

# Characteristics of a First Grade Student

## ***Physically***

First grade children are becoming more coordinated every day, and their play is becoming more organized than before. They need varied activities to keep them focused. Alternating physical activities with quiet moments will help to accomplish this. Their hands are usually busy touching, feeling, and exploring. Even though you may see lots of movement, they are probably still hearing what you are telling them.

## ***Mentally***

Attention span is growing longer. Most will be able to do one activity for at least ten minutes, but keep them busy for the best results. These students are busy observing things about you and the room and will sometimes reflect this in their questions, which may have nothing to do with the lesson you are trying to teach! They still like to be read to, but will often want some time to read out loud themselves as they feel more confident in this area. Be patient. Remember that letting them read may take more time than you had planned, but they need this stimulation. Lots of repetition is needed, but they learn things quickly.

## ***Socially***

Most children who are six years old seem ready to talk to almost anybody, and to share themselves and their ideas and warm emotion. They have a growing sense of independence and will try to work things out themselves, sometimes even “fighting it out.” They are usually responsible and want to do what is right. You may find a lot of tattling at this age.

## ***Emotionally***

Experiencing worry may be new to first graders. They may have important questions about heaven and hell, life and death. They experience intense feelings. They will sometimes reflect the emotions of the adults around them. They are however starting to develop perseverance, and will stick to something and try to see the bright side even if there is a challenge. Some may not take correction well.

## ***Spiritually***

God is very real to these children. They readily believe God is able to do anything! They have a simple trust in God and are eager to accept all you tell them about God; therefore, it is essential the information taught is clear and accurate. They should be taught to talk to God at any time, thanking Him for His love and asking Him for the things they need. Their conscience is developing, enabling them to recognize right and wrong. They need to be assured that God always loves them even when they sin, and that they can ask God for forgiveness knowing He will always forgive them. They think of Jesus as a friend who loves and cares for them.

## Tips for Teaching

- ◆ Before Sunday school starts, send a postcard or letter to each pupil introducing yourself. Explain what you will be doing in class, when the first sessions will be, and where your classroom will be.
- ◆ Pray for your students and their families by name. Ask God to help you find the most effective ways of sharing God's love with them.
- ◆ Get to know your students personally. Greet the children as they come in the door. Learn about their interests and concerns. Have play dough, coloring sheets, clay, Duplos, wooden blocks, etc., out before class begins. Have appropriate music playing softly in the background before class or during activity times.
- ◆ Share about your own relationship with Christ as you talk with children and their parents.
- ◆ Always stress that we are saved by *grace* (Ephesians 2:8). Students at this age are usually "pleasers." They may think salvation has to do with being good. If they have been reprimanded, they may feel they are not worthy. Love them.
- ◆ Give positive notes to the child to take home. Call parents with a positive message about their child.
- ◆ Find a way to meet the parents if you do not know them. Talk to them as they bring or pick up their child.
- ◆ Instill in your pupils the life habit of daily "devotions," the turning over of ourselves every day to God by asking for forgiveness for our sins and thanking God for His great love for us.

## Tips on Discipline

- ◆ Pray for patience, understanding, and guidance when discipline concerns arise. Prepare in advance to be flexible so that you are able to switch activities if something is not working.
- ◆ The goal of discipline is different than that of punishment. Discipline is given in order to help the child to become self-disciplined.
- ◆ The most effective and probably easiest way to discourage misbehavior is to let your child know what you expect and then reinforce appropriate behavior.
- ◆ Discipline should immediately follow the inappropriate behavior.
- ◆ Keeping children busy will prevent most discipline problems from occurring.
- ◆ Give gentle reminders about proper behavior and affirm good behavior.
- ◆ Point out natural or logical consequences. For example, when a child writes on the table, he or she must wash it off.
- ◆ Specific warnings like "Before I get to ten this job will be done!" help keep a child focused on the task at hand.
- ◆ Sometimes a child needs some thinking time or cooling down time. Ask the child to put his/her head down for two minutes with no eyes showing. Make sure that you explain so that children know why they are being asked to do this.
- ◆ Discuss behavior concerns with your superintendent or pastor for further suggestions.
- ◆ If misbehavior is persistent the parent should be contacted. When talking to parents about a behavioral concern, first stress the positive attributes of the child and then move on to the behavioral concern. Describe what you have done to stop the misbehavior and ask the parents if they have any other suggestions that you could try. Then discuss with the parents how this could be reinforced at home.

