

We Skoolhouse

New School Year



Back to School!

The start of a new school year is a significant milestone, particularly for our youngest learners. For many children, this may be their first experience being away from their parents, which can be both exciting and daunting. Even for children who have been in programming before, transitioning back to school, meeting new teachers, and forming new friendships is a substantial adjustment.

As teachers, it's essential to approach this period with patience and empathy. Recognizing that each child responds differently to change will help us create a supportive and nurturing environment. Some children may adapt quickly and eagerly to their new surroundings, while others might take more time to feel comfortable and secure.

Understanding the magnitude of this shift for young children allows us to better support them through this transition. By acknowledging their feelings, providing consistent routines, and offering plenty of reassurance, we can help ease their anxieties and foster a positive start to their learning journey.



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Preparing the Classroom Environment

As you prepare for the new school year, creating a warm, inviting, and stimulating classroom environment is essential for fostering a love of learning in your children. Here are some practical tips to help you set up your classroom:

Create a Welcoming Atmosphere:

- Arrange the classroom furniture to create cozy, inviting spaces where children feel safe and comfortable. Consider creating small nooks and corners where children can retreat for quiet time or group activities.
- Use soft, neutral colors to create a calm and soothing environment. Avoid over-stimulating bright colors, charts, & busy patterns that can distract or overwhelm children.
 - Consider the inclusion of fabrics, plants, natural materials & warm lights.
- Remember, it's okay to have bare walls & you don't need a "theme." You may begin to add personal touches such as family photos, children's artwork, and items that reflect the interests and cultures of your children as they accrue. This helps create a sense of belonging and personal connection to the classroom.



Preparing the Classroom Environment (Cont'd)

Create Inviting Learning Areas: Designate specific areas in the classroom for different activities, such as a reading nook, art station, sensory table, and dramatic play corner. Ensure each area is inviting and well-organized, with materials that are easily accessible to the children to encourage exploration and engagement (*Refer to our Classroom Centers Documents for more specific guidance on setting up different areas of the classroom*).

- **Tips for Learning Centers/Areas:**

- While setting up learning centers/areas helps us organize and find materials more easily, we always advocate for the children's full autonomy in these spaces:
 - **Resist assigning specific children and/or a specific number of children to a given center.** Allow children to navigate throughout the centers of the classroom independently. We want them to take ownership of their learning, which means assessing, communicating, problem-solving, collaborating, and negotiating with their peers.
 - **Do not have children rotate centers after a certain amount of time.** While this approach appears to provide children with a "well-rounded" experience, it undermines their authentic play and learning. Imagine a child is in the middle of building something and then a timer goes off implying they have to move to another center. This can be quite frustrating and disappointing as the child was in the middle of an important project and now has to step away prematurely, and potentially led to "play" in an area that does not interest them.
 - **Welcome children to move materials from one center to another.** While we have centers organized in a particular way, we should allow for flexibility when it comes to the actual play. Children should be able to bring a baby doll from dramatic play to a "crib" created in the block center. We want to promote creative and flexible thinking (best occurs when objects that may not typically go together, then go together!) And of course when it's time to clean up, children should be encouraged to return the materials back to their respective areas.
 - **Be flexible and receptive to adapting the centers to reflect the interests and engagement of the children.** After the children engage in different classrooms centers for some time, notice what areas are most often and least often used. What changes can be made to adapt to the observations? How can we possibly expand a space with high traffic? What can we change or add to a space with low traffic? Always assess and revise as needed!

Preparing the Classroom Environment (Cont'd)

Preparing a classroom environment at the beginning of the year with a small budget or physical restrictions requires creativity and practical solutions to create a nurturing and engaging space for children. Despite challenges such as limited natural light, small/odd layout, or varied paint colors on the walls, there are effective ways to enhance the learning environment. One approach is to **visit local flea markets or thrift stores for affordable, second-hand furniture**. These pieces can provide unique and functional additions that add character and comfort to the classroom without breaking the budget.



Avoiding brightly colored charts, borders, and rugs, and instead opting for soft string lights and house lamps, can create a warm and inviting atmosphere conducive to learning. Neutral-colored bulletin boards help reduce visual clutter and maintain a calm environment that supports concentration and creativity. **Introducing mirrors strategically** can open up a small space, reflect light, & create an illusion of more space, enhancing the ambiance.



