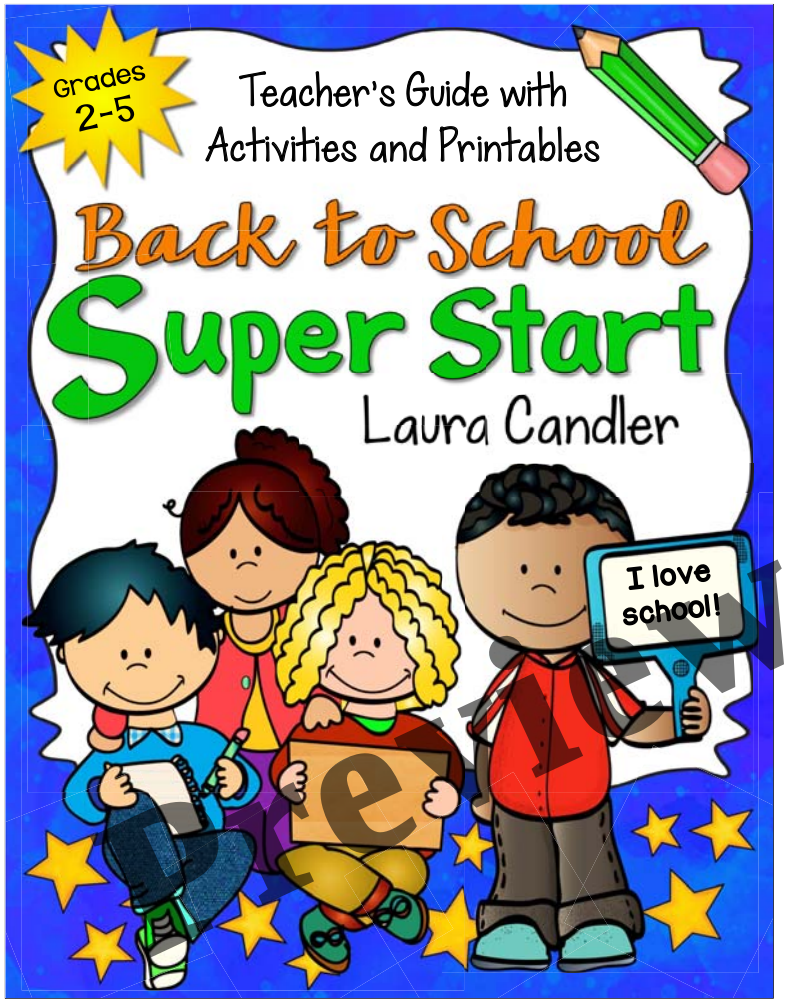


# Back to School Super Start

by Laura Candler

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Preview Version



# Back to School Super Start

**By Laura Candler**

The first week of school should be an exciting time, not one that's filled with the drudgery of explaining class rules and administering assessments. Forget the old saying that teachers shouldn't smile until Christmas; using fear and intimidation will not create the warm, caring environment children need to thrive. Rules and procedures are important, but it's equally important to let your new students know that your classroom is not only safe, it's lots of fun, too! The lessons, activities, and printables in Back to School Super Start provide many opportunities to share your rules and procedures as you actively engage students in getting to know each other and learning your classroom expectations. The majority of the activities as described in the book are best for 3rd through 5th grade; however, most can easily be adapted for other grade levels by modifying the directions or the printables. Academic content lessons are not included because they vary widely according to level. Just sprinkle these activities in between your academic lessons to ensure a super start to the year!

I've organized these back-to-school tips and activities into four chapters, and each chapter includes teaching suggestions and ready-to-use printables. You'll find a thumbnail version of each printable next to the directions for using it, and the full-sized printables can be found at the end of each chapter. Most of the student printables are in black and white, but some printables also have a color variation. There's no need to print the entire book; read through the activities and only print the pages you need.

As you read the teaching suggestions in each chapter, you'll notice that I've written most of the narrative informally, in first person. My purpose in writing this book was to share my own strategies for creating a caring and well-organized classroom, so I decided to write it as if I were standing in your classroom chatting with you.

You'll have to develop your own timeline for using these activities; incorporate them with other essential elements of your own back to school routines. If you have some flexibility in your schedule, I highly recommend that you focus on creating a caring classroom and teaching procedures before you dig too deeply into academic content. The time that you invest in these activities during the first week will reap rewards throughout the year!

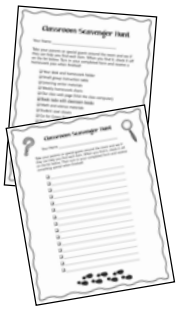


**Chapter 1**

# Reaching Out to Parents as Partners

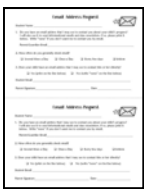
One of your most important tasks at the beginning of school is to reach out to your students' parents and let them know that you value their involvement. Furthermore, you consider them to be your partners in the important task of educating their children. To foster this spirit of cooperation, open the lines of communication right away and set a positive tone for future interactions. Don't wait until students are misbehaving to reach out to parents. Some of these forms and tools will help you get started.

### Open House Scavenger Hunt



Many school systems now offer an Open House prior to the first day of school. Students frequently attend these events so that they can meet their new teacher and find out what supplies they need for the first day of school. The problem is that all of your new students and their parents seem to show up at the same time, full of questions for you! I found a Scavenger Hunt to be a great way for students to get comfortable in their new classroom, and it gives them something to do when several families are in the room at once. I've included a sample **Classroom Scavenger Hunt** on page 7 similar to the one I used with my students, and there's a blank one for you to customize on page 8. If you don't have an Open House before school, you can use this form later in the year for your students to show their parents around the classroom.

### Email Request Form

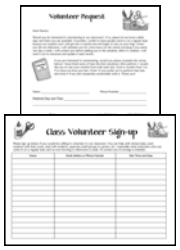


During Open House or the first time you meet parents, it's important to collect contact information from them. Most schools have a form for this, but if you think it would be helpful to collect a little more information regarding student and parent emails, you can ask them to fill out an Email Address Request form (page 9) during Open House or on the first day of school. From the information on that form, create a contact list in your email program for sending group emails to parents. To keep the email addresses confidential, when you compose an email, send it to yourself and add the parent email addresses to the "BCC" field.

If you do contact parents by email, you may want to establish some boundaries, such as asking them not to email you to find out the next day's homework. Students need to be responsible about writing down their assignments each day and not rely on their parents to email the teacher to get it! Also, let them know that you'll need at least 24 hours to respond to an email, and if they send you an email at 11 pm one evening, they should not expect to get a response the next morning!

**Parent Volunteer Sign Up**

Another effective strategy during the first Open House is to ask parents to sign up if they are interested in volunteering in your classroom. Leave a copy of the **Class Volunteer Sign-up Form** (page 10) on a table in the classroom and invite parents to sign up if they are interested. This will help you find people who were willing to come in for a few hours a week on a regular basis. You might also want to ask them to complete the **Volunteer Request** form (page 11) which asks them to rate how comfortable they are helping out with certain tasks. For example, some parents don't want to help 5th graders with math assignments, but they do enjoy reading with students, cutting out materials that had been laminated, filing papers, and other clerical tasks. You can use the information on the forms to prepare a list of tasks for volunteers to do or assist with on the days they are scheduled to be in your classroom.




**Class Supply List**

A class supply list is absolutely essential, and it's helpful to print copies of this list to hand out to parents during Open House or on the first day of school. **Our Class Supply List** (page 12) is an example of my list, and the blank copy on page 11 is for you to use to create your own. It's important to divide your list into required and requested items to help families with many children who can't afford to contribute extra items.

**Wish Upon a Star Request for Extra Items**

In addition to the items on your list, you'll want (and need) other supplies and materials for your classroom. Many parents are willing to donate those items if they know what you need. You can use the **Wish Upon a Star** system to request those items during Open House or on the first day if parents bring their children to school. To prepare the display, post one of the two **Wish Upon a Star** signs (page 14 or 15) on a bulletin board, whiteboard, or large empty wall. Write the requested items on individual stars using the pattern on page 16 or on sticky-note stars if you can find them. Arrange the stars around the title poster. As parents arrive, invite them to take one or more of the stars home and return them, attached to the donated items. What types of things can you request? Try these:

- Folding chairs for reading time
- Beanbags for reading
- Clean pillows and pillow cases
- Extra supplies like tissues, wet wipes, and plastic baggies
- Craft supplies for projects
- Gift card to a bookstore or craft store
- Tennis balls for chair "socks"
- Science supplies
- Goodies for your treat jar
- Small toys to use as rewards

Preview Version





**Classroom Handbook**

Creating a class handbook is a great way to share your policies and procedures with both parents and students, right from the first day of school. You can explain everything from your homework guidelines to your schedule for resource classes like art, music, and physical education. A class handbook is also helpful during conferences when parents tell you they were not made aware of certain policies and procedures, especially regarding homework. Just pull out a copy of the handbook to show them where it was written.

