



# FIRST THINGS First

BY INES C. BAUTISTA

Those first days of school can set the tone for the rest of the school year. Make sure that yours are wonderful and memorable!

**t**he start of the school year. It's a little overwhelming for most teachers and maybe even downright scary for new ones. But no matter how many years you've been teaching, you probably feel that familiar tingle of excitement shooting up your belly straight to your heart. Newness is always exhilarating, but also nerve-wracking because there are so many expectations to fulfill. And there's always the threat of disappointment if you don't feel that much-needed connection with your students.

How can you make sure your first meeting will set the tone of inquisitiveness and enthusiasm you want to stir up in your students throughout the rest of the year? *Star Teacher* gives you a rundown of what must be established on the first day of school and how to do it.

## Welcome students with "invitations"

Great parties always send out invitations to heighten anticipation for the event as well as give the details. Wedding and party planners always say that the invitation must reflect the theme and atmosphere of the affair. This school year can be one long party for you and your students. So why not invite them to this great event? Create a postcard or a short letter saying something like, "You're invited to be in the best class this school year!" and "I can't wait to meet you and begin our exciting year of learning!" Decorate it with balloons, confetti, and other fun designs. Make copies and leave one on each desk. Your students will be intrigued, and they'll want to know you better.

## Create a comfortable atmosphere

Students learn best when they are relaxed and not anxious. School usually makes them worry, thus disrupting their concentration and creativity. One way of addressing this is to make the classroom more welcoming. You can bring posters from home that are related to school or hang large pieces of blue, green and purple cloth over the walls. Surveys show that these colors calm the mind. You can also ask each student to bring a favorite drawing of theirs and create a collage on the wall. They will feel more at home and have a sense of ownership for their classroom instead of seeing it as a dreaded place.



## Seat them where they will learn best

Students are usually seated alphabetically, but sometimes this doesn't work. A nearsighted student could end up at the back just because her last name begins with the letter Z and the tallest kid in the class gets a front-row seat because his begins with an A. Why not base the seating plan on where the student will learn best? Ask them to fill out a confidential form with questions that will help you get to know them even better like:

- I like/dislike reading because...
- I think school is ...
- I like sitting (choose from: in front, at the back, near the window, near the door, in the middle) because...

Ask them to seriously think of who they want to sit next to in class and why. They have to give a good reason like "we work well together." Next, ask them to name who they don't want beside them and why. Again, these reasons must be good such as, "I don't want to be distracted because I want to do better this year." Use these sheets when you make your seating plan. Of course, if you know that two kids will just cheat off each other or chat up a storm during a lecture, use your discretion.

ILLUSTRATION BY: MIKKE GALLARDO

## Agree on class rules

Kids don't enjoy being told what to do, so giving them a set of your classroom rules may just be asking for trouble. The rebels will instantly know what they should do in class to get you angry! Instead, ask your class what they think their responsibilities as students are. What rules will give them the best atmosphere for learning? As they volunteer different rules, make sure these are phrased positively. Change "don't run in the hall" to "walk calmly and quietly in the hall." "Don't eat in class" can be rephrased to "Eat only during break time." Write all these rules down on Manila paper and get each member of the class to sign his or her name as a pledge to follow these rules. Hang the list in the classroom to serve as a reminder throughout the year.

**Hang large pieces of blue, green and purple cloth or cartolina on the walls. Surveys show that these colors calm the mind.**

## Set goals

Motivate your students even further by asking them what they want to achieve by the end of the year. You can suggest goals such as winning an annual class competition, reading a certain number of books, planting a vegetable garden, making sure that each member of the class passes and moves up to the next grade. Seeing a list of class goals mounted on the classroom wall will inspire your students and keep them on track. They will remember that they are learning to achieve as individuals and also as members of a united class.

## Get them back into the school groove

Remember what the week before a new school year was like was like when *you* were a student? You may have experienced—as many people do—nightmares of dreams of falling or being chased. This is because most students feel anxious about starting a new school year with a different set of classmates, a different teacher, and new hardships to face. To help make the transition smoother for your class, explore how they feel about being back in a classroom. Ask them to take out a sheet of paper and write down their thoughts. Give them a sentence to complete and expound on such as:

- When I was getting ready for school today, I felt...
- I hope this year will be better than last year because...
- I've heard that this grade will be...

They can also draw how they feel if that will be easier for them. Explain that this will not be graded and that you're the only one who'll read it. Assure them that they can be honest and you won't judge them, and keep your word! This will help you get to know your students better and find out if they have problems that need your attention.

Now that you're ready to face that dreaded yet highly anticipated first day of school, you can look forward to a truly exciting and fulfilling school year. Good luck! ★

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The best classes are usually those where the students respect each other and enjoy each other's company. This isn't only apparent in class activities and presentations, but also in how they interact with all their teachers. You can help develop good rapport among your students by making them feel comfortable with you and with each other during the first week of school. Try these activities:

### 1 YOU VERSUS ME

In this game, ask your students to think of five facts to share about themselves with the class. Each student will take turns sharing. You will also tell them 30 or more facts about yourself (you can share one fact at a time after each student shares). At the end of the sharing, say as much as you can remember about your students and they must do the same for you. Keep a tally to see who remembers the most—you or them. Remember that it's a fun competition, but do your best to listen and remember facts about each one of your students because this is the main objective of the game.

### 2 MY BAG

Ask your students to bring a bag filled with objects that are special to them. In a show-and-tell format, have them present these to the class and explain why these are treasured items. You must do the same to gain their respect. Besides, your students will be eager to do your activities if they know you're participating too.

### 3 SYMBOLIC NAMETAGS

Prepare pieces of white cardboard, coloring materials, glue or paste, scissors and magazines your students can cut. Ask your students to think of an object or an animal they have something positive in common with. Explain that this will be their symbol. They can draw their symbol on one side of the white cardboard or cut out their symbol from a magazine and paste it. In the center of the cardboard, they will write their nicknames. When they have finished with their nametags, each one will explain the symbol they have chosen to the class. Make one for yourself too.

#### ABOUT THE WRITER:

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