

First Day Jitters



BY JULIE DANNEBERG
(WHISPERING COYOTE, 2000)

Filled with reservations about her first day at a new school, Sarah tunnels down to the end of her bed and refuses to come out. That is, until Mr. Hartwell gives her five minutes to be dressed and downstairs. Feeling sick, weak, and breathless, Sarah summons up the courage to get into the car and head to school. On arrival, her enthusiastic principal whisks the nervous Sarah down the hall, into her classroom, and to the front of the room. Then, with all eyes focused on the two people up front, the principal introduces the class to its new teacher—Mrs. Sarah Jane Hartwell!



Ask children if they wanted to stay home on the first day of school. Divide the class into two groups according to their responses: “Yes” or “No.” Then, beginning with the Yes group and ending with the No group, invite children to explain why they preferred either staying home or going to school. Continue by inviting volunteers to share reasons they are happy to be in school today. Then wrap up your discussion by giving children smiley stickers and telling them that you’re glad that they came to spend the day in your class.

Extending the Book

He Said, She Said (Language Arts)

Point out to students that the first part of the story is told in a dialogue (or conversation) between Sarah and Mr. Hartwell. Then reread the story, encouraging children to think about which character is speaking. As you read, have the girls in your class raise their hands each time Sarah speaks in the story. Have the boys raise their hands when they hear Mr. Hartwell’s part read. Afterward, explain that, in print,

quotation marks are used to set off a speaker's exact words. Show how quotation marks are used in the book. Continue by telling students that speech bubbles are also used to show a person's spoken words. Ask them to think about a conversation they have had with someone (for example, a parent, sibling, or even pet) about the first day of school. Then have children draw themselves engaged in the conversation. Ask them to write and circle each speaker's words with a speech bubble. Invite children to share their dialogue cartoons with the class.



Who's There? (Science)

Show students the two-page spread on which the police and children are searching for Sarah. Draw their attention to the shadows on the floor. What's making the shadows? How? If Sarah were in the chair, what kind of shadow would they see? Explain that a shadow is created when something blocks the path of a light. A shadow takes the form of the object that causes it. Give children flashlights and let them experiment with creating shadows in the room. Then play this guessing game to help children become more familiar with one another. First, suspend a white sheet from the ceiling so that it touches the floor. Place an adjustable desk lamp and a chair behind the sheet, with the chair positioned sideways between the lamp and sheet. Next, divide the class into groups of three or four. Have one group at a time sit on the floor behind the sheet. Then ask the children to take turns sitting in the chair to cast their shadows onto the sheet (you may need to adjust the distance and angle of the lamp to get a well-defined shadow image of the child). Ask the class to name the mystery child in the chair. Did they guess correctly? What clues helped them guess? Continue until each student has had a turn to be the mystery child.

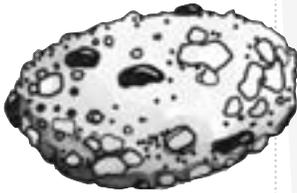


☆ Diagnosis: Jitters ☆

Jitters is another word for nervous, anxious, or excited feelings. What did Sarah say, feel, or do that indicated that she had a case of the jitters? Have children ever had similar symptoms? Invite them to tell what prompted the jitters and to describe how the jitters made them feel and act.

☆ Jitter Critter ☆

As Sarah worked through the first-day jitters, her cat was there to sympathize with and comfort her. Do any students have a jitter critter—a pet, stuffed animal, or doll that comforts and helps ease their fears and anxieties? Invite children to tell about their jitter critters. Later, send them to the art center to draw, paint, or craft models of their special comfort critters to share with the class.