Utilizing storage bins and baskets for organizing materials not only maximizes space but also promotes independence and accessibility for children during activities. Additionally, incorporating plants and natural elements, even in small pots or displays, can bring a touch of nature indoors. This addition not only beautifies the environment but also provides sensory stimulation & a connection to the natural world, enriching the learning experience.

Teaching Team Meeting

At the beginning of the year, meeting and planning with your co-teacher(s) is essential for establishing a cohesive and collaborative classroom environment. This time allows you both to align your educational philosophies, discuss goals for the children, and set expectations for daily routines and activities. Regular planning sessions also foster open communication and mutual support, ensuring that all teachers feel valued and equipped to contribute effectively to the children's learning experiences.



1. Foster Open Communication: Establish clear and open lines of communication with your teaching team from the beginning. Regular meetings and check-ins allow for the sharing of ideas, observations, and reflections, ensuring everyone is on the same page and can contribute to the collaborative environment.

2. Define Roles and Responsibilities: Clearly define each team member's roles and responsibilities to ensure smooth collaboration. Understanding who is responsible for different aspects of the classroom, such as setting up provocations, leading specific activities, or managing documentation, helps prevent confusion and promotes efficiency.

3. Value Diverse Perspectives: Encourage team members to share their unique perspectives and expertise, valuing the contributions of each educator, and diverse viewpoints. This inclusive approach enriches the learning environment, inspire new ideas, and enhances the overall learning experience for the children.

4. Create a Reflective Practice Culture: Regularly engage in reflective practice as a team. Discuss what is working well, what challenges have arisen, and how you can collectively improve. Reflecting on your practices, both individually and as a group, helps to continuously align your efforts and adapt to the needs of the children. **Consistent communication is key for a positive working experience.**

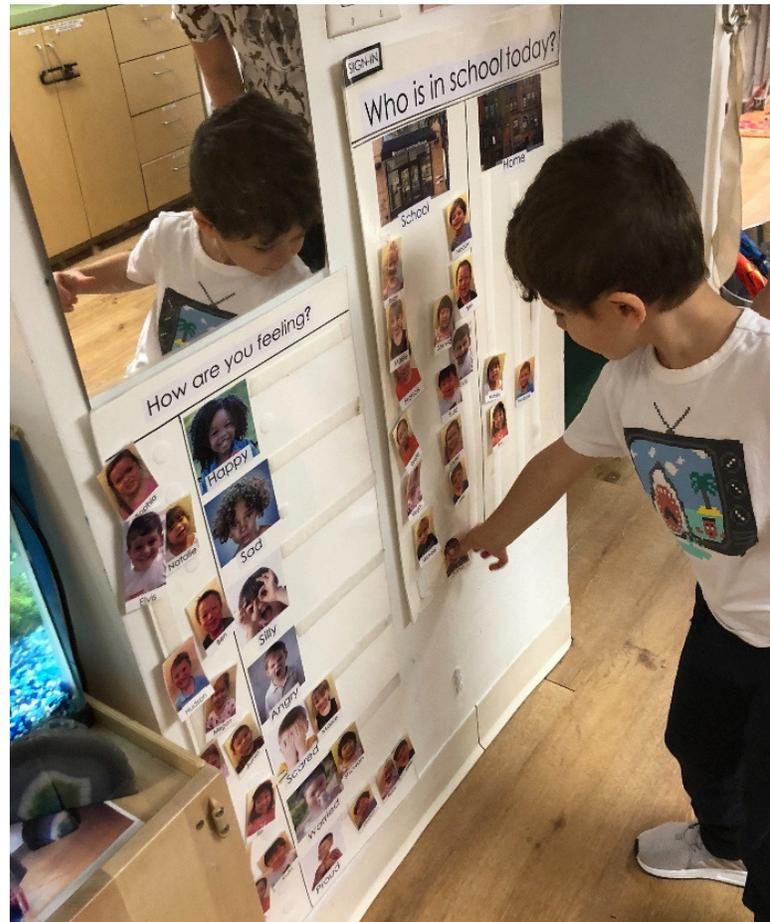
Curriculum Planning (First Two Weeks)

As you prepare for the first two weeks of school, prioritize creating a nurturing environment that fosters trust and connection among children, teachers, and peers. Establish a consistent daily routine to provide stability and predictability, allowing ample time for smooth transitions between activities.