Have a copy available for parents to look through during your Back to School open house. Explain that after you go over the information with your students during the first week of school, you'll be sending it home for a signature.

If you don't have a class handbook, you can purchase an editable set of handbook covers and pages from my TpT store. Click **here** to find them.

**Student Information Survey**

Another way to reach out to parents is to send home the **Student Information Survey and Parent Letter** to help you learn important details about your students. Print the survey (page 17) on one side of the paper and the lined paper (page 18 or 19) on the back.

The survey asks for useful information like who lives at home with the child, any special requests regarding holiday celebrations, whether or not the child is supposed to be wearing glasses, etc. Then it asks parents to write a letter to you on the back of the form to tell you anything they feel you should know about their child.

I recommend that you send the form home with students in an ***unsealed envelope*** and ask parents to complete it and seal it in the envelope before returning it to school. Most parents will feel more comfortable sharing information about their child with you if the forms and letters will not be seen by the children. Returning the form in an envelope also ensures confidentiality. Or you can give your parents additional options like mailing their completed surveys and letters to the school, bringing them to you personally, or scanning them and emailing them to you.

You might be thinking that many of your parents won't write a letter, but I think you'll be surprised at how many of them do. Most of my parents did write a letter to me, so I knew they understood the importance of us working together as partners. I learned so much about my students from the surveys and letters, and I highly recommend you add this practice to your back-to-school repertoire.

Preview Version

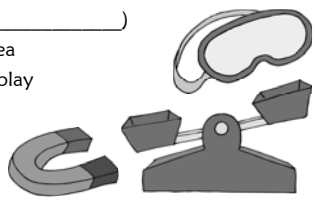


# Classroom Scavenger Hunt

Your Name _____

Take your parents or special guests around the room and see if they can help you find each item. When you find it, check it off on the list below. Turn in your completed form and receive a homework pass when finished!

- ❑ Your desk and homework folder
- ❑ Small group instruction table
- ❑ Listening center materials
- ❑ Weekly homework charts
- ❑ Our class web page (Visit the class computer)
- ❑ Book racks with classroom books
- ❑ Math and science materials
- ❑ Student coat closets
- ❑ Go for Green Stoplight Bulletin Board
- ❑ Daily Class Schedule (on board)
- ❑ Reading Chairs
- ❑ Pillows and carpet squares
- ❑ Class pet (Name _____)
- ❑ Lunch box storage area
- ❑ Wish Upon a Star display



Preview Version



# Classroom Scavenger Hunt

Your Name _____

Take your parents or special guests around the room and see if they can help you find each item. When you find it, check it off on the list below. Then turn in your completed form and receive something special when finished!

- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____

Preview Version

## Email Address Request

Student Name _____

1. Do you have an email address that I may use to contact you about your child's progress? I will also use it to send informational emails and class newsletters. If so, please print it below. Write "none" if you don't want me to contact you by email.

   Parent/Guardian Email_____

2. How often do you generally check email?

   ❑ Several times a Day ❑ Once a Day ❑ Every few days ❑ Seldom

3. Does your child have an email address that I may use to contact him or her directly?

   ❑ Yes (print on the line below) ❑ No (write "none" on the line below)

Student Email _____

Parent Signature_____ Date _____


## Email Address Request

Student Name _____

1. Do you have an email address that I may use to contact you about your child's progress? I will also use it to send informational emails and class newsletters. If so, please print it below. Write "none" if you don't want me to contact you by email.

   Parent/Guardian Email_____

2. How often do you generally check email?

   ❑ Several times a Day ❑ Once a Day ❑ Every few days ❑ Seldom

3. Does your child have an email address that I may use to contact him or her directly?

   ❑ Yes (print on the line below) ❑ No (write "none" on the line below)

Student Email _____

Parent Signature_____ Date _____


Preview Version

## Class Volunteer Sign-up

Please sign up below if you would be willing to volunteer in our classroom. You can help with clerical tasks, assist students with their work, read with students, supervise small groups in centers, etc. I especially need volunteers who can come in on a regular basis such as one morning or afternoon a week. I'll contact you to arrange a schedule.

| Name | Email Address or Phone Number | Best Times and Days |
|---|---|---|
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## Volunteer Request

Dear Parents,

Would you be interested in volunteering in our classroom? If so, please let me know which days and times you are available. If possible, I prefer to have people come in on a regular basis because my students and I will get into a routine and will begin to rely on your help. Unless you tell me otherwise, I will schedule you for a few hours (or the whole morning if you want) one day a week. I will contact you before adding you to the schedule. After it's created, I will send it out to everyone and update it each month.

If you are interested in volunteering, would you please complete the survey below? I have listed some of tasks that the volunteers often perform. I would like you to rate your comfort level with each task. Circle a number from 1 to 5 to show me how you feel. Circle 1 if you prefer not to perform that task, and circle 5 if you feel completely comfortable with it. Thank you!

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Preferred Days and Time: _____

_____

| Task | Low Preference | | | | High Preference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Operating the copy machine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Helping students with basic math skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Helping students with more advanced math | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Helping students with writing assignments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Playing a learning game with a student | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Helping students research in the media center | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Helping students use the Internet | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Filing papers and stapling progress reports | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Leading a small group lesson | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Cutting out and/or coloring materials | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Reading with a student or a small group | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Sharing a skill (explain below) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



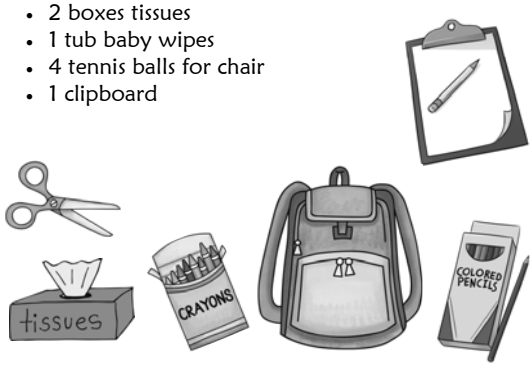
## Our Class Supply List

**Required Items:**

- 3 packs of college-ruled loose-leaf paper
- 1-inch view binder
- 2 dozen pencils (no mechanical pencils)
- 1 box of crayons
- box of colored pencils
- 3 plastic pocket folders with prongs
- zippered pencil pouch (heavy-duty canvas)
- low-odor dry erase markers (at least 4)
- 3 glue sticks

**Requested Items:**

- 1 pair student scissors
- 2 boxes tissues
- 1 tub baby wipes
- 4 tennis balls for chair
- 1 clipboard



## Our Class Supply List

**Required Items:**

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

**Requested Items:**

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Preview



We are wishing for these materials. Would you donate one or more to our classroom?

# Wish Upon a Star

Version

If you can help, take a star and return it with the item. Thanks!



# Wish Upon a Star

We are wishing for these materials. Would you donate one or more to our classroom?

Preview

If you can help, take a star and return it with the item. Thanks!



## Wish Upon a Star Patterns

Version

## Student Information Survey

Student's Name _____ Nickname (if any) _____

Name/Relationship of Person Completing Survey _____/_____

**Family Information**

Please list siblings and ages: _____

With whom does the student live? (Circle all that apply)

Mother Father Stepmother Stepfather Grandmother Grandfather Aunt Uncle

Other Household Members: _____

Do you have any pets at home? Explain: _____

Would you like to share information regarding the child's religious background and/or holidays celebrated (or not celebrated)?

_____

**Medical Information**

Is your child supposed to be wearing glasses? _____ For reading or board work? (circle)

If your child IS supposed to be wearing glasses, will he or she have them at school? _____

If not, please explain: _____

Describe any medical/physical conditions and food restrictions or allergies your child has:

_____

_____

**Additional Information**

Does your child have internet access at home? Yes No

What do you consider to be your child's strengths and areas for improvement?

_____

_____

On the back of this paper, please write me a letter to tell me more about your child. To keep the information confidential, you may return this form in a sealed envelope or email the letter portion to me at _____. Please include any of the following, or anything else you feel would help me get to know your child better:

- Study habits and/or feelings about reading, math, or other subjects
- Your child's social skills and how your child relates to other children or family members
- Situations at home that may influence learning (recent move, loss of pet, divorce, death of a family member or friend, new baby in the family, etc.)
- Concerns or worries that you may have concerning your child's education

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## Parent/Guardian Letter to the Teacher

**Student's Name** _____ **Date** _____

**Parent's/Guardian's Name** _____

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Chapter 2

## Creating a Caring Classroom

Most teachers know the importance of teaching class rules and procedures during the first few weeks of school, but some may not be aware that it's just as important to devote time to creating a classroom community. These tasks are intertwined because part of creating a caring classroom is letting kids know that everyone's rights will be respected and that your classroom is a safe place to be. However, for the purposes of this book, I'm dividing these activities into separate chapters and you can decide how to integrate them into your lesson plans.

### Planning for Cooperative Learning

An essential component of creating a caring classroom environment is teaching kids how to work effectively with partners and in cooperative learning teams. If you are new to cooperative learning, there are a number of questions to consider before your students arrive.