First-Day Jitter Fritters (Math and Character Development)

Measure, mix, and munch away those first day jitters with some tasty jitter fritters. Before making these single-serving snacks, tell students that, like Sarah, most people experience mixed feelings on the first day of doing something new. Explain that each ingredient in this recipe represents a possible first-day feeling or experience. As children stir up their treats, share what each ingredient represents (as shown on the recipe, or make up ideas of your own):

First-Day Jitter Fritters



(makes one serving)

- 1/4 cup raisin bran** (for the nervous jiggles and lumps children feel inside)
- 3 teaspoons peanut butter** (for new friends to stick with)
- 1 teaspoon powdered sugar** (for fun things sprinkled throughout the classroom)
- 1 teaspoon light corn syrup** (for the teacher's reassuring smile)
- 3 teaspoons powdered milk** (for new ways to learn and grow)

Mix all the ingredients in a bowl. Shape the mixture into a patty, drop it into a bag of powdered sugar, and then gently shake the bag to coat the patty with sugar. Remove the "fritter" and enjoy!

(NOTE: Check for food allergies before serving.)

Calm and Chaos (Language Arts)

After imagining a chaotic first-day classroom scene, it's no wonder Sarah preferred staying in bed! Turn to the two-page spread (near the front of the book) showing a pleasant, well-behaved class on the left and the same class "in action" on the right. Write a made-up name for each pictured child on sticky tabs (avoid using names of students in your class). Stick each tab to the

corresponding child on the left page. Prop the book on a book stand in the writing center. Then invite visitors to the center to pick a child from the picture. Ask them to write a short, imaginary account of their chosen child's first day of school from that child's perspective. Encourage them to include a description of what prompted the child to behave as he or she did on the right page of the spread. During group time, display the two-page spread and invite children to share their stories with the class. To extend, children can make puppets to represent their chosen story students and then use them to act out skits about class activities and events.



Teacher-in-a-Lunchbox (Language Arts and Social Studies)

Most likely, Mrs. Sarah Jane Hartwell carried food in her lunchbox. But, to help children get to know you better, you can carry a bit of yourself in your school lunchbox. First, fill a lunchbox with photos and small items that represent you. Include pictures and things that will prompt children to guess information about you and your interests (for example, a crayon of your favorite color, a small stuffed animal to represent your pet, the cover jacket to your favorite CD, a picture of a sport you enjoy, a charm representing a special place or activity, and so on). If possible, include enough things to equal the number of children in your class. Then pass your lunchbox to children and invite them to remove an article from it. Encourage them to ask you questions about the article and then try to guess how it is significant to you. As children get to know all about you, use their interest as a springboard to get to know them better, too.

A First-Day Toast (Language Arts)

This story gives students a new and different way of looking at you—their teacher. Perhaps children are now curious about whether or not you had (or have) the first-day jitters. Share the feelings you experienced up to and on the first day of school. Also, talk about feelings you expect to have in the upcoming weeks—relief, satisfaction, comfort, and so on—as you and the children become more familiar with each other and class routines and activities. Discuss your feelings positively and with honesty.

This will help children understand that adults get the jitters over some of the same things they do and that it may take time to work out these feelings. After discussing, remind children that Mr. Hartwell gave Sarah toast for breakfast. She deserved the treat for her efforts, but she also deserved another kind of toast—praise and a pat on the back—for making it through the first day of school! Copy and fill out the certificate (page 22) for each child in your class. Pass the certificates out to “toast” children for their first-day efforts. Then invite each child to reciprocate by filling out a certificate for you. (Note: The certificates can serve as a first-of-year writing sample for your records.)



Book Links



I Don't Want to Go Back to School by Marisabina Russo (Greenwillow, 1994).

Older sister Hannah teases Ben about his “what if” anxieties over the new school year. But the first day brings relief to Ben’s worries—and a comical twist to Hannah’s experience!

Miss Nelson Is Missing by James Marshall (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977).

Dreading her unruly class every day, Miss Nelson decides that something must be done. Many days and one strict substitute teacher later, Miss Nelson returns from a “leave of absence” to find a kinder, more considerate class.

Tibili: The Little Boy Who Didn't Want to Go to School by Marie Leonard (Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 2002).

Tibili is convinced that school is a waste of time. But when he finds the Box of Knowledge and discovers that he can’t read the directions for how to open it, Tibili has a change of heart and rushes home to ask his mom when school will start.

Toast Certificate



Congratulations,

(name)

A toast to you for coming
on the first day of school!

I'm glad you came to school because

Presented by

(name)