Embrace self-directed, child-led play as the cornerstone of learning, encouraging independence and boosting confidence early on. Offer the same learning provocations in each center for at least one week, allowing children to revisit materials and deepen their understanding of their properties, uses, and concepts.

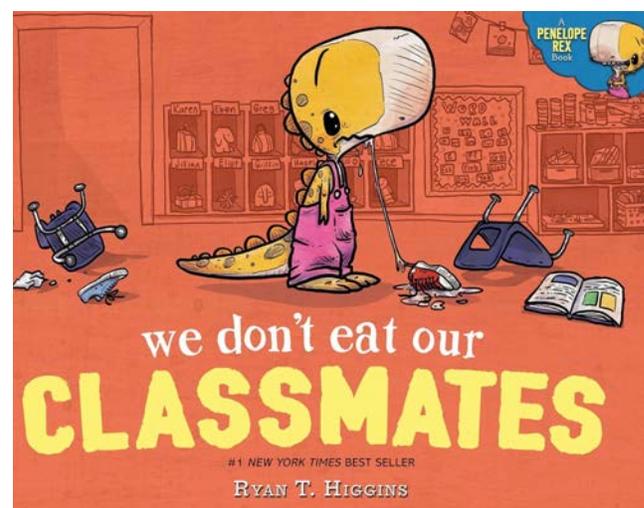
Keep new introductions of activities and materials minimal to simplify the adjustment process for children who are already adapting to new surroundings. Document children's interactions with materials and each other to observe emerging interests and behaviors, which may guide future curriculum planning.

Foster collaboration among teachers through regular communication and reflection to continuously enhance the learning environment based on children's evolving needs and interests. This approach not only supports a smooth transition into school but also lays a foundation for meaningful and engaging learning experiences throughout the year.

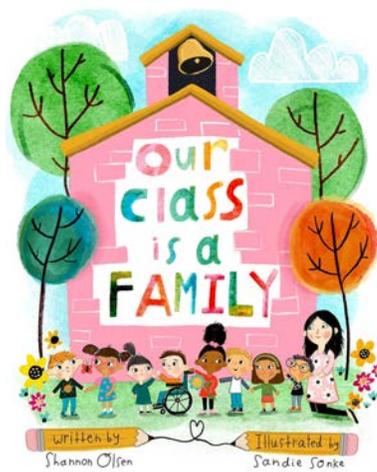


Back to School Books We Love

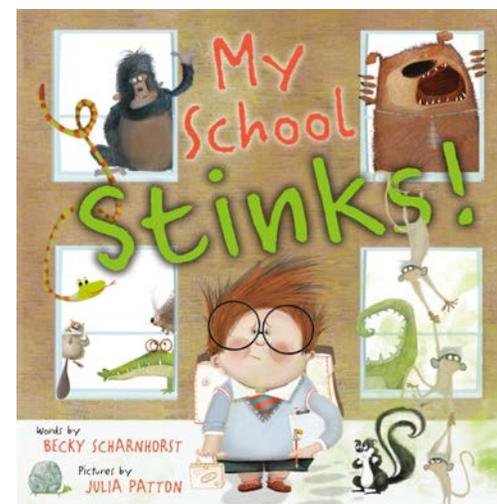
Books about starting school play a crucial role in supporting children's transition to a new educational environment. They provide a comforting and relatable narrative that helps children understand and process their feelings about starting school. These books often feature characters experiencing similar emotions and situations, offering reassurance and normalization of common anxieties. Through engaging stories and vibrant illustrations, children can explore different aspects of the school day, from making new friends to navigating classroom routines. Reading these books encourages open discussions about expectations & excitement, fostering a positive outlook & easing the transition for children.