**How many students should be on a team?**

Four is the ideal number of student per team because each group can easily be divided into two sets of pairs for partner activities.

**Should teams be homogeneous or heterogeneous?**

In classrooms where students stay together for most of the day, mixed-ability teams seem to be the most effective. Heterogeneous teams provide students with the opportunity to interact with others who are different from themselves. If you're concerned about students having to work together when their academic skills vary greatly, you can assign different partners for specific content-area instruction such as math or reading.

**How long should teams stay together?**

That depends on your students' ages and their social skills. Younger students need to switch teams more frequently, perhaps once a week. However, upper elementary students can usually stay in one team for 4 to 6 weeks. If students are moving to different classrooms throughout the day, they may be able to handle staying with the same team for an entire grading period.

**Should students be seated in teams on the first day?**

It's your call, but my recommendation is to arrange your desks in teams before school begins and seat students in teams right away. Some teachers have told me that they don't feel comfortable using cooperative learning until they get to know their students. While I understand that view, seating students in teams right away sends the message that teamwork is an integral part of your classroom. You can begin to establish your rules and procedures right away, and having students seated in teams will make it easier to make cooperative learning a part of your daily instruction.

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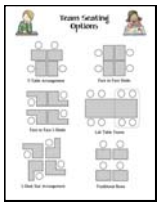
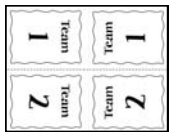
### Desk Arrangements for Cooperative Learning Teams

There are many ways to arrange your students' seats depending on whether you have rectangular desks, L-shaped desks or tables. Take a look at page 25 to see a few options. I prefer "T-table" seating because no one has his or her back to the front of the room. If you like to seat your students in forward-facing rows most of the time as shown in the bottom right illustration, you can designate teams of four when you do a cooperative learning activity. Have the two in front turn around and become a team with the ones behind them. That way everyone is facing forward unless you specifically ask them to turn around. Some teachers feel this is a nice compromise.



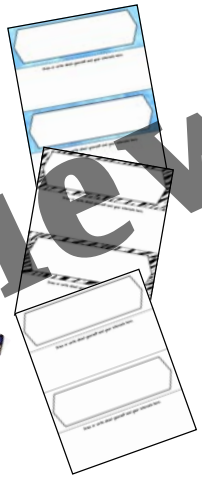

### Assigning Team Numbers

It's helpful to identify your teams by numbers, and an easy way to do that is to assign those numbers to the tables (or groups of desks) where the students in each team are seated. Print as many of the team number cards (pages 27-30) as you need, cut each one vertically on the dotted line, and fold them to form Team Number "tents." Place one numbered tent in the middle of each table group.




### Seating Assignments for the First Day

I've found it best to assign students to teams rather than letting students choose their own seats. On the first day of school, place name cards on each desk so the students know where to sit. You can print name plates from one of the patterns on pages 31 - 33 on white card stock. Fold them on the dotted lines to form small name "tents." If you prefer, you can skip the pattern and just fold half sheets of white card stock. Write each student's name on the front of a name tent, and randomly place each name tent on a desk before the students arrive. Provide a set of colored pencils or crayons for each team to share.



### Welcoming Your New Students

Getting off to a great start on the first day can be a challenge. The problem is that there's almost always a bit of disorganization as new students arrive. Having assigned seats helps reduce the confusion. As your students arrive, greet them, ask them how to pronounce their names, and help them find their seats. Provide colored pencils or crayons for each team so students can decorate the backs of their name tents while they wait for the others to arrive. The decorated name tents will be used later as a way for students to introduce themselves to each other.

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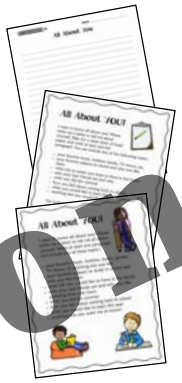
### All About You Letters

When most of your students have arrived, introduce the All About You writing assignment. Ask your students to write a letter to you telling you all about themselves. You'll find two versions of assignment directions to display for your students to follow. The one on page 34 is more suitable for younger students, and the one on page 35 works well with upper elementary and middle school students. You'll also find a page of lined paper on page 36 to go with this activity.

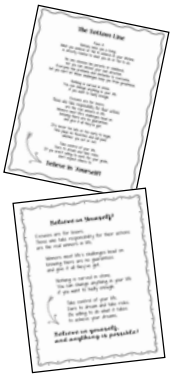



The All About You letter-writing activity is a great way to keep the students who have arrived on task while you greet new students as they enter the classroom. When students finish writing their letters, have them choose a book from your class library and read quietly.

If possible, read your students' letters as they turn them in or later that day. Write personal comments on each letter, and return them the next day. Reading these letters will help you learn about your students' writing skills and what's important to them, and returning their letters with thoughtful comments shows them how much you care.

### Class Discussion: Believe in Yourself

One of the most important ways to create a caring classroom is to convey to your students that you believe in them and have high expectations for all of them. From the very first day of school, I let my students know that not only did I believe in them, I expected them to believe in themselves. I also let them know that believing in yourself means you must stop making excuses for your lack of success so you can take charge of your life.



I love the poem on page 37, *The Bottom Line*, because it conveys a clear message about the importance of accepting responsibility for your actions. I have no idea who wrote the poem or I would certainly give credit! It's appropriate for students 5th grade and up because students of this age are usually mature enough to grasp the concepts.

I included this poem in my class handbook, and on the first day of school, I read it to my students as they read along silently. I stopped at the end of each stanza to discuss what it meant. One stanza I made a point to discuss was "Nothing is carved in stone. You can change anything in your life if you want to badly enough." I reminded my students that today was a new beginning, so we should keep an open mind and not judge others based on their past behavior. Someone who used to be a bully might want to change. But if no one gives them a chance to change, it's going to be difficult for that person to do so. This statement seemed to make a big impact on everyone, and it paved the way for kids to drop negative or defiant behaviors.

Because the poem isn't really appropriate for students below 5th grade, I revised it to create a shorter version titled, *Believe in Yourself!* That poem is on page 38.

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### Introducing Cooperative Learning

Don't assume that your students understand the importance of working in cooperative learning teams. Instead, explain why teamwork is beneficial even though it can be difficult at times to work with others. Introduce the rationale for cooperative learning by saying that in most jobs and careers, people are expected to work with others.

Ask your students to think about examples of jobs in which people have to work together. Call on students to share, and discuss the examples as a class. Then briefly share that research has shown how important it is to be able to talk over ideas when learning something new. Reassure your students that they will also have opportunities to work alone, and that almost all graded work will be done alone. However, much of their practice work will be completed with partners or in teams.

*We Instead of Me* is a poster I created to remind my students about the importance of considering others. If you'd like to use it, you can find several variations on pages 39 - 42.

### Change Teams Daily for the First Week

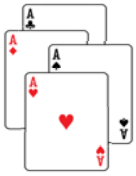
One strategy to help kids get to know all of their classmates is to have them change teams each day for the first week of school, or at least for the first three days of school. Forming new teams every day will also allow you to see who works well together and who doesn't.

Because you won't know your students very well at first, it's best to start with random teams. There are many methods for creating random teams, but here are two quick and easy methods.

#### Random Team Formation Method #1: It's All in the Cards

***Materials:*** One deck of playing cards

***Directions:***



1. Remove all face cards from the deck and sort the remaining cards into groups of four by number.
2. Think of the number of teams in your class, and keep the cards with those numbers only. For example, if you have 6 teams, keep the aces through the sixes and set the rest of the cards aside.
3. Shuffle the cards and give one card to each student. If you have some teams of three, you'll have a few extra cards left over. Make sure that those numbers are different or you'll end up with some teams of two.
4. Ask all the Aces to move to Table 1, the Twos to move to Table 2 and so on.
5. Choose one suit such as clubs, and designate the person who has that card on each team to be the Team Captain for the day.

***Management Tip:*** Ask the Team Captain to bring you all four cards right away so they don't get lost. Put them back in order to be sure you have them all.

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#### Random Team Formation Method #2: Team Puzzles

***Materials***: One large, unique, photo for each team (Calendar photos, full-page magazine photos, photographs or stock photo images printed on 8.5" x 11" paper, etc.)

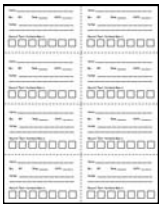
***Directions***:

1. Cut each photo into four puzzle pieces. If you have some teams of three or five, cut a few photos into three or five pieces as needed, making sure you have one piece per student.
2. Mix up the pieces and give one piece to each student. Make sure that students on any given team receive a piece from different puzzles so they won't end up together on the next team.
3. On a signal from you, students stand up, move about the room, and find students with the other pieces of their puzzle.
4. After the members of each team find each other and complete their puzzle, they move their belongings to a new table group and sit together.

***Management Tip:*** Be sure to collect all the puzzle pieces right away and store them for another time you need to form random teams.

