

Introduction

For many years, I've been collecting tried-and-true greetings and activities for Morning Meeting from K–8 classrooms across the country. I find these in classrooms, at workshops, in teacher rooms, and over dinner conversations. I jot them down in notebooks, on the back of envelopes, on odd scraps of paper, and on restaurant napkins.

I collect these activities because I believe so deeply in their value. Like Morning Meeting itself, the activities collected in this book offer students the opportunity to practice important academic and social skills in a playful way. This is a powerful combination as children often learn best when they're having fun.

In today's educational environment with so much focus on accountability, teachers often worry about "wasting time" on fun activities when there's so much curriculum to cover. Rest assured that the activities in this book not only create an environment that's conducive to learning, but they help children learn content and practice skills required by state standards.

In addition to the specific skills children practice while participating in these activities—skills such as spelling, counting, reading, and active listening—there are many general skills important to learning that children develop through these activities. These are:

- Risk taking
- Choice making
- Problem solving
- Self-control
- Active participation
- Assertion
- Cooperation

These are skills that serve children well during Morning Meeting and throughout the rest of the school day.

This book is meant to complement *The Morning Meeting Book* written by Roxann Kriete (NEFC 2002). In *The Morning Meeting Book*, you'll find a guide to doing all four components of daily Morning Meetings as well as directions for over 100 greetings and group activities. However, since for some readers *99 Activities and Greetings* will be a first taste of Morning Meeting, I offer some basic information about Morning Meeting and the role of greetings and group activities on the following pages. You'll also find guidelines for using these activities and greetings successfully.

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Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting, a key component of the *Responsive Classroom* approach to teaching, is a powerful tool for building community and integrating the teaching of social and academic skills. Every day, for fifteen to thirty minutes first thing in the morning, teachers and students gather in a circle to greet one another, share news, practice academic and social skills, and prepare for the day ahead.

The meeting consists of four components done in the following order:

- 1. GREETING:** Students greet each other by name. There are many greeting activities, including handshaking, singing, clapping, and greeting in different languages.
- 2. SHARING:** Students share information about important events in their lives. Listeners offer empathic comments or ask clarifying questions.
- 3. GROUP ACTIVITY:** All participate in a brief, lively activity that fosters group cohesion (for example, reciting a poem, dancing, singing, or playing a game that reinforces social and/or academic skills).
- 4. NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Children read the news and announcements chart that their teacher has written. The chart often includes an interactive activity and focuses children on the work of the day ahead.

Role of Greeting and Group Activity

Greeting

Morning Meeting always begins with Greeting. In Greeting, each child is welcomed by name and practices welcoming others.

The goals of the Greeting component are:

- 1.** To set a positive tone for the day
- 2.** To provide a sense of recognition and belonging
- 3.** To help children learn and use everyone's name
- 4.** To let children practice hospitality

Although greetings might reinforce academic content or challenge the intellect, the primary learning is social. In Greeting, children not only learn and practice the basic elements of greeting each other in a friendly way, they also gain experience in reaching across gender, clique, and friendship lines.

Group Activity

Group Activity is the third component of Morning Meeting. The children have been sitting quietly and listening carefully during the second component, Sharing. Now it's time to be more active and join together in a short, lively activity that helps build community and allows everyone to contribute at his/her own level.

The goals of the Group Activity component are:

1. To build community culture by developing a class repertoire of songs, games, chants, and poems
2. To foster active and engaged participation
3. To heighten the class's sense of group identity
4. To have fun together while gaining competence in key social skills
5. To reinforce the learning of curriculum content

There is a wide range of activities available for this component of Morning Meeting. In addition to the activities described in this book and in *The Morning Meeting Book*, children could also sing a song together, act out a scene from a book, or recite a poem.

The important thing is to choose activities that are age appropriate and accommodate a range of skill levels. Some activities will have a clear focus on a particular academic skill; others will offer practice in general skills such as listening, following directions, and exercising self-control. All activities should be active, inclusive, and engaging for the entire group.

Keys to Success with Greeting and Group Activity

Successful Morning Meetings require careful structuring, teaching, and managing. This is particularly true for Greeting and Group Activity, where children are often moving around, taking risks, and in physical contact with one another. Following are guidelines that will help ensure productive Greetings and Group Activities:

1. *Work with the children to establish behavior guidelines for Morning Meeting.* Children need to know what's expected of them during Morning Meeting. How should they sit? When can they talk? When do they need to be quiet? How should they walk when they cross the circle to greet someone? Early in the year, work with students to set up behavior guidelines. "What do we need to do to make sure everyone has fun, feels safe, and feels included during Morning Meeting?" the teacher might ask. The teacher can then shape the children's ideas into a set of positively stated behavior guidelines that are posted in the Morning Meeting area. Including the children in this way helps them feel invested in following the guidelines throughout the year.

