

CASE STUDY

Start of the Week Grades K-2 template–Documentation of First Grade In Classroom use September 2013-June 2014.

The use of the *Start of the Week Grades K-2* template every Monday of the 2013-2014 school year showed astounding and dramatic results in my first grade classroom. The children and I grew in our connections to one another and in our interactions over time. We started with one approach and then we, as a class, evolved the approach to adapt to their growing skill set and to fit my intentions for use.



BACKGROUND

I developed this template prior to my year as a first grade teacher in Fairfax County Public Schools. I wanted something that we could discuss about as a class each week; a platform for them to share their feelings and thoughts. The section where they share what makes them worry and what makes them happy were included to allow the children the opportunity to share thoughts that may infringe on their ability to focus during instruction.

It is proven that all learning happens through relationships. For this reason alone, I felt it was important to address the feelings of every child, every week. “Be attentive to the social-emotional skills and needs of each unique child ... Your attention and presence as a teacher can be a pillar of confidence for children who are dealing with stressful life circumstances. Letting children know that you are there to help will build children’s trust that you are a source of guidance” (TK California). Children are more cognitively open to adults who they feel understand them emotionally. Children learn more effectively from adults that they like and trust.

I also wanted to give the children an opportunity to take control of their learning and reflect on themselves as learners and listeners in my classroom. I wanted them to be thinking about how they can be the best students they can be; emotionally, behaviorally, or educationally. I also felt that having children, especially first grade children, think proactively about their upcoming week in my class helped them to strengthen their skills of prediction and self-awareness. The intention was to have an open discussion each week about the results in an effort to begin each week with a clean slate.

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PROCESS/APPROACH

Throughout the year, I changed the way that I instructed them to interact with the *Start of the Week* template and how I assessed the output from my class:

- *In the beginning*, I gave the children three sticky notes and had them fill out one sticky note for each section.
- *In the middle*, I began giving each table a different color. This allowed me to make sure every child at every table was responding to the template.
- *After a time*, I used a *differentiated approach*. I gave higher-level children three sticky notes and the average and lower level students one or two sticky notes. I instructed them to choose any of the sections to respond to, but to not put more than one sticky note per section. This gave them the freedom they needed to be excited to share what mattered most to them.



While this is a paper copy of the template taped on the board, I also projected it onto my SmartBoard screen and had the children bring their sticky notes to the screen towards the end of the year. I would even make notes directly on the SmartBoard during discussions.

LEARNING, GROWTH & OUTCOMES

- *Helped me learn friends & set seating charts* - At the beginning of the year, working with this template gave me a good idea of which children were friends. This helped me to see where and, in some cases, where not to seat them.
- *Helped me soothe worries and start my students week at school with a clean slate* - It allowed me the chance to get a glimpse into their thoughts. Children are constantly thinking about different things when they are in school. It allowed me to soothe worries and start with a clean slate for that week. Giving the children a platform to express their feelings and emotions gave them the chance to strengthen their emotional awareness. "Knowing more about emotions better equips children in social situations to understand emotions expression and emotional situations that elicit emotions" (Dr. Deham, 2). This not only helped them express their emotions but they also became aware of others and how they might be feeling.
- *Gave me writing samples and documented progress* - While I anticipated learning about their emotional worries, this template also gave me a weekly writing sample in an easy and fun way. First grade is a pivotal time in the development of writing and reading for young children. After looking at their writing samples as a whole, I noticed distinct changes that occurred at different times throughout the year. These changes reflected what they were learning and the different elements of writing I had taught them. They went from primarily drawing pictures as their responses to writing complete sentences with correct spelling and detail.

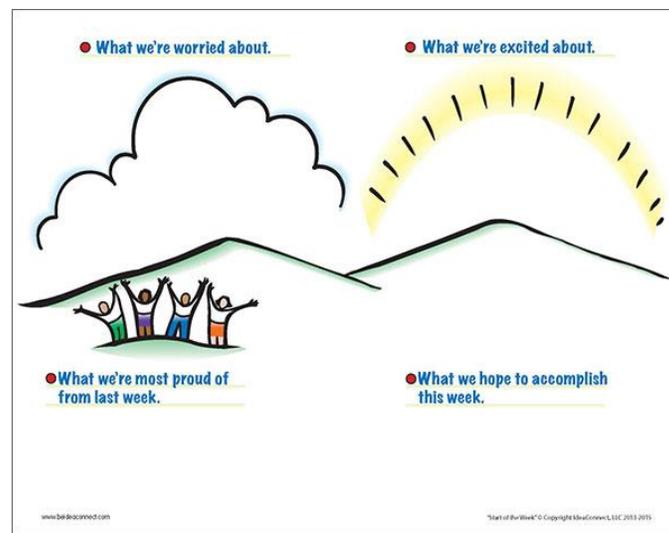
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- *The change was astounding* and I was proud of them for the progress they had made as students in my class. As writing is a continuously evolving skill for students in any grade, this template could apply to any teacher in any grade level. The expectations for their responses could change based on what they are expected to do within other written works.

My experience with the *Start of the Week Grades K-2* template not only gave me a big picture view of how their writing skills developed but it also gave me the opportunity to see their emotional evolution. The children in my class became more emotionally aware of others and more aware and better able to articulate the feelings that they were feeling.

Please note that this template can be used differently in different grades and classrooms. This is merely a first hand account of its functionality and development in a first grade classroom.

Start of the Week Grades 3-6 Version:



This version of the template is currently being used each week in my Third Grade Advanced Academics classroom.

Bibliography:

Denham, Susanne. "Emotions in the Classroom." *Psychoanalytic Studies* (n.d.): 1-2. Web. <<http://denhamlab.gmu.edu/Emotions%20in%20the%20Classroom%20Brochure.pdf>>.

TK California. "Social-Emotional Teaching Strategies." *Social-Emotional Teaching Strategies*. TK California, n.d. Web. 28 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.tkcalifornia.org/teaching-tools/social-emotional/teaching-strategies/>>.