### Take Time for Team Building

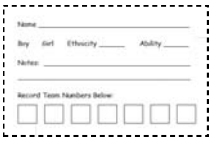
Each time you form new teams, it's important to guide your students through a team building activity to help them get comfortable with their new teammates. This could be as simple as having students take turns introducing themselves, but it's better if you have time to do an icebreaker activity. Check out ***Chapter 3: Class Building and Team Building,*** to find some easy icebreakers that work well.



### How to Form Permanent Teams

After a few days or the first week, you'll be ready to form more permanent teams. I recommend using the Team Formation cards on page 43 to track team assignments throughout the year.

Print enough pages so there's one card for each student. If possible, print the girls' cards on one color and the boys' cards on a different color. Doing so will make it easier to create teams with equal numbers of boys and girls. Write each student's name on one card. Add notes regarding the student's academic strengths or needs, or other notes based on your observations. Obviously, these cards are for your eyes only, and you need to keep them in a safe place where they will not be seen by others.




Next, divide the team formation cards into groups of four. Do your best to create teams that are diverse with regard to gender, academic ability, and ethnicity. Assign a team number to each group, and record that number in the first box at the bottom of the card. Each time you change teams, record each student's new team number in the next box. This tracking system will help you remember which students have already been on the same team together. It's amazing how quickly you will forget who has already been with whom!

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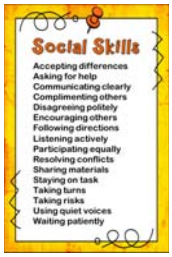
Preview Version

## Chapter 2 - Creating a Caring Classroom

**Teaching Social Skills**

After you have observed your students, you'll have a better idea of your students' social skills. Sometimes your new students will already know how to speak to each other in a polite way, listen attentively, and express their own opinions with respect. However, you'll also have years in which your students seem to have very few social skills and may appear disrespectful and argumentative. Students may appear to be unwilling to listen to others, or unwilling to share materials. Don't give up on them! Just as students need instruction in math and reading, many kids need explicit social skills instruction.

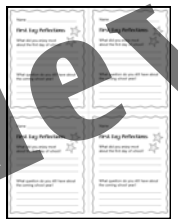



Use the Working Together Skills anchor chart on page 44 to teach the skills needed to be successful in cooperative learning groups. Recreate the chart on a large piece of poster board and laminate it so you can use it over and over. Choose a social skill that your students need to work on, such as encouraging others, active listening, sharing, or helping others with their work. Write the social skill at the top of the chart. Ask students to brainstorm what it would look like and sound like when students are using that social skill. Page 45 shows how a completed chart on Encouraging Others might look.

After you complete the chart, immediately involve your students in an activity where they have to use that skill. For example, to practice encouraging others, you might have them do a partner activity in which they take turns solving math problems. You can find more detailed directions for teaching social skills lessons by clicking here to go to my Social Skills page on Teaching Resources.

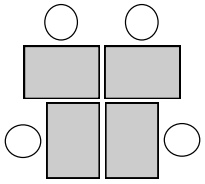
**First Day Class Meeting Wrap Up**

The activities in Chapter 2, "Creating a Caring Classroom," can be spread out over several days or a week. However, the First Day Class Meeting Wrap Up needs to be done at the end of the first day of school. Holding a class meeting is a really special way to end the first day and send your students home excited to be in your class.

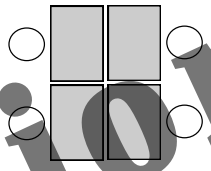



Before the meeting, have your students complete a First Day Reflections form (page 46) by jotting down something they enjoyed about the day and a question they have about the school year. When everyone is ready, have students move to an open area in your room or take them to a large open room in the school. Ask them to sit in a large circle so everyone can see everyone else. Start by asking your students to take turns sharing what they liked about the first day. Then give them a chance to ask their questions, although you don't have to answer them all. Wrap up the meeting by sharing how much you are looking forward to the school year, even if you have some reservations at that point. You might be surprised at how quickly your challenging students begin to thrive in a caring classroom environment! In fact, it's often the students who present the biggest challenges who end up bringing you the most joy later in the year!

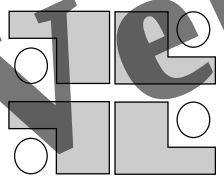
# Team Seating Options



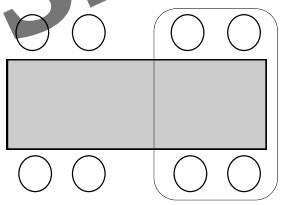
T-Table Arrangement



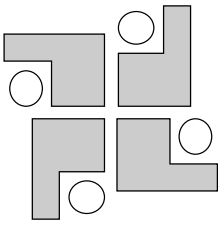
Face to Face Desks



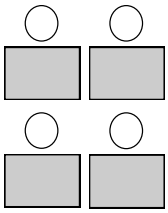
Face to Face L-Desks



Lab Table Teams



L-Desk Star Arrangement



Traditional Rows



Team 1

Team 2

Team 1

Team 2



Team 3

Team 4

Team 3

Team 4



Preview Version

Team 5

Team 6

Team 7

Team 8

Team 5

Team 6

Team 7

Team 8

Preview Version





Draw or write about yourself and your interests here.

Draw or write about yourself and your interests here.

Preview

Version

Draw or write about yourself and your interests here.

Draw or write about yourself and your interests here.

Draw or write about yourself and your interests here.

Draw or write about yourself and your interests here.



# All About YOU!

I want to know all about you! Please write me a letter to tell me all about yourself. Write at least one paragraph and include any of these topics:

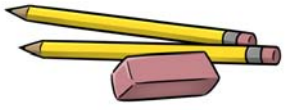
- your favorite foods, hobbies, books, games, TV shows, or anything else you like
- your favorite subjects to study in school and why you like them
- what job you would like to have in the future
- who your best friends are and why you like spending time with them
- what you did this summer
- how you feel about coming back to school
- what you would like to learn this year
- anything else you want me to know!

# All About YOU!

I want to know all about you! Please write me a letter to tell me about yourself. Take out a clean sheet of lined paper, and write at least one full paragraph. You can include any of the following topics:

- your favorite foods, hobbies, books, TV shows, etc.
- your favorite subjects in school and why you like them
- what job or career you hope to have in the future
- who your best friends are and why
- what you did this summer
- how you feel about coming back to school
- what you would like to learn this year
- anything else you would like to share with me

Put today's date in the upper right hand corner of your paper. Then start your letter with a greeting. Write at least one full paragraph in the body. Be sure to sign your letter at the end!



Name _____

## All About You



Preview Version
Preview Version

# The Bottom Line

Face it.
Nobody owes you a living.
What you achieve or fail to achieve in your lifetime
is directly related to what you do or fail to do.

No one chooses his parents or childhood,
but you can choose your own direction.
Everyone has problems and obstacles to overcome,
but you can't let those challenges keep you from greatness.

Nothing is carved in stone.
You can change anything in your life
if you want to badly enough.

Excuses are for losers.
Those who take responsibility for their actions
are the real winners in life.
Winners meet life's challenges head on
knowing there are no guarantees
and give it all they've got.

It's never too late or too early to begin.
Time plays no favorites and will pass
whether you act or not.

Take control of your life.
Dare to dream and take risks.
If you aren't willing to work for your goals,
don't expect others to.

**Believe in Yourself!**



Preview Version

# Believe in Yourself!

Excuses are for losers.
Those who take responsibility for their actions
are the real winners in life.

Winners meet life's challenges head on
knowing there are no guarantees
and give it all they've got.

Nothing is carved in stone.
You can change anything in your life
if you want to badly enough.

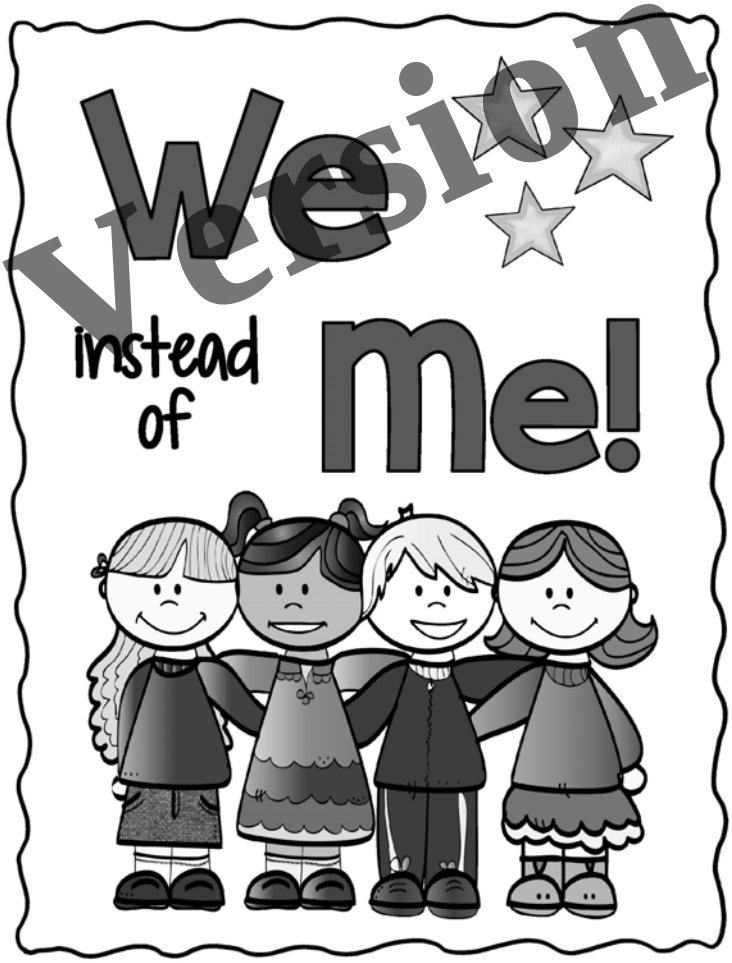
Take control of your life.
Dare to dream and take risks.
Be willing to do what it takes
to achieve your dreams.