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Guidelines often include things like:

- Listen to the person who's talking
- Look at the person who's talking
- Keep your body in control
- Raise your hand if you want to talk
- Respect everyone's efforts

2. *Talk with the children about how the guidelines apply to Greeting and Group Activity.* Because the guidelines consist of a few broad statements, an ongoing task for the children is thinking about how the guidelines apply to specific situations. For example, what does it mean to keep your body in control when you're mingling with other students in a greeting activity? What does it mean to respect everyone's efforts during group activities? Since children are concrete thinkers, it might help to ask questions like "What will it look like to keep your body in control during today's greeting?" or "What do we do if someone makes a mistake during Group Activity today?"
3. *Model and practice the behaviors needed to be successful with Greeting and Group Activity.* It's important not to assume that children will know how to shake hands respectfully, move across the circle safely, take turns, or respond appropriately when someone makes a mistake. Early in the year, model and practice the basic routines and behaviors necessary for making Greeting and Group Activity successful; throughout the year, review these routines as needed and model and practice any new routines required by more complex greetings and activities.

Behaviors to model for Greeting include:

- Shaking hands respectfully
- Making friendly and respectful eye contact
- Using a friendly, warm voice
- Moving around the room in a way that keeps yourself and others safe

Behaviors to model for Group Activity include:

- Using an appropriate voice level
- Maintaining self-control during active games
- Taking turns

- Responding supportively when a classmate makes a mistake
- Choosing partners in a respectful way

Modeling

Throughout this book, we refer to the technique of modeling. Generally, teachers use modeling when they want to introduce a behavior that needs to be done in a particular way. Following is a step-by-step example of modeling how to greet each other in a friendly way. The teacher's words are in italics.

Steps in the Modeling Process

- Describe the desired positive behavior.
We said that in Morning Meeting we will take care of everyone and that means we need to greet each other in a friendly way.
- Collect ideas from students if you think they know the appropriate behavior.
Who has an idea of what we might do to greet each other in a friendly way?
- A student or the teacher demonstrates the positive behavior.
Watch while Samantha greets Isaac and see what she does.
- Ask students what specific actions, language, and voice tone they noticed in the demonstration.
What did you notice about how Samantha greeted Isaac? What made it a friendly greeting?
- Ask for an additional student demonstration if you need to reinforce the positive behavior.
Who else can show us a friendly greeting?
- Invite all students to practice the behavior and state your expectation that the behavior will continue.
Now we know how to greet each other in a friendly way. We'll need to remember how we did this as we do our greetings in Morning Meetings this year.

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4. *Keep greetings and activities simple at first.* Early in the year, when children are still learning basic classroom routines and getting to know each other, introduce easy-to-do and low-risk greetings and activities. For example, in the first weeks of school, children might easily say “hello” warmly and respectfully but not be comfortable with a greeting that requires touching, such as a handshake greeting. Likewise, children might be successful with an activity where they interview each other but may not have the self-control to do an activity that requires a lot of fast movement.
5. *Throughout the year, pay attention to children’s developmental and learning needs when you choose greetings and activities.* As you make choices of what greetings and activities to use, it is important to keep in mind that not all groups of students develop social and academic skills at the same rate. A greeting or activity that’s suitable for one group of children may not be appropriate for a wiggly or shy or young-for-their-age group. Observe the students, gauge their interests and skill development, and choose accordingly.

Some considerations in choosing activities are:

- What is the predominant developmental age of the children?
- How well do children work and play together?
- What level of risk is appropriate for the group?
- Does the class need energizing? Do they need help focusing?
- Are there academic skills the children need to practice?

Introducing a Greeting or Group Activity

The way you introduce a greeting or group activity has a big impact on children’s success with it. Here are some steps you can take to ensure that children have a positive experience:

1. Gather and prepare all materials needed for the greeting or activity.
2. Think ahead of time about the academic and social skills required for the greeting or activity. Are there any skills that children need to learn or review?
3. For complex greetings and group activities, consider introducing the activity over several days. For example, for a chant that has many accompanying movements, teach just a couple of movements per day for a few days before going through the entire chant.

4. Explain the greeting or activity and then model skills that are new or need review. In activities where there are complex instructions, you might want to do a “pretend” round of the activity to make sure everyone understands before starting “for real.”
5. Monitor the activity closely, being ready to reinforce positive behavior, remind children about the behavior guidelines when necessary, and redirect children who are off track.
6. If children are having a hard time with a greeting or activity, don’t hesitate to interrupt the action and once again model certain routines or skills. If children continue to have problems, stop the activity and try again another day.
7. Brainstorm with the children various ways to take turns so that the same children aren’t always first, last, or in the middle. Also brainstorm ways for children to know who has already been greeted or had a turn. Taking the time to work out these details will save time later and will allow children to have responsibility for taking care of each other.

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How to Use This Book

The book is divided into two sections: Activities and Greetings. Because timing is so important, I’ve also divided both the activities and greetings into two sections:

- Those to introduce early in the year: these are uncomplicated, easy to teach, and designed to help children learn more about each other.
- Those to introduce later in the year: these build on previously learned skills, are more complex, and require a higher degree of self-control and group cohesion.

In order to help you easily find a particular activity or greeting, there is an index in the front of the book. Keep in mind that many of the activities in this book have been invented by or modified by children and teachers who have then passed them along to others. As you read the selections, you might discover a way to adapt an activity to make it work better for your class. Or you might find some greetings that you think would work well as group activities and vice versa. Please modify, embellish, and experiment freely. Just remember to have fun and share any new versions of these activities with others. Enjoy!