduce them to different words in the morning message. To prepare for



A novice writer places punctuation at the end of every word.

Morning Message Sample

Think Small!

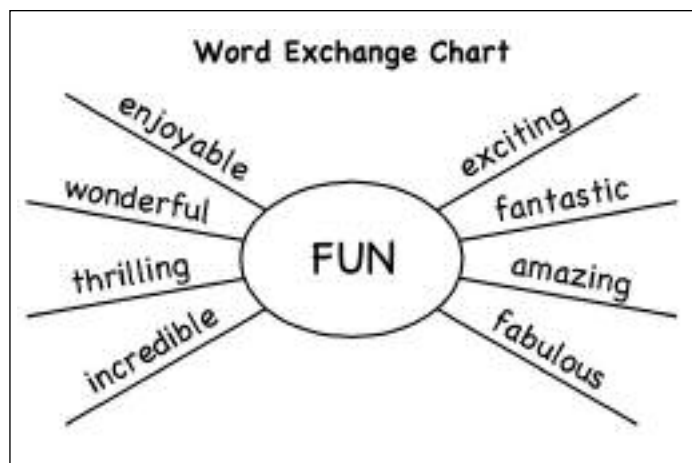
If you were writing about a birthday party, what moments could you describe?

Birthday Party Moments
(possible responses): blowing out the candles, opening gifts, eating the cake, playing games

Morning Message Sample

Let’s make a word exchange! What are other words that mean the same as FUN?

this message, select words that students are choosing over and over again. This message can be repeated each month with different words to prompt you to notice and discuss interesting words with your class.



MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: SHOW, DON'T TELL

This morning message gives students a glimpse into the difference between words that show and words that tell. Many primary writers tend to tell how they are feeling rather than *showing* the reader with vivid verbs and description. To introduce this message, invite a student to act out an emotion such as angry or happy. Jot down the verbs that describe what the child is doing. The sample includes a few sentences to get you started—we're sure you and your students will come up with many more. A book that ties in nicely with this message is *On Monday When It Rained* (Kachenmeister, 2001).

MORNING MESSAGE IDEA: NOUNS ALL AROUND

Use this message after the mini-lesson on page 46 to reinforce the concept of nouns.

Morning Message Sample

Show, Don't Tell

Which sentences show you how the boy is feeling??

The boy is happy. The smiling boy jumps and cheers.
He stomped his feet as he walked away. The boy is mad.
The boy is sad. The tears rolled down his face.

Morning Message Sample

Nouns All Around

Can you circle the nouns in this message?

The door flew open and out darted my puppy. My sister chased him for miles. Finally, Sarah found Beanie hiding at the park.