**Believe in yourself,
and anything is possible!**



Preview Version

Preview Version



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Name _____

Boy Girl Ethnicity _____ Ability _____

Notes: _____

_____

Record Team Numbers Below:

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Name _____

Boy Girl Ethnicity _____ Ability _____

Notes: _____

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Record Team Numbers Below:

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Boy Girl Ethnicity _____ Ability _____

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Boy Girl Ethnicity _____ Ability _____

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Name _____

Boy Girl Ethnicity _____ Ability _____

Notes: _____

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Record Team Numbers Below:

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

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## Working Together Skills

| Looks Like | Sounds Like |
|---|---|
| | |

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Preview Version
Preview Version

# Working Together Skills

## Encouraging Others

| Looks Like | Sounds Like |
|---|---|
| • Thumbs up<br>• Smiling<br>• Nodding<br>• Eyes on speaker | • You can do it!<br>• Don't give up!<br>• I like the way you...<br>• You are so good at ...<br>• Way to go!<br>• Don't worry about missing that one – you'll get it next time!<br>• Think it over carefully and I know you can figure out the answer. |



Name _____

### First Day Reflections

What did you enjoy most about the first day of school?

_____

_____

_____

What question do you still have about the coming school year?

_____

_____

_____

Name _____

First Day Reflections

What did you enjoy most about the first day of school?

What question do you still have about the coming school year?

Name _____

First Day Reflections

What did you enjoy most about the first day of school?

What question do you still have about the coming school year?



**Chapter 3**

# Class Building and Team Building

During the first few days of school, plan to spend part of each day teaching class procedures and part of each day leading your students through activities to help them get to know each other. These icebreakers are quick, fun activities that are free of academic content. They are sometimes divided into two categories depending on their purposes. Class builders are whole group activities designed to help students get to know everyone in the class. Team builders take place within teams and are designed to help students feel comfortable working with their team mates.

To keep the day from becoming chaotic, alternate fun, high-energy activities with quiet lessons about rules and procedures. If you're tempted to skip the icebreakers and spend the whole day teaching procedures, don't! Not only will your students be bored out of their minds, they won't have an opportunity to get to know their classmates! Icebreakers are critical for teaching students how to interact with each other in cooperative learning teams.

If you form new teams each day for the first few days of school as suggested in Chapter 2, it's important to do a team building activity right after they are seated together. Each day when the students move to their new teams, have them bring the name plates they decorated on the first day of school. Give students time to introduce themselves each day using their name plates, but it's even better if you can take time to do another ice breaker, too.

**Learning Classmates' Names**

Class Builder

In order for your students to feel comfortable with each other, they must learn each other's names. One way to make sure they learn each other's names is to use their names as your first spelling list! To make the assignment easier, require them to spell each other's first names only. You will probably want to split the list into two parts and test each half on a different day. Keep in mind that names are hard to spell because many of them do not follow phonetic rules. Learning them is an exercise in memorization, so be sure to break the list into sections for testing.

You can type a list of names to give your students, but having them write each classmate's name on a list themselves seems to help kids learn to spell them. Display a copy of the Names to Know form on page 52 and give each student a copy of the printable. Announce each student's name, one at a time, in alphabetical order. After reading each name, ask the student to stand briefly and to confirm that you pronounced his or her name correctly. While the student remains standing, write his or her name on the list and ask everyone to copy it on their own paper. When you finish with all names, have students switch papers and check to be sure that all names were written correctly.

Note: If you plan in advance, you can include the Names to Know form in your class handbook.





**Mystery Student Bingo**

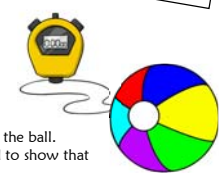
Class Builders

Not only do students have to learn how to spell each other's names, they need to be able to identify each other and speak to each other by name. A fun game to help them match names and faces is Mystery Student Bingo. In this game, each student writes facts about himself or herself on a Mystery Student Bingo Clue card. Then each student fills out a blank Bingo board by writing each classmate's first name in one of the boxes randomly. This game works well in conjunction with the Names to Know spelling list activity. If you wait to play this game until after the students have recorded everyone's names, they can refer to their spelling lists when completing their Bingo boards.

When you're ready to play the game, collect the Mystery Student Clue Cards and mix them up. Then randomly choose a card and call out the clues about that student, one at a time. Everyone tries to guess which classmate is described by the clues. When the "mystery" student is revealed, everyone may cover up that classmate's name on the board. You can find complete, step-by-step directions on page 53, and they are followed by two Bingo board patterns and the blank Mystery Student Clue Cards.

**Name Toss Game**

To play Name Toss, you'll need one light-weight playground ball, bean bag, or beach ball for the class. If you want to try the timed variation, you'll also need a timer that can count up and show time to the nearest second.



*Name Toss Directions*

1. Ask students to stand in a circle around the edges of the classroom or outside on the playground.
2. Start by calling out a student's name and tossing him or her the ball.
3. After tossing the ball to the other player, sit, squat, or kneel to show that you are out of that round of the game.
4. The student whose name you called should attempt to catch the ball, but there's no penalty for missing it. The student simply picks up the ball and the game continues.
5. The student who caught or picked up the ball announces someone else's name and gently tosses him or her the ball. Then the person who threw it sits or squats down.
6. Play continues with students tossing the ball only to those who remain standing. If someone cannot remember the names of those who are still standing, he or she may ask for help.
7. At the end of the game, the last player says your name and tosses the ball back to you.

*Timed Variation:* After you play the game one time, tell your students that you're going to time them for the next round. Start a count-up timer and repeat steps 1-7. Remind your students to toss the ball gently to someone who is still standing and not to blast it at each other because the whole point is to learn each other's names. At the end of the game, announce the time to the nearest second. Then challenge your students to play the game again and try to beat their time.



Preview Version

### Create and Share Me Bags

Team Builder

One of my favorite team building activities is to create and share Me Bags. To prepare for the activity, fill a small paper lunch bag with 5 to 10 items that represent your family, hobbies, and interests. These items might include a family photo, a ticket stub from a favorite movie, a bookmark if you like to read, etc. Near the end of the day on the first day, bring out your Me Bag and explain that the bag is filled with items about yourself. Pull out one item at a time and share a little about why you included it.

Next, give each student a small paper lunch bag and explain that tonight's homework is for them to create their own Me Bags. Give each student a copy of the half-page assignment letter on page 57 to tuck inside the bag. Ask them to write their names on their bags and store them in their book bags to bring home. Remind them NOT to bring expensive toys or devices that might be broken or stolen. Also, the items must fit into their bags. They should not bring in a 2-foot tall trophy from last year's spelling bee; if they want to share about the spelling bee, they might bring in a copy of their award certificate or a photo of the award.

When students arrive at school the next morning, have them bring their Me Bags directly to you without opening them or revealing the contents to others. When you are ready to begin, distribute the bags to the members of each team and tell them that the bags must stay closed until it's their turn to share. Ask students in each team to number off from 1 to 4 if they haven't already done so. Then give each team member a few minutes to share what's in their Me Bags. It's best if you provide structure by stating who goes first and timing them. For example, say "Student #1, you may show and tell about your Me Bag items." Allow about 3 minutes for those students to pull out their items, one at a time, to present to their teammates. After the 3 minutes are up, announce that it's time for Student #2 to share. At that point, Student #1 must return ALL items to his or her bag. If you don't have them do this, the other team members will still want to play with Student #1's items and may not pay attention to the next team member.

While your students are working, walk around and observe their social skills. Are teammates attentive during this time and appreciative of each other's treasures? If not, stop and model the appropriate behaviors. After everyone has had their 3 minutes in the spotlight, let them pull out all their treasures once again and talk about them or play with them for a few minutes in a less structured way. But at the end of the activity, everything must go back into the bags. Collect them and lock them up until the end of the day.



