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"Good Morning, Learners!"

Morning messages welcome children to school and enhance the day's learning and teaching

An adapted excerpt from *Morning Meeting Messages, K-6: 180 Sample Charts from Three Classrooms*, a new NEFC book by Rosalea S. Fisher, Eric Henry, and Deborah Porter, with an introduction by Marlynn K. Clayton



One March morning, children entering a fourth grade classroom take turns gathering at a chart on which their teacher has written a message just for them:

March 7, 2005

Dear Invertebrate Investigators,

Yesterday we continued our studies about invertebrates, and we put two types of food in our worm farm. Recall what you know about worms as we make new observations today.

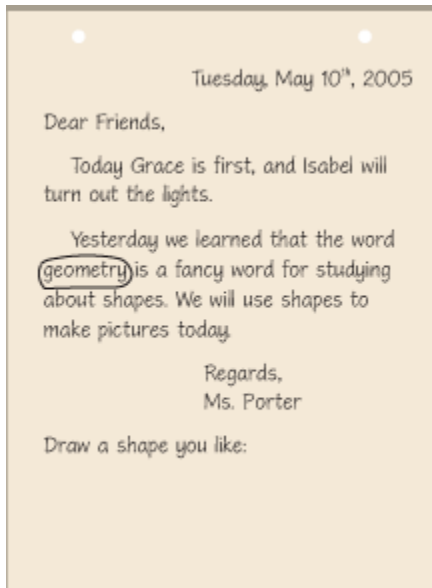
Make a prediction: How do you think the contents of the worm farm will have changed since yesterday?

Some children softly read the words aloud; others read silently. They chat about their predictions and take turns writing them in the space at the bottom of the chart.

When they finish, they move on to another morning activity and a new group of students moves in. It's a fluid process rich with opportunities for social interactions, informal learning, and the building of classroom community and students' sense of competence.

A daily message, written by the teacher for the class and highlighting one aspect of the learning day ahead, is a simple but highly effective technique for welcoming students into the classroom, setting the tone for the day, and reinforcing academic

skills. Teachers in a wide range of K-6 classroom settings use daily messages in various ways.



When kindergarten teacher Deborah Porter uses a relatively new vocabulary word (geometry), she emphasizes it visually and includes a reminder about its definition in the text.

In classes that use the *Responsive Classroom* approach, morning messages play an important role in the last segment of Morning Meeting, when the class reads and works with the message together before moving into the rest of their day. The message is also often integrated into activities and lessons later on in the day. (For more information about Morning Meeting, see [The Morning Meeting Book](#).)

Well-designed messages can anchor the day's learning. Students look forward to seeing and discussing them each morning. Teachers rely on them to launch their day of teaching. In the book *Morning Meeting Messages, K-6: 180 Sample Charts from Three Classrooms*, teachers will find comprehensive guidelines on creating effective morning messages as well as annotated charts chosen from those created in three classrooms over the course of a year. Here we give a few sample tips on how to create purposeful morning messages for your students.

Write a message every day before students arrive. Predictability helps students feel secure, and the completed message signals to the children that you're ready to start the day. Plus, seeing that you've taken time to write to them daily shows students that morning messages are important and deserve their attention.

Use an easel stand and chart paper, if possible. Sturdy and easily moveable, an easel stand holding the message chart can be placed to welcome the children as they enter the room, repositioned in the morning meeting circle, and then moved to a spot where students can continue reading or writing on the chart during the day. Another advantage of using chart paper is that messages can easily be saved for later use or review.

Include these essential elements:

- * *A greeting, such as "Good Morning!" or "Welcome, Math Wizards!"* This greeting can be quite simple, as long as it is friendly and personal, telling the children, "This message was written especially for you. Come and read it!"
- * *The date.* This may be written at the top of the page or as part of a sentence: "Today is Tuesday, November 7, 2006."
- * *Body.* The body should draw the children's attention to something they'll look forward to doing in later in the school day. Write in a style that is

developmentally appropriate for the children, and invite them to think about or respond in some way to what you've written.

Focus on a single topic. This is a key to crafting messages that engage students. Instead of using the message to review the day's schedule, choose one idea drawn from a topic of current interest to the class and get them thinking about it. Message topics can be derived from curriculum units, classroom issues and interests, or events in the news.

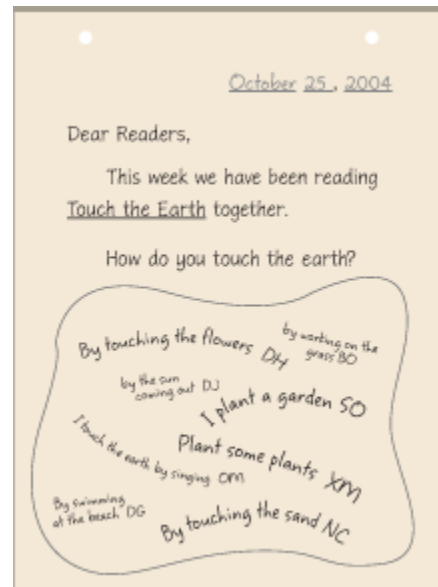
Use examples for inspiration, but make your messages unique. Talking to colleagues or perusing the 180 sample charts in *Morning Meeting Messages* can be a great way to get ideas and get over "writer's block." But your messages will be most powerful and engaging to your students if tailored to their particular needs and learning goals.

Try these tips for making writing messages easier:

- * **Use a weekly schedule.** For example, Monday's message can always be about events from the weekend, Tuesday's can always be about science, and so on. Also, you may want to plan a week's messages in advance as you do your week's lesson planning.
- * **Make notes or a draft the day before.** Planning ahead cuts down on the stress of trying to think and write under pressure..
- * **Keep it simple.** Messages don't have to be clever, funny, or artistic. Speaking directly to the class on topics they care about is usually the best way to get their interest.

Ready to learn

Well-crafted morning messages generate enthusiasm about the day ahead, reinforce academic skills, and strengthen students' sense of themselves as a learning community. In the words of one fifth grade teacher, the message "focuses children's attention on the business of school and gives them a sense of purpose and belonging in the classroom."



Questions that invite children's creativity usually elicit enthusiastic responses. This message helps students connect literature study with personal experience in a simple, effective way.

Purposes of Morning Messages

1. Welcome students to school.

Seeing an attractive and interesting message waiting for them at the beginning of the day lets children know that their teacher has thought about the day ahead and welcomes them to it. The message helps children make the daily shift from home to the classroom community.

2. Set a positive tone for the day.

The message excites the children about their academic day. It conveys that the classroom is a fun, safe place for learning and working hard, lets students start the day feeling competent, and shows them that their teacher believes in them and their abilities.

3. Reinforce literacy and other academic skills.

Morning messages give children daily practice in functional reading. For new readers, messages with predictable patterns and easy sight words build confidence. For more fluent readers, messages offer daily practice in reading harder words and sentences. Messages can focus on topics from math, writing, science, social studies, or literature studies.

4. Encourage a sense of community.

A carefully crafted message builds community. It provides a context for acknowledging group accomplishments and challenges and can be used to prompt group thinking, planning, and reflection.

5. Send students into the day ready to learn.

Reading and discussing a message that stems from classroom life and studies helps students make the transition into the school day with learning in mind.

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