

Your First-Grader and Language Arts

First-graders build skills by working individually and in small guided groups, as well as listening to stories and singing songs with the whole class.

By GreatSchools Staff

In Your Child's Classroom

Success in school starts with reading and writing

"A first-grade classroom is an enchanting place where a passionate teacher helps develop a keenness of mind and a kindness of heart that walk hand- in- hand every day," notes Jane Ann Robertson, Arizona's 2004 Teacher of the Year and our consulting teacher.

The reading process in first grade, as in kindergarten, is a developmental one. Children enter first grade with a wide range of skill levels. While some are already readers, students typically begin to move from pre-reading to building crucial language skills in reading, spelling and writing in first grade.

Reading and writing activities

The teacher engages students in many different activities: listening to stories, working in small guided reading groups, making books and reading short books silently. Your child engages in arts activities such as painting, drama and singing that connect to stories he's reading and writing in class.

The teacher often reads aloud in class, sharing many different types of books, songs and poems. As she reads, she points out writing conventions such as uppercase letters at the beginning of sentences and periods at the end. She also asks questions while she reads. She asks children to make predictions of what will happen next, imagine new endings or develop a sequel to the story. The children begin to learn about characters, settings, problems and solutions.

Reading strategies

As children learn to read, they are taught the important strategies that all good readers use to decipher new words. They learn to use context, syntax and phonetic clues. They get instruction in phonics - the predictable relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language. By engaging in phonics activities, they learn the consonant sounds, short and long vowel sounds, blends (*sh* and *br*), and word families.

Daily writing

First-graders write daily. You can expect your child to write thank-you notes, signs, poems and stories.

Many first-graders write in journals several times a week to help them develop strong writing skills. Your child will learn to write frequently used words such as when and they. She'll learn how to write sentences using simple grammar rules, and using correct capitalization and punctuation.

View a progression of early writing development at Linda's Learning Links compiled by Linda McCardle, a kindergarten teacher at Mathews Elementary School in Columbus, Georgia. <http://www.lindaslearninglinks.com/earlywrtgdev.html>

Thematic teaching

Many first-grade teachers use themes to help teach the required standards. Thematic teaching is an exciting way to keep your youngster engaged and motivated throughout the year. If the theme is apples, you're likely to see apples everywhere in the classroom: books about apples, a science center that lets children explore the life cycle of an apple tree, samples of student writing and art work about apples. The teacher may read the story of Johnny Appleseed aloud and discuss it with the class, cut an apple into sections for a lesson in fractions, or ask the class to brainstorm other words that begin with A. Look for opportunities to contribute to a theme that matches your interests or expertise.

Don't be surprised, however, if your child gets excited about class projects but doesn't have terrific follow-through. It's common for first-graders to be enthusiastic learners, but they often have short attention spans. You might notice your first-grader bringing many papers home, but few of them will look like perfect, finished products.

"On the other hand, you might feel your first-grader isn't bringing home enough papers," notes Robertson. "A visit to the classroom might enlighten you - much of the learning that goes on in a first-grade classroom centers around the use of manipulatives, games and many hands-on activities that do not require paper and pencil."

Among the activities you might see is "reader's theater," in which students read aloud from scripts. Reader's theater is used to increase reading fluency and expression. To learn more about a rich language arts program, read *Language Arts in a First-Grade Classroom*.

What to Look for When You Visit

- **Songs, songs, songs!** Nothing helps the first-grade brain gear up for reading like a great song. Singing stimulates the same parts of the brain that are responsible for reading and language.
- **A variety of activities** (small group, large group, individual projects) to keep students motivated.
- Activities that allow children to **work at their own level** and be challenged.
- **A cozy library corner** with colorful books at different levels and on different topics.

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Do you know Arizona State Standards for Language Arts for your child's grade? [Click here](#) to find out.