## Tips for Memorization

- ◆ Print the memory verse on a chalkboard. Read the verse several times together with the class. Let different students in your class choose to erase one word at a time. See if they can still say the complete verse after each word has been erased. Continue to have students erase words one at a time. When there are no words left on the chalkboard, recite the verse together again.
- ◆ Bring a potato or small ball for students to pass around the room while they say the memory verse. As a student passes the object, he should say the next word in the memory verse. Whoever is holding the object when the verse is completed must say the entire verse by himself. Repeat so that several different students will have a chance to say the verse by themselves. Help prompt them as needed.
- ◆ Make a memory verse circle. Take a large piece of tag board and divide it into twelve pie pieces by drawing twelve equal sections. Using different colors of construction paper, make twelve different pie pieces to fit your circle. On the pie pieces, write one memory verse for each week. Take twelve clothespins and write the reference for each verse on them. Each week as you learn the new memory verse, have a student tape the verse to the circle. Have another student take the clothespin and pin the reference onto the outside of the circle, matching it with the correct verse. For a review, take the clothespins off and hand them to the students asking them to clip the reference pins back on with the right verses.
- ◆ After you have learned the Bible memory verse each week, place the activity sheet or a 3" x 5" memory verse card into the Memory Verse Basket (see memory verse song *"Thy Word Have I Hid in My Heart"* for instructions). Use the Memory Basket for regular review of memory verses. Remind students that we are hiding God's Word in our hearts when we read the Bible and memorize Bible verses.

## Tips for Storytelling

- ◆ Build a background for students before beginning the Bible story. Use visuals to give them something to focus on, and ask questions to give them ideas to think about. For example, show several pictures of things that were created by God. Then ask the children to name something that they see in the pictures. Give each child a chance to name at least one thing. Then ask them who created these wonderful things. Assure them that God is the Creator of all things including you and me!
- ◆ Give a purpose for listening. Explain how important it is to learn from God's Word. Explain that God teaches us about Himself and His love for us when we read His Word. Tell the children to not only read the Bible at Sunday school and church, but encourage them to also read their memory verses at home during the week and to ask their parents to help them read from the Bible every day.
- ◆ Use a variety of storytelling techniques such as:
  - \* tell the story using flannelgraph figures
  - \* listen to a cassette tape of the story as you turn the pages of a book or show pictures
  - \* encourage the children to listen very carefully as you tell the story. Then have the children perform actions when certain words are heard (e.g. rain – wiggle fingers).
  - \* use puppets representing different characters from the story
  - \* show videos or films
  - \* help the children act out the story or invite parents or other older children or adults to come and act out the story for the children

# Teaching Music

- ◆ Repetition is the key at the first grade level. Whether first graders are learning to read, learning math facts, learning Bible verses, or learning music, repetition is key to retaining what they are being taught. So until the children are confident of the song, REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT! Also remember that when you show your joy and enthusiasm, they will remain interested in singing the music.
- ◆ One way to first introduce a song with more than one verse is to sing it a verse at a time on a weekly basis and then have the children sing it back to you. To start this process, say the words of one phrase in the rhythm in which the song is written. Have the children repeat the phrase with you. (They will automatically follow your rhythm!) Continue through the verse until you have completed it. Now sing the verse phrase by phrase and have the children echo it back to you. Then sing half the verse (if it's short you can sing the whole verse) and have them echo it. Then conclude with the second half in the same way. Now sing the verse all together with the children. In the weeks following, you can teach the rest of the song. But always repeat the verses previously learned. The children will have them stored in the library of their minds when they need to be comforted or need guidance in life's situations.
- ◆ Add actions or hand signs when possible. If the actions or hand signs are not too complicated, you may want to add them while you are speaking the words and having the children echo the words. Anytime a child can connect an action or body movement with the words of a song, the song is learned more quickly. This kinesthetic activity (like signing or other actions) helps the child to retain the words of the song and the music too.
- ◆ If the children in your class are already reading well in first grade, you could read the words of the song together either from a book or the chalkboard. Then teach them the music by singing it for them and asking them to repeat it. Using your hand to show pitch levels and the direction of the notes of the melody will also help the children to learn the music a little more quickly.
- ◆ Split-track cassette tapes of the songs you are learning also aid the children. Once the children learn the words, the accompaniment track can be used along with the children singing it. This is especially helpful in the classroom where you may not have a piano to accompany. The children love to sing with taped accompaniment!
- ◆ No matter what method you are using to teach the music, always remember that it is very important to explain any words that the children may not understand. If they do not understand the meaning of the words, they will not get the message of the song you are trying to teach them. Also remember to create a spirit of reverence and respect toward God by the way that you sing the music. By your words and actions, make use of every opportunity to tell about and show God's great love!