

Fabulous First Days: Back-to-School Welcome Ideas

Come September, millions of students will be returning to school across Canada. Educators from pre-school teachers to university professors will want to start the year off right by making a good first impression on all of those eager and anxious minds.

That first day is so critical for students as it sets the tone for the rest of the year. Many times, teachers will take the opportunity on the first day of class to look ahead and review with the students what they will be learning over the course of the year/semester. While an overview of what's to come can be helpful, for many students the expansive list of topics, projects and assignments can be a daunting process that generates both anxiety and stress.

This year, consider a different approach. Focus on the highlights and trim the fat. Give students a general overview and then spend time on engaging welcoming activities.

Hello, my name is ...

For a classroom with a lot of new faces, it is important to do a get-to-know-you activity. Your classroom may be comprised of students who don't know each other or ones who have been in classes together for years but simply don't interact much with students outside of their small group of friends. In either case, there is always more for the students to learn about the classmates they will be with for the year.

Try an icebreaker called common threads. To play, toss a ball of yarn for a student to catch. That student will then need to share something about themselves. The next student to speak needs to share a personal story that connects with the first student's story in some way. The ball of yarn is untwined and held by each person who makes a connection, making a web of connections and showing commonalities amidst the group.

Get back into gear

Give the brain a bit of a "dusting off" after it has been dormant for the summer months. Try an activity that will help students get back into the mindset of school. To prep, brainstorm a number of different topics, facts or ideas that the students should be familiar with. These could be lessons they learned in the previous grade/year or entry level concepts surrounding the topics you will be covering in the year ahead. Put each of the ideas on a [post-it®](#) that will be handed out to the students in class. Without looking at what's written on the post-it, students stick the item on their forehead then make their way around the classroom giving clues to explain what is on each other's post-its without actually saying the items by name. When a student guesses the correct item on their post-it they can take it off and continue to help others figure theirs out. This is a great way to get students to think and interact.

Learning the lay of the land

Each year students are introduced to something new, whether it's a new course topic, a new classroom or a new school all together. Discomfort comes with the unknown and anything you can do as a teacher to make the students more familiar with their surroundings will help tremendously. On the first day of school or class, try to incorporate activities into the schedule that will help students be more comfortable.

One way to accomplish that is through a scavenger hunt. Scavenger hunts can take on many forms; to help students get more familiar with the layout of their course books, their classrooms or even their school/campus. Create a list of items students need to find or send them off with a list of clues that will send them on a journey.

Games are always a great way to engage students and get them excited about what is to come. Try to incorporate classroom rules, literature topics or key syllabus items into game show games such as Family Feud, Jeopardy or Pyramid. Students who are a bit more outgoing may find it fun to play a game of charades. To get the competition going, award students prizes they can use at school ranging from [pencils](#) or [jump drives](#) to [book bags](#) and [laptop sleeves](#). If nothing else ... everyone always loves candy!

Plan for success

So keep the anxiety down on the first day of school. Find ways to engage with students in a fun and interactive way. There is nothing worse for students than showing up excited for the first day of class only to leave with knots in their stomachs thinking of all the lessons they'll need to learn. Take the first day to make a good impression and set the tone for a successful year to come.