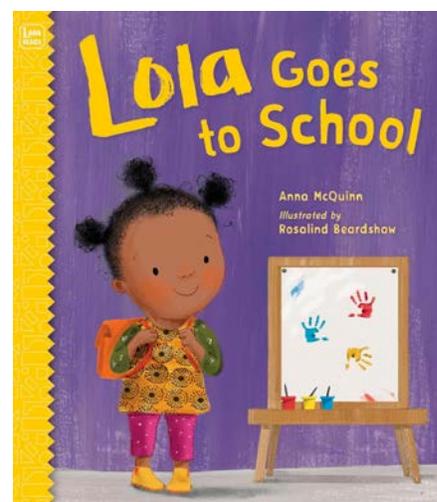
We Don't Eat Our Classmates,
by Ryan T. Higgins



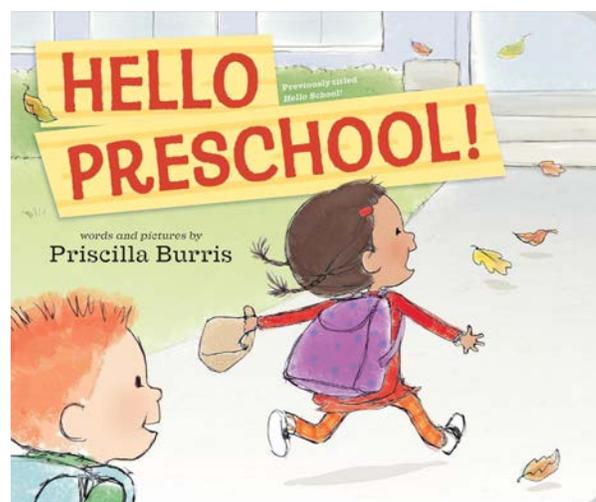
Our Class is a Family,
by Shannon Olsen



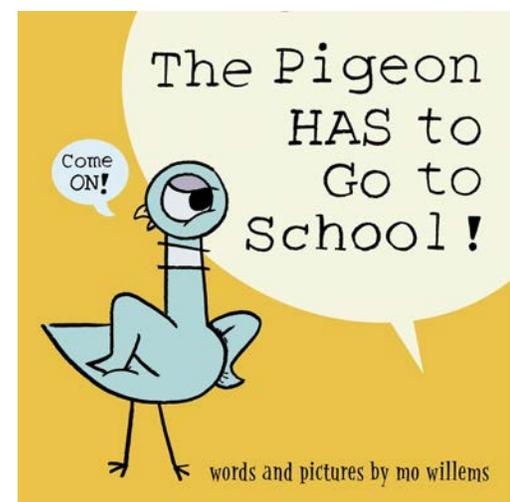
My School Stinks!,
by Becky Scharnhorst



Lola Goes to School,
by Anna McQuinn



Hello Preschool!,
by Priscilla Burris



The Pigeon HAS to Go to School!,
by Mo Willems

Welcome Letter to Parents & Children

A welcome letter from the teacher to parents and children before the first day of school plays a pivotal role in establishing a warm and welcoming atmosphere. It serves as a crucial bridge between the classroom and home environment, setting a positive tone for the upcoming school year. Including a picture of yourself in the letter not only introduces the teacher but also helps children connect a name to the face, easing their transition and building familiarity before they step into the classroom. Additionally, photos of the classroom, if available, provide a sneak peek into the learning environment, sparking excitement and curiosity in both children and parents alike.

Beyond introducing themselves and providing a visual introduction to the classroom, teachers can use the letter to offer practical tips for a smooth transition from home to school. This may include emphasizing the importance of a quick and consistent drop-off routine, which helps children establish a sense of security and routine **(Please review our Drop-off & Pick-up Routines Document for greater elaboration)**. By outlining classroom routines, daily schedules, and expectations, the letter helps families feel prepared and informed, reducing anxiety and setting clear expectations for the new experience.

Moreover, the welcome letter serves as an opportunity for teachers to share their teaching philosophy, approach to learning, and goals for the year. It fosters a sense of partnership between home and school from the outset, building trust and collaboration between teachers, parents, and children. This initial communication not only sets a positive tone but also ensures that everyone involved feels welcomed, supported, and excited about the educational journey ahead. We recommend one from every member of the teaching team goes out to families (Please review our example letter on the next page)!



