

Using Morning Messages to Start the Day in Distance Learning

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Classroom Management

The morning message is a popular way to help elementary students transition into school—and it can be adapted for home learning.

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The beginning of the school day is an important time for students as they transition from home to school. Helping students make this transition is even more important when they're doing their school work at home. One strategy I use to set the tone for a day of learning is an interactive morning message. The morning message is a daily message from the teacher that is posted for students when they enter the classroom. It can be written on chart paper or projected on the whiteboard. It can also be shared via Google Slides to reach students who are distance learning.

The morning message welcomes students to school and helps reinforce academic skills. Adding an interactive component helps increase student motivation and engagement and builds classroom community. Students anticipate the message and know that their first task each day is to read and respond to it.

Creating an interactive morning message each day may seem like a lot of work, but it's not too difficult. I use a weekly schedule of message themes and repeat the same types of messages each week to streamline the process. This makes planning easy and offers the students predictability. I use alliteration in the theme names to establish a fun, simple routine that is easy to remember.

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Math Monday

On Mondays, the morning message includes a math puzzle or problem for students to solve. It can relate to the current lesson or review a prior concept. It can be as simple as a math problem for each student to solve, like adding or dividing or simplifying fractions. Or it can be a complex, multistep word problem that students work together to solve.

Incorporating math into morning messages provides extra time for math. It also allows me to introduce or review topics in a fun and low-stakes manner. Even students who say they aren't good at math often enjoy participating in the morning message and will try problems they might otherwise be reluctant to do.

Tell Me About It Tuesday

On Tuesdays, I pose a question to the class and ask each student to respond. Students can respond directly on the message or, when we're in the classroom, on a sticky note that they stick on or near the message. I like to mix up the format. During distance learning, you can post these questions online and allow students to respond either during a class discussion or in a private message.

I use these questions for a variety of purposes, including getting to know the students, building classroom community, reinforcing academic concepts, and teaching social and emotional learning skills.

Examples include:

- What is something a good friend always does?
- What is your favorite book that we have read this year?
- Which climate would you prefer to live in?
- Tell me about a time you learned how to do something hard.

Would You Rather Wednesday

“Would you rather...” is a favorite activity of many children. It provides a quick and easy way for them to voice their opinions. Questions can be outlandish, tied to academic content, based on the season, or even completely random.

Examples include:

- Would you rather have a pet unicorn or a pet dinosaur?
- Would you rather battle a polar bear or a lion?

I use “Would you rather...” questions to discuss and review tally marks. For older students, they can also initiate a conversation about fractions or probability. Sometimes I ask the students to defend their choice or persuade someone else why their choice is better.

Think Outside the Box Thursday

On Thursdays, students flex their creative thinking muscles and think outside the box. I draw part of an object on the message and provide a photocopy for each student to complete. During distance learning, you can send your simple drawing online and have a parent or guardian either print it out or replicate it on a sheet of paper, and send you a photo of the completed drawing. I impose a time limit for the drawings, and students have the opportunity to share their creations with the class.

I often tie the drawing to the current season or holidays, and I restrain students’ thinking by telling them what the object is not—they can turn it into anything else. For instance, if the message contains a drawing of a V, I might add, “It is NOT an ice-cream cone. What could it be?” The students complete their drawing based on the V making it anything but an ice-cream cone.

Thursdays are always my students’ favorite morning message. I’m amazed by how creative and artistic they are. This activity also allows students who often struggle with academics to shine.

Figure It Out Fridays

On Fridays, the message contains a riddle or puzzle. Sometimes I use a simple brain teaser, “This is the longest word in the English language.” (Answer: “smiles,” because it has a mile between the first and last letter). I also introduce analogies, logic puzzles, and word play. These messages help develop critical thinking skills.

Sometimes the puzzle is simple, and students can guess the answer on their own. Other times it's more challenging, and students must work together.

The best morning messages are both fun and instructional. As you experiment with them, you'll figure out what works best for your students.