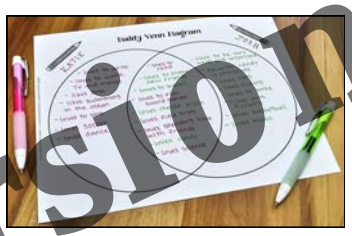


### Buddy Venn Diagrams

Team Builder

Another easy team builder is to have students create Buddy Venn diagrams. Students will complete the Venn diagram with a partner, and the team building takes place when they share within teams at the end. You can print one copy of the Venn diagram on page 58 for each pair of students, or simply have your students draw a Venn diagram on paper.

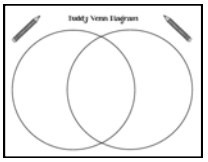
#### Whole Class Introduction




1. Draw a large Venn diagram on chart paper, a chalkboard, or on a piece of paper that's displayed for the class with a document camera.
2. Call on a student volunteer to demonstrate the activity with you.
3. Write your name at the top of one circle and ask your volunteer to write his or her name at the top of the other circle as shown in the example.
4. Take turns telling each other about yourselves and comparing your interests. For example, you could say, "I love to eat Chinese food." If your partner likes it, too, you write "love Chinese food" in the middle area.
5. If your partner says, "No, I'm not a fan of Chinese food," you write it on your side.
6. Next, your partner states a detail such as, "I have two brothers." You discuss whether this is true for you or not, and your partner writes the information in the correct section.
7. Continue demonstrating until everyone seems to understand what to do.

The introductory lesson is a great time to explain how to let your partner know that you don't like something that they like. Remind your students that rudely saying, "Ewww! I hate that!" is only going to make your partner feel bad. Some ways to respond include saying, "That's not my favorite," "I don't really prefer that," or "I haven't liked it when I've tried it before."

#### Buddy Venn Team Builder Activity




After you model the activity with a student volunteer, pair students up with someone on their team. If it's clear that two students are already good friends, pair them with someone else on the team. Don't let them choose partners or some students will immediately feel left out when no one on the team wants to be their partner. Give each pair one blank copy of the Buddy Venn diagram. If possible, have them complete the Venn diagram using two different colored pencils or pens. Ask them to write their first names at the top of the circle that's closest to them and to take turns sharing information about themselves and adding it to the graphic organizer. Stop them after about 10 minutes, and ask them to compare their Venn diagrams with the other two team members to find out what they all have in common. Finally, collect the Venn diagrams and read them yourself.





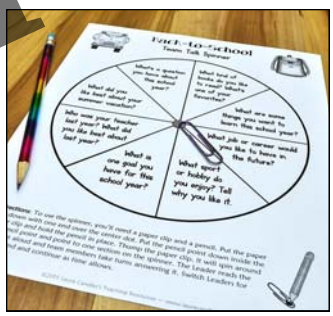
### Back-to-School Team Talk Spinner

Team Builder

Have you ever noticed that adding a spinner to almost any activity can make it seem like a game? A few years ago I discovered how to make a spinner with a paper clip and a pencil, and I began creating discussion spinner activities. This activity makes an excellent icebreaker when students have been placed into new teams.

***Team Talk Directions:***

1. Give each team one Back-to-School Team Talk Spinner and a paper clip. Demonstrate how to use the paper clip and the pencil to create a homemade spinner. Directions can be found at the bottom of the spinner printable.
2. Designate one person on each team to be the first Leader. Ask the Leaders to spin their Team Talk spinners and announce the question to the team. Provide a few minutes of think time for everyone to think about how they want to answer. You may want to ask your students to give a "thumbs up" signal when ready.
3. Starting with the Leader, everyone on the team responds to the question in turn. It's not necessary to provide a specific amount of time for the discussion on each question.
4. After each team finishes discussing the first question, the role of Leader rotates in a counterclockwise direction. The next Leader spins the spinner and reads the question aloud. If the spinner lands on the same question as one that has been discussed, the Leader may choose any question on the board.
5. After a few minutes of think time, the Leader starts the discussion and all team members respond in turn.
6. Continue rotating roles and discussing the questions as time allows. Some teams may answer all questions and others might only discuss a few of them, but the quality of their discussions is more important than the number of questions they discuss.






# Names to Know

## Spelling List of Classmates' Names

| | |
|---|---|
| 1._____ | 16._____ |
| 2._____ | 17._____ |
| 3._____ | 18._____ |
| 4._____ | 19._____ |
| 5._____ | 20._____ |
| 6._____ | 21._____ |
| 7._____ | 22._____ |
| 8._____ | 23._____ |
| 9._____ | 24._____ |
| 10._____ | 25._____ |
| 11._____ | 26._____ |
| 12._____ | 27._____ |
| 13._____ | 28._____ |
| 14._____ | 29._____ |
| 15._____ | 30._____ |



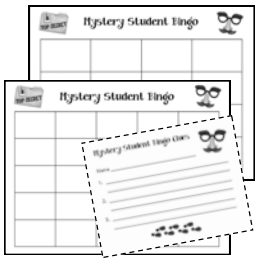
Preview Version

# Mystery Student Bingo

## Teacher Directions

**Materials for Each Student**

- 1 Mystery Student Bingo board (4x4 or 5x5)
- 1 Mystery Student Clues card
- At least 20 Bingo chips or markers




**Mystery Student Bingo Directions:**

1. Give each student a Mystery Student Clue card or an index card. Ask students to write their names and three facts about themselves such as favorite hobbies, where they were born, what they love to read, favorite songs, etc. Tell them not to show their cards to anyone because the game will involve guessing who the facts describe. Collect the cards and shuffle them.
2. Depending on the size of your class, decide whether to use the 4 x 4 or the 5 x 5 Mystery Student Bingo board. Give each student a copy. Display your students' names or give each student a pre-printed class name list. Ask your students to randomly write one of their classmates' first names in each block on their Bingo boards. If you have more students than spaces, ask your students to leave out their own names and a few others as needed. If there are fewer students than spaces, ask them to create one free spot, and then add your name and the names of other adults in the school. Be sure to prepare a clue card for each name used in the game.
3. To play the game, give each person a handful of Bingo chips. Draw out one clue card and don't reveal whose name you've drawn. Begin to read the facts aloud, one at a time, and call on students to guess who the facts describe. When someone guesses correctly, have the person whose card you drew stand up and take a bow. Everyone in the class may cover the person's name on the card.
4. Continue playing until someone has a full row of chips (vertically, horizontally, or diagonally) and calls out, "Bingo!" Have everyone clear their boards and continue playing additional games until you've used all student names.

**Mystery Student "Clueless" Variation**

After you use the deck of clue cards, change the game to eliminate reading the clues. Instead, draw a card, walk over to the student, and tap him or her on the shoulder. The student stands, everyone tries to remember the person's name, and they cover that spot on their board. At that point, announce the student's name aloud so his or her classmates will know if they covered the correct spot. They should remove the Bingo chip if it was not placed correctly.

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Mystery Student Bingo Clues

Name _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mystery Student Bingo Clues

Name _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mystery Student Bingo Clues

Name _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mystery Student Bingo Clues

Name _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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Mystery Student Bingo

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Mystery Student Bingo

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Preview Version

# Me Bag Homework

Dear Parents,
My students have a very important homework assignment! I've given each student a small paper bag to fill with 5 to 10 items that represent his or her hobbies, interests, family background, etc. These items should not be costly or valuable, and they must fit inside the bag. For example, your child might include a movie ticket stub from a favorite movie, a photo of family members or pets, a small stuffed animal he or she loved as a child, and so on. Please make sure your child labels the bag with his or her name.

As students arrive at school, they should bring their bags to me for safekeeping and should not reveal anything inside the bag to other students. Later in the day, I will return the bags to them for an activity in which they will reveal their treasures to their team and share information about themselves. I will send all bags home after we complete the sharing activity. Please do not allow your child to bring items that might be easily broken or that others might be tempted to "borrow." Thanks for your support with this activity!

# Me Bag Homework

Dear Parents,
My students have a very important homework assignment! I've given each student a small paper bag to fill with 5 to 10 items that represent his or her hobbies, interests, family background, etc. These items should not be costly or valuable, and they must fit inside the bag. For example, your child might include a movie ticket stub from a favorite movie, a photo of family members or pets, a small stuffed animal he or she loved as a child, and so on. Please make sure your child labels the bag with his or her name.