Welcome Letter to Parents & Children (Example)

Dear Parents and Children,

Welcome to [Classroom Name]! My name is [Teacher's Name], and I am overjoyed to be your child's teacher this year. I hope this message finds you excited and ready for a fantastic school journey ahead!

A little about me: I love [hobbies or interests related to teaching]. I've been teaching [age groups] for [number] years, and each year brings new adventures and discoveries.

In our classroom, we're not just learning; we're exploring, creating, and growing together. I believe in the power of curiosity and hands-on experiences to spark a love for learning that lasts a lifetime.

Here's what you need to know to start the year off right:

- **Where to Find Us:** Our classroom is nestled [location details]. It's a cozy space filled with [describe classroom environment].
- **First Day Details:** We kick off our journey on [start date] at [start time]. Please arrive on time to settle in and say hello!
- **Our Daily Adventure:** From [brief overview of daily activities], our days are filled with laughter, learning, and making connections.
- **Let's Stay Connected:** Communication is key! You can reach me at [teacher's email]. I love hearing from parents and sharing the joys of your child's day.
- **What to Bring:** [List any specific items or supplies needed for the first day or week].

Your child's unique personality and interests are incredibly important to me. Feel free to share any insights that will help me make this school year memorable & enriching for them.

Save the date for [upcoming event] on [date], where we'll gather to celebrate and set our goals for the year ahead. I can't wait to meet each of you and embark on this wonderful journey together!

Warmest wishes,
[Teacher's Full Name]



List of Recycled Materials & Loose Parts

Strive to continuously collect loose parts and recycled materials for children to utilize in their daily experiences. By encouraging the use of everyday items such as bottle caps, cardboard tubes, fabric scraps, and natural materials like pinecones and shells, we can foster creativity and imaginative play. To support families in this endeavor, we recommend sending out lists of desired materials at the start of the year, as well as on a monthly basis. This consistent reminder helps families develop an "eye" for spotting these everyday treasures, reinforcing the idea that valuable learning resources can be found all around us. This practice not only enhances the children's creative & innovative thinking skills, but also promotes sustainability and resourcefulness through upcycling.

Metal Materials

- Bottle caps
- Soda can tabs
- Metal washers
- Old keys
- Nuts and bolts
- Tin cans
- Metal lids
- Aluminum foil
- Paper clips
- Cookie cutters
- Metal containers
- Old jewelry
- Chain links
- Rusted gears
- Brackets
- Screws
- Metal rings
- Wire hangers
- Metal mesh
- Hinges

Natural Materials

- Pinecones
- Leaves
- Seashells
- Rocks
- Driftwood
- Acorns
- Branches
- Leaves
- Bark
- Seed pods
- Feathers
- Dried flowers
- Bamboo sticks
- Coconut shells
- Corn husks
- Moss
- Straw
- Nutshells
- Pumpkins
- Pressed flowers

Paper & Fabrics

- Cardboard boxes
- Old newspapers
- Paper towel tubes
- Toilet paper tubes
- Egg cartons
- Tissue paper
- Envelopes
- Wrapping paper
- Paper bags
- Construction paper
- Paper plates
- Paperboard
- Fabric scraps
- Old clothing pieces
- Package stuffing
- Fabric ribbons
- Canvas remnants
- Burlap sacks
- Felt sheets
- Quilting scraps

Plastic Materials

- Bottles
- Bottle caps
- Containers
- Straws
- Lids from jars
- Bubble wrap
- Air pillows
- Cutlery (spoons, forks)
- Bags (clean and dry)
- Egg cartons
- Plant pots
- Bottle rings
- Mesh bags
- Milk jugs
- Tubs (from butter)
- Old CD's
- CD cases
- Shower clips
- Loose game pieces
- Unused straws



Wish List Items

Sending out a wish list of items to families can greatly enhance the learning environment in the classroom. Depending on the program's focus and needs, items such as art supplies, books, educational games, sensory materials, or outdoor equipment may be requested. These items not only enrich meaningful learning but also foster a sense of community involvement and support. Families contributing to the wish list can feel engaged in their child's learning journey while ensuring that resources are available to create a vibrant and dynamic learning space for all children.

