
Introduction

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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?

THIS MESSAGE, WRITTEN IN LARGE LETTERS and placed prominently on a chart stand near the door, greets students in a fourth grade class as they walk into the room on a March morning. After taking off their coats and putting away their belongings, several students gather around the chart to read the message and see what's in store for the day ahead.

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



“The food will be gone.”

“No change.”

“They will eat some of both.”

When these students are done at the chart, 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.

After the morning arrival time, the teacher moves the chart into the meeting circle for the class’s daily morning meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting, the morning message is the focal point of the conversation.

“Who would like to read today’s message?” asks the teacher as she adjusts the chart stand beside her slightly so the message is visible to every child in the circle.

The children’s attention shifts to the chart, and many hands go up. The teacher calls on Alonzo, who reads the message aloud.

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After he finishes, the teacher says to the class, “You’ve put some predictions up here. What do you notice about them?” and takes a few responses. The class then hears several students describe how they came up with their predictions.

“So, we have a lot of different predictions,” the teacher summarizes, “We’ll get back to this topic after lunch, when you’ll do some writing about your predictions before we look at the worms. We’re going to start the day now with partner reading. Get your folder and your book and meet your partner at your reading spot.” The class disperses, energized and ready for a day of learning.

A daily message, written by the teacher for the class and highlighting one aspect of the learning day ahead, is a highly effective technique for welcoming students into the classroom and generating their excitement and sense of competence as they begin the day. It can help set the tone for the day and be used to reinforce a wide range of academic skills. Implemented in a wide range of K–6 classroom settings, a morning message is a simple but powerful technique with an array of benefits for students.

This book features 180 examples of morning meeting messages selected over the course of a year from three public elementary school classrooms: a K–1 class in a small rural school, a third grade bilingual class in an urban setting, and a fifth grade class in the suburbs of a large city. It also features guidelines and tips for creating your own messages and using them as a tool for teaching your class.

Purposes of Morning Meeting Messages

There are multiple purposes for a daily message chart. The teachers featured in this book hold the following goals in mind when crafting their daily messages to students:

1. To welcome students to school
2. To set a positive tone for the day
3. To reinforce literacy and other academic skills
4. To encourage a sense of community
5. To send students into the day ready to learn

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 is ready for them, has thought about the day ahead, and welcomes them to it. The message helps children make the daily shift from being their “home selves” to being members of their classroom community. Below is a sample chart from the K–1 classroom featured in this book that illustrates how a teacher uses the chart to welcome students to school.



By asking students about their weekends and inviting each child to draw a sun, the teacher helps them make the transition from home to school and sends the message that each of their lives is important and each can make a valued contribution to classroom life.

2. Set a positive tone for the day

Another goal of the message is to excite the children about their academic day. The tone of the writing reflects the sense of community in the class—the feeling of “us.” It conveys that the classroom is a fun, safe place for learning and working hard. It gives students an opportunity to feel competent and to see that their teacher believes in them and their abilities.

3. Reinforce literacy and other academic skills

Morning meeting messages give children the opportunity to practice functional reading every day. For children who are learning to read, messages that use predictable patterns and easy sight words provide high-interest, confidence-building practice. For more fluent readers, the message provides daily practice in reading harder words and sentences and reinforces the fact that reading is a valuable way to get information. The content is usually drawn from the math, science, literature, or other academic content the class is studying. Whatever the content, the text can also be used to reinforce literacy skills. Here, the third grade teacher in this book uses the message to give students practice in grasping units of measure.

February 18, 2005

Dear Third Graders,

We've been learning about measuring in math.
When you need to measure something, how do
you decide which tool to use?

What would you measure with:

a ruler? a yardstick? the unit mile?

Besides using such a chart to discuss measuring, a teacher might also use it to lead the class in a quick, playful review of the spelling of “measure” versus “measuring” or the use of contractions.

4. Encourage a sense of community

A carefully crafted message is a tool for building a sense of community. It provides a context for acknowledging group accomplishments and challenges and can be used to prompt group thinking, planning, and reflection. A message can also serve as a mirror for the class when the teacher uses it to tell them positive things she or he has noticed

about their learning and growth. In the message below, for example, the fifth grade teacher in this book reinforces the positive behaviors students showed in a class game:

11/18/04

Dear Cooperative Class,

Good morning! I was impressed by your focus and spirited play during yesterday's Explorer Matrix game. Wow! What are some things that you think made this activity go so well for us?

5. Send students into the day ready to learn

Reading and discussing the message together at the end of morning meeting helps students make the transition into the rest of the day. Because the content of the chart stems from the life and interests of the class, the message generates enthusiasm about the class's learning and launches students into the day with learning in mind.

The teachers who wrote the messages in this book are long-time teachers who use the *Responsive Classroom* approach to teaching and a daily morning meeting that uses the message as a teaching tool. (See the Appendix for information about the *Responsive Classroom* approach and its version of morning meeting.) While a daily morning message is part of the *Responsive Classroom* approach, all teachers, regardless of whether they use this approach to teaching, can use a morning message effectively.

The morning message charts selected from each of the three classrooms are intended to inspire you to create messages that meet the needs of your students and fit your teaching style. The messages featured in this book will give you ideas and guidance, but it is ultimately your knowledge of your class that will make the daily messages you write powerful, purposeful, and dynamic for your group of students.

How to Use This Book

- n In addition to the 180 sample charts in this book, the next section provides general tips about creating and using messages. You may want to read these guidelines now, or wait until you have become familiar with the sample charts. Choose whichever order feels right for you.
- n Although you will probably begin by perusing the charts from the grade level closest to the one you teach, remember to look at other grade levels for ideas that you can adapt to fit your class's needs and reading abilities.
- n Look for common features among the sample messages, including length and other format issues, content that focuses on a single topic, and a tone that is friendly and inviting.
- n Notice the differences in Deborah's, Rosalea's, and Eric's styles. Each of these teachers' messages are effective because they are authentic, reflecting her or his personality and relationship with a particular group of children.
- n Pay attention to the way the messages change and evolve over the course of the school year. Look for threads and themes that emerge, and for evidence of the class's increasing skill and knowledge.
- n Read the annotations to learn more about the thinking that guides the process of writing messages, as well as how teachers use messages during morning meeting and beyond.

Note: While the teachers' writing is the focus of the sample charts in this book, in some cases student responses have also been included. Where necessary, writing by students was edited to improve readability.