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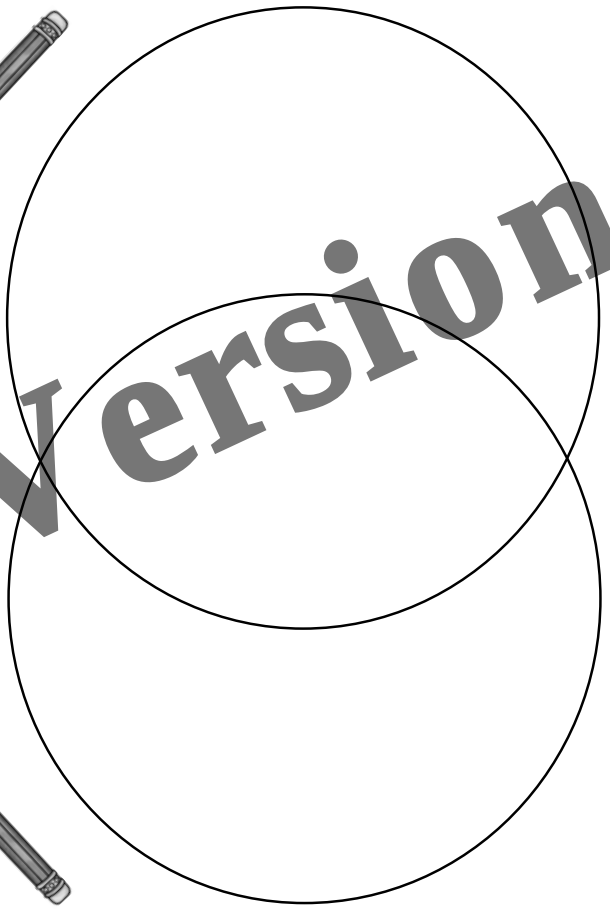
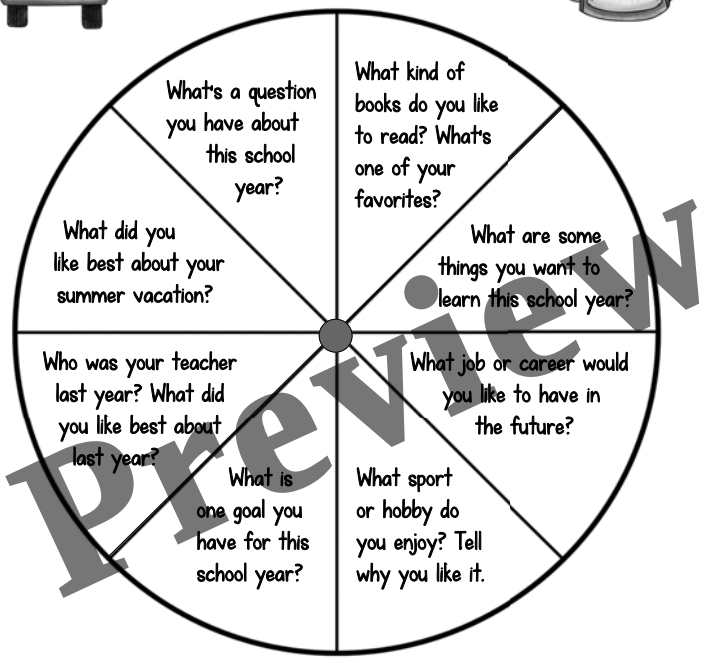
Preview Version

# Buddy Venn Diagram



Preview Version

# Back-to-School
## Team Talk Spinner




**Directions**: To use the spinner, you'll need a paper clip and a pencil. Put the paper clip down with one end over the center dot. Put the pencil point down inside the paper clip and hold the pencil in place. Thump the paper clip. It will spin around the pencil point and point to one section on the spinner. The Leader reads the question aloud and team members take turns answering it. Switch Leaders for each round and continue as time allows.

Chapter 4

# Establishing Rules and Procedures

One part of creating a caring classroom is establishing rules and procedures. Even though these strategies and lessons will be integrated with the activities in Chapters 3 and 4, they are in a separate chapter because they serve a different purpose. These strategies will ensure that your classroom is a safe place to be, a place where students are not physically threatened and where they feel safe to express themselves. These procedures need to be started from the first day of school, but don't make the mistake of starting the first day of school with two hours of discussion on rules and procedures! What I found to be most effective was to alternate a fun cooperative learning activity or icebreaker with a short lesson on rules and procedures.

### Choose an Effective Quiet Signal

One of the most important procedures is an effective quiet signal. This quiet signal is not for disciplinary purposes; instead, it will be used all day long as you engage your students in discussion and teamwork. When kids are working together in teams, they are going to talk and become engrossed in what they are doing. You need an effective quiet signal to get their attention when it's time to give directions. My favorite quiet signal is the set of chimes shown on the right. The sound is pleasant, but your students can easily hear it anywhere in the room.

You can also use a clapping signal or pattern. Clap a certain number of times and your students clap the pattern back to you. I've also seen the following quiet system used effectively. It's a clapping pattern combined with words in the following sequence:

- "If you hear me now, clap once." (Clap once in unison with the students who heard you.)
- "If you hear me now, clap twice." (Clap twice in unison with the students who heard you.)
- "If you hear me now, clap 3 times." (By this point, the whole class should clap 3 times.)

### Teach the Quiet Signal

After you choose a quiet signal, you need teach it to your students. But remember that telling isn't teaching! To teach the procedure, first explain it and then provide time to practice it. Tell your students exactly what you expect them to do when they hear the signal. For example, "*When you hear the chimes, stop talking, signal your partner with a finger to your lips, turn to face me, and be ready to listen. We need the room quiet in 5 seconds.*"

The next step is to immediately provide a chance for your students to practice the signal. Announce a topic such as "Your Dream Vacation" and ask students to discuss it with a partner. After a minute of discussion, use your quiet signal to get their attention, and time them to see how long it takes. It will probably take 10 or 20 seconds to get the room totally quiet the first time. Record the time, and announce that you're going to try it again. Repeat this practice until they are able to be quiet and ready for the next set of instructions within 5 seconds.

Preview Version

### Stoplight Behavior Management System

After you establish your quiet signal, the next most important step is establishing your whole class management system. Lecturing students for misbehavior is ineffective and wastes class time. What you need is a whole class management system with clearly defined consequences at each level. If you don't already have an effective system, I highly recommend the Stoplight Behavior Management System described on page 64. Introduce the system on the first day of school and begin implementing it right away. Consistent use of an effective classroom management system will eliminate the need to raise your voice and will help promote a positive classroom atmosphere.

**Caution:** Never assign a consequence to the whole class for the behavior of a few students. The practice is unfair and you are unlikely to receive the support of parents or your administration.

### Warm Fuzzy Jar – Class Reward System

In addition to a classroom management system like the Stoplight System, you'll need a system for rewarding positive behavior. Placing "warm fuzzies," or cotton balls, in a jar is an easy way to show your appreciation when your class engages in appropriate, on-task behavior. When the jar is full, the class will receive a reward, such as extra recess, 15 minutes of free time at the end of the day to talk to friends, extra computer time, a class kickball game, or any other reward of your choosing.

Ask your students to help you brainstorm a list of rewards (preferably non-food rewards that are free), and let them vote on a reward to work towards. Review the ways they can earn warm fuzzies, such as for their behavior when they go to art, for their lunchroom behavior, for lining up quietly to go outside, when the class gets a compliment, and so on. The system is most effective when you announce why they are earning the warm fuzzy. For example, "Class, I really appreciate how quickly and quietly you lined up for lunch today. You definitely deserve a warm fuzzy!" I don't recommend taking warm fuzzies out of the jar because it's discouraging to lose a warm fuzzy that had been earned previously.

### Creating Classroom Rules

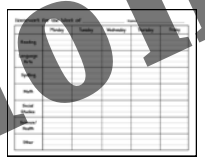
Some teachers like to establish their own classroom rules and simply share them with their students on the first day of school. However, a long list of rules can be a turn-off and may set a negative tone in the classroom. With upper elementary and middle school students, you can often involve them in a cooperative learning lesson to create their own classroom rules. If you follow the directions for this activity outlined on pages 65 and 66, your students will probably end up with the same rules you would have given them anyway! The difference is that they will have created those rules on their own, and they will understand why rules are needed in the classroom. Therefore, they will be more likely to follow the classroom rules.





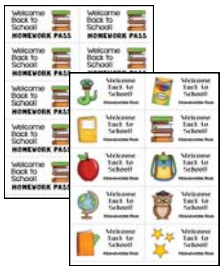
After your class selects a set of five or six important rules, you can ask them to copy the class rules onto a piece of paper or onto the printable on page 67. Ask them to sign the rules and return those pages to you or place the rules at the backs of their handbooks. You may even want to send a signed copy of those class rules home to parents. Finally, you can create a poster of the rules for your classroom by enlarging the pattern on page 68 or writing them on poster board. Refer to the class rules when they are not being followed, and remind students that they developed these rules themselves.

### Daily Homework Posters and Weekly Homework Charts



Most teachers expect students to write down their homework every day, so it's helpful to have a place in the classroom to record assignments. A set of laminated posters similar to the ones below work well. You can create your own set by gluing pages 69 to 73 onto brightly colored backgrounds or by printing pages 74 to 78 which already have colored backgrounds. Each time you announce an assignment, write it on the day that it will be due, and not on the day you assigned it. Using this system, students can look ahead and see what's due on each day throughout the week. Be sure to provide time at the end of each day for your students to record the assignments in their student planners. If your students don't have planners, you can print copies of the Weekly Homework Chart on page 79 for them to use instead.