Art Supplies

- Tempera paints
- Watercolors
- Paintbrushes
- Finger paints
- Construction paper
- Drawing paper pads
- Colored pencils
- Crayons
- Markers
- Safety scissors
- Glue sticks
- Liquid glue
- Modeling clay
- Play-Doh
- Pipe cleaners
- Googly eyes
- Pom-poms
- Feathers
- Sequins and glitter
- Craft sticks

Sensory Materials

- Play sand
- Kinetic sand
- Water beads
- Sensory balls
- Sensory bins or trays
- Rice (for sensory bins)
- Shaving cream
- Playdough
- Scented playdough
- Bubble wrap
- Feathers
- Fabric scraps
- Velcro strips
- Foam blocks
- Sensory mats
- Squeezy stress balls
- Texture tiles or boards
- Scented oils (for olfactory exploration)
- Marble runs
- Magnetic sand

Classroom Toys

- Wooden blocks
- Duplo Bloks
- Legos
- Dollhouse
- Dress-up clothes
- Puppet theater
- Puppets
- Musical instruments
- Sorting toys
- Stacking toys
- Puzzles
- Train set with tracks
- Magna-Tiles
- Toy cars and trucks
- Play food sets
- Art easel
- Outdoor play equipment (balls, jump ropes)
- Sand & water table

Books

- "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle
- "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak
- "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" by Bill Martin Jr.
- "Caps for Sale" by Esphyr Slobodkina
- "If I Built a Car," by Chris Van Dusen
- "David Goes to School," by David Shannon
- "Room on the Broom," by Julia Donaldson
- "My Play Can Be..." by Stephanie Seidler
- King Bidgood's in the Bathtub, by Audrey Wood
- "The Little Engine That Could" by Watty Piper
- "The Cat in the Hat" by Dr. Seuss
- "Sweety," by Andrea Zuill
- "Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!" by Mo Willems
- "The Day the Crayons Quit," by Drew Daywalt
- "Dragons Love Tacos," by Adam Rubin
- "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," by Laura Numeroff
- "A Piglet Named Mercy," by Kate DiCamillo
- "A Little Spot of Feelings (Box Set)", by Diane Alber



Planning for Parent Orientation

A curriculum night/parent orientation at the beginning of the school year is essential for establishing strong connections between teachers and parents, setting the stage for effective communication and partnership throughout the year. It provides an opportunity to introduce parents to the educational philosophy, daily routines, and learning environment, helping them understand and support the progressive model. Engaging parents early on fosters a sense of community, builds trust, and encourages active involvement in their child's education. This initial meeting also opens the door for ongoing dialogue, ensuring that parents feel informed, valued, and ready to collaborate in supporting their child's development and learning journey.

Example Itinerary & Activities:

- **Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)**
 - Greet parents as they arrive, provide name tags, and offer refreshments.
 - Introduce the teaching team and briefly explain the evening's agenda.
- **Classroom Tour (15 minutes)**
 - Walk parents through the different learning areas of the classroom and highlight the purpose and benefits of each area, such as the art station, science center, etc.
- **Curriculum Overview (20 minutes)**
 - Explain the daily schedule, routines, and present the key components of the curriculum & environment, emphasizing child-led learning and exploration.
- **Parent Engagement Activities (30 minutes)**
 - Lead parents in hands-on activities to give them a firsthand experience of the classroom approach (*Suggested activities on the next page*).
- **Q&A and Closing (15 minutes)**
 - Open the floor for questions and encourage parents to share their wonders.
 - Conclude with a thank-you note and provide contact information.

Planning for Parent Orientation (Suggested Activities)

Collaborative Art Project:

Provide a variety of art materials and invite parents to create a collective mural. This activity mirrors the collaborative and creative processes the children will experience.

Exploration of Loose Parts and Open-Ended Materials:

Offer a selection of loose parts and open-ended materials, such as stones, shells, fabric scraps, and wooden blocks. Ask parents to explore and brainstorm what can be done with these materials, demonstrating the endless possibilities for creativity and critical thinking in the classroom.



Create a Frame for Your Child's Classroom Family Photo:

Provide materials for parents to design and decorate a frame for their child's classroom family photo. This personal activity emphasizes the importance of family involvement and creates a keepsake that will be displayed in the classroom, fostering a sense of community and belonging.





MADE FOR CHILDREN. DESIGNED FOR YOU.

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