

SAMPLE LETTERS TO PARENTS

August 16, 19__

Dear Parents,

I will be _____'s teacher this year. Your child's classroom will be room 12 which is located in the last wing on the right of the breezeway.

We will be making collections during the first week of school which we will use in our math program. Could you help your child collect a few objects from four or five different categories on this list? Your child should bring them to school on the first day of school. Once we have our collections, the children will use them for counting, sorting, making patterns with, and so on.

- Items for the treasure boxes: small lids (from toothpaste tubes, small jars and bottles)
old keys
bottle caps (dented ones are fine)
buttons
pits (saved from peaches, apricots, dates, olums, cherries, and oranges)
rocks
Eucalyptus buttons (or other seed pods or small pine cones)
shells
nuts and bolts (rusty and discolored used ones are best)
plastic price tags from bread packages: 

No items should be larger than this →



These materials will be put in separate boxes and used in many different ways by the children. The experience of contributing to the creation of the classroom learning materials helps the children realize they are a valued and needed member of our class. Sharing one's materials with others and having others share their materials with you helps the children appreciate the cooperative effort that is necessary to build a learning environment.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

October 1, 19__

Dear Parents,

I need some help after school on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week. Could you come to school to help me prepare some of the children's math materials? It will involve cutting, gluing, putting contact paper on tagboard, making spinners and drawing lines on paper. It's actually fun to work together on these projects. I will have everything ready at 3:00 and we can go home at 4:30.

If you can come on Tuesday or Wednesday to help, please return this note with your child tomorrow and I will plan your work.

Thank you,

Mary Baratta-Lorton

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

Dear Ms. Baratta-Lorton

Yes, I can come to school Tuesday Wednesday (circle one) from 3:00-4:30 to help you. See you then!

Parent's signature

September 11, 19__

Dear Parents,

Thank you for helping your child collect items for our treasure boxes! These contributions help your child feel he or she is a valued and needed member of our class who shares with others and with whom others share. The treasure boxes will be used throughout the year by the children in many different ways.

Thank you again for your help.

Sincerely,

Mary Baratta-Lorton

September 18, 19__

Dear Parents,

Your child will be using a special kind of mathematics program this year designed to help your child learn a wide range of mathematical concepts as well as insuring knowledge of basic Arithmetic skills. This program is based on current research evaluating the most effective ways to teach young children mathematics. This method stresses real-life mathematical experiences rather than races and pages of abstract drill. The children become actively involved with concrete materials and make many discoveries using ceramic tiles, Pattern Blocks, Unifix cubes, geoboards, mirrors, collections of buttons, seed pods, bottle caps, etc., as well as a variety of measuring devices for comparing weight, length and volume. Over the school year the children will work with pattern, sorting and classifying, graphing, measurement, addition and subtraction, probability, geometry, place value, and problem solving.

The next few weeks will be a period of free exploration in our mathematics program. Each child will have the opportunity to freely explore all the materials available in the program, to determine each material's unique possibilities and limitations, to spontaneously discover and explore pattern, social relationships, balance and classification. During this period the children become familiar with the learning materials, observing likenesses and differences in texture, color, size, shape, weight and number. They share discoveries and ideas with one another and learn to share the classroom space and materials. During this time I will be assessing each child's level of skill and observe how the children interact with the various materials and with one another. To encourage the development of the appropriate vocabulary, I will help the children to put their ideas and discoveries clearly into words.

I will be sending you similar notes as the year progresses to keep you informed on our mathematics program. I will also suggest activities which you might enjoy doing with your child at home which would reinforce your child's school experiences. The following suggestions would supplement your child's free exploration work in mathematics:

1. Encourage your child to make a collection. It could be a collection of stamps or shells or rocks or nuts and bolts or anything else. Talk with your child about his or her collection. Compare the sizes, shapes, colors, and textures. Count small groups of objects such as all the small ones, or the round ones, or the two-tone colored ones. Put out three or four of the objects and describe one of them. See if your child can select the object you are describing.
2. Give your child a magnet to explore with. Encourage your child to find all the things in one room that are magnetic. Discuss the findings together.
3. Collect 10-15 empty jars of various sizes and shapes. Set a dishpan or large pot of water outside and let your child explore the jars and compare the volumes by pouring water from one jar to another. Select a small jar and have your child guess how many small jars of water it will take to fill the largest jar.

I look forward to seeing you at our parent meeting October 3rd and discussing more of your child's reading and mathematics program at that time.

Sincerely,
Mary Baratta-Lorton

October 7, 19__

Dear Parents,

We need to collect some things for our classroom. Could you save some of the following items for us:

Two empty 1/2 gallon milk cartons. Cut one off 4" from the bottom so

it is square  and the second one 1 1/2" from the bottom 

Empty margarine tubs (with lids)

Empty cottage cheese or cool whip bowls

Clear plastic lids (from coffee cans, canned hams, peanut cans, pringle potato chips, etc.)

lids from jars (any size)

Baby food jars

unusually shaped bottles or jars (ones without straight sides) 

For our treasure boxes: We still need a few more small lids (from tooth paste tubes, vanilla bottles, perfume, first-aid ointments, vinegar, soy sauce, etc., etc., etc.).

We need more plastic price tags from bread too. 

Thank you for your help. These items will be a great help to us!

Sincerely,

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

October 9, 19__

Dear Parents,

The children are beginning to work on patterning in their mathematics program now. Current research in mathematics education points out the importance of pattern in the development of children's growing mathematical understanding. Pattern is the underlying theme of all of mathematics and is a powerful problem solving tool. During the next few weeks your child will be experiencing pattern visually, auditorily and rhythmically. The children will participate in rhythmic clapping activities where they will have an opportunity to clap patterns and translate those patterns to other rhythmic actions and to various concrete materials. They will analyze and extend a variety of visual patterns with dot pattern cards, Pattern blocks, geoboards, Unifix cubes, and collections of common objects. This patterning work prepares children to see number patterns later on in the program.

If you would like to reinforce this beginning patterning work with your child at home during the next few weeks, you might do any of the following activities:

1. Examine and discuss the patterns in objects around your home. Jewelry often has a pattern on it: large, small, small, large, small, small, necklace beads. Drapes often have stripes which are in a pattern: white, green, white, green, green, white, green, white, green, green. Sometimes fences are put up in a pattern:



Striped material in children's clothing is a pattern: red, white, red, white...

2. When arranging food on a plate, you might enjoy placing it in a pattern and see if your child can tell you what the pattern is or even add to the pattern you have begun: Bologna, cheese, Salami, Bologna, cheese, Salami. White bread, brown bread, white bread, brown bread. Pickle, olive, olive, Pickle, olive, olive.

3. When you are out driving with your child in the car, look for patterns together. The striped roof of the Kentucky Fried Chicken Store: Red, white, red, white. Barbershop poles: Red, white, blue, white, Red, white, blue, white. Cans are often stacked in patterns with one on the top, two on the next row, three on the following row, and so forth. Fences, buildings, windows and flowers often have patterns.

4. Have your child set the table for family meals. Draw a simple picture on a piece of paper showing where the fork, plate, glass, etc. goes. Your child can refer to this as needed:

Thank you for reinforcing