### Welcome to School Homework Passes



Giving each student a homework pass (page 81 - 84) on the first day of school is a nice way to welcome them. From time to time everyone has a family emergency or a legitimate reason why they can't do their homework, and homework passes can help when that happens. Before you give out the passes, I suggest writing students' names on them and telling your students that the passes can't be given to anyone else. Be sure to explain any other rules for using them, including whether the passes can be used to skip an assignment or just avoid a late penalty. Obviously, you don't want a student to give you a homework pass in lieu of doing a major assignment! My rules were that a pass could be used to avoid a late penalty if an assignment was not finished on time or if it was left at home, but the assignment did have to be turned in the next day.





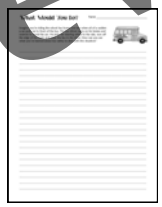
### Bus Safety Discussion Mix Up

If your school offers bus transportation for students, you're probably required to teach a bus safety lesson within the first few days of school. After you teach a short bus safety lesson, engage your students in a few rounds of Bus Safety Discussion Mix Up. In this activity, students will mix and mingle quietly around the room and then stop to discuss a question with a partner. You'll need one set of the School Bus Safety Question Cards on page 85 for yourself to use as discussion prompts. Cut the cards apart and shuffle them. Then follow these directions:

1. Ask students to stand and push in their chairs.
2. Announce "Mix!" and have them move quietly throughout the classroom for about 30 seconds, speaking in whisper voices.
3. Say, "Freeze!" and ask everyone to stop.
4. Say, "Pair" and ask students to find a partner who is close by.
5. Call out the question on the first card and ask students to discuss it with their partners.
6. Then call on a few students to share their ideas, and clarify any misunderstandings.
7. Announce, "Mix!" and repeat steps 2 through 6 until all cards have been discussed.

**Management Tip**: Tell students that each time they pair up, they have to find a new partner. This will keep them from pairing up with the same person over and over.

### Bus Safety Writing Assignment: What Would You Do?



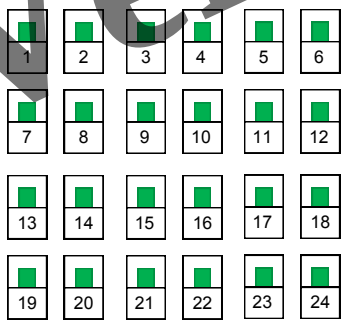
No matter how much we discuss bus safety rules with our students, talking about what to do is not enough to prepare them in the event of a bus accident. However, writing about what to do can help students imagine how they would respond. Thinking about this possibility in the safe confines of the classroom gives them time to evaluate their options and apply what you've discussed. Display the writing prompt on page 86 and discuss it with the class before having your students write on the topic independently. Or assign the writing prompt without discussing it in advance to assess their understanding of bus safety. Then read what they write and use that as the basis for further discussion. If you grade the activity, give your students the opportunity to rewrite their responses after the discussion. Who knows, this writing activity may help to keep them safe one day in the future!

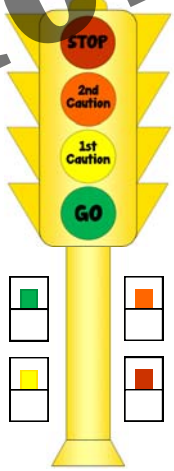
### Back to School Super Start Wrap Up

You might not be able to include all of the activities in this packet during your first week back to school, but even including a few of them will promote a caring classroom environment. Sometimes teachers feel pressured to teach academic content right away, and this pressure can discourage them from providing ample time to involve students in community-building activities. However, I find that spending time establishing procedures and getting to know each other pays off in the end. After we establish the ground rules and students know how to work effectively in teams, we can turn our attention to the academic curriculum. I hope you'll find that these activities really do provide a super start to your new school year!

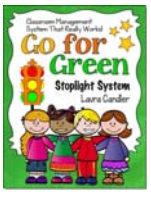


## Go For Green Stoplight Management System




## How the Stoplight System Works




The Stoplight System takes the chaos out of the classroom! To create this display, staple a stoplight pattern to a large bulletin board, and add a numbered library card pocket for each student. Insert a green strip of paper in each student's pocket, and place yellow, orange, and red strips in extra pockets near the base of the stoplight. Students start each day "on green." When a student engages in an off-task behavior, place a yellow strip of paper in his or her assigned pocket as a caution. If additional incidents occur, place an orange, and then a red strip, in the pocket. Follow up with a specific consequences according to your management plan. At the end of the day, record the stoplight color changes, and then replace the yellow, red, and orange strips of paper. You can find the complete directions, patterns, and classroom management forms in my **Go for Green Stoplight System**. Click the cover image to find it in my TpT store! ~ Laura Candler



Preview Version

# Creating Classroom Rules

## Teaching Suggestions

**1. Discuss the Need for Rules**

Have students pair with a partner to discuss this question: "Why do we need rules in the classroom?" Then call on volunteers to share their ideas with the class and discuss until your students seem to understand why we need rules in the classroom.

**2. Brainstorm Rules**

Give your students individual dry erase boards and markers or ask them to get out scrap paper. Ask everyone to write down one classroom rule that they think is important. (Encourage them to keep the rules stated in a positive manner instead of starting with the word "don't.")

Explain that, as a class, you are going to settle on no more than five or six class rules, and you need their help to develop those rules. If something like not chewing gum is on a school policy, you don't need to include it on your classroom list. Because you are only choosing five, they should focus on general rules like "Pay attention others are talking," instead of "Don't tap your pencil on your desk when others are talking."

**3. Team Members Revise Rules**

Number your students off from 1 to 4 in each team. Starting with Student #1, ask your students to take turns reading their rules to their team. As each rule is read aloud, team members should discuss the rule and revise the wording if needed. If students wrote very similar rules, one of them may want to change to something different. If no one wants to change, that's fine, too.

Preview Version



**4. Share and Discuss Rules**

Before you ask students to share their rules with the class, remind them that they are going to end up with a list of no more than five or six rules. Ask everyone to hold up their dry erase boards for you to review. Choose about 8 to 10 rules that you feel are most important and ask those students to bring their boards to the front of the room. If possible, place their boards along the top of your chalkboard or somewhere that everyone can see them.

Number the boards in order and ask the students who contributed them to have a seat. From now on, refer to each rule by number rather than by the person's name who wrote it. Saying, "We don't need Mary's rule," may inadvertently hurt Mary's feelings, but saying, "We don't need #6 because it's almost the same as #4," is much less personal. You'll notice that many of the rules will sound similar, so at this point you can combine some of them together, recording the new variation on a chart, chalkboard, or interactive whiteboard.

**5. Select Top Five or Six Class Rules**

Eventually through discussion and possibly voting, your class will be able to reduce the list to the most important five or six.

**6. Record and Post Rules**

Ask students to record the list of class rules on a sheet of lined paper or on the Class Rules printable shown on the right. Create a class wall display or bulletin board of the rules. You can write them out yourself on poster paper or allow each team to make a small poster (12" x 18") of one of the rules. If you have more than six teams, let one make a title card for the display.

Preview Version



# Our Class Rules

Our class created these rules to make sure that everyone in our classroom feels safe and valued. I understand the importance of these rules and agree to follow them.

Signature _____ Date _____

Preview Version



# Our Class Rules

Preview Version

# Monday

Preview Version



# Tuesday

Preview Version



# Wednesday

Preview Version



# Thursday

Preview Version

# Friday

Preview Version



# Monday

Preview Version



# Tuesday

Preview Version



# Wednesday

Preview Version

# Thursday

Preview Version



# Friday

Preview Version



Homework for the Week of _____ Name _____

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | | | | | |
| Language Arts | | | | | |
| Spelling | | | | | |
| Math | | | | | |
| Social Studies | | | | | |
| Science/ Health | | | | | |
| Other | | | | | |

Preview Version



Homework for the Week of _____ Name _____

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |

Preview Version

Welcome Back to School!

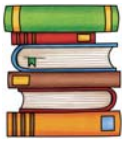
HOMEWORK PASS

Welcome Back to School!

HOMEWORK PASS

Welcome Back to School!

HOMEWORK PASS



Welcome Back to School!

HOMEWORK PASS

Welcome Back to School!

HOMEWORK PASS

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Preview Version

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HOMEWORK PASS

Welcome Back to School!

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Preview Version

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# School Bus Safety
## Question Cards

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|---|---|
| 1. What are 3 safety rules for walking to the bus stop and getting on the bus? | 2. What are 3 safety rules to remember when riding a bus? |
| 3. What are 3 safety rules to remember when getting off the bus? | 4. How should you cross the street after getting off the bus? |
| 5. Why shouldn't students eat on the bus? | 6. Why shouldn't students talk to the bus driver while the bus is in operation? |

Preview Version



## What Would You Do?

Name _____

Imagine you're riding the school bus home one day when all of a sudden a car pulls out in front of the bus. The bus driver slams on his brakes and swerves to avoid the car. He jerks the steering wheel to the side, runs off the edge of the road, and stops the bus in the ditch. How can you use what you've learned about bus safety to deal with this situation?

Preview Version



**Terrific Teaching Resources from Laura Candler!** Click each cover below to find the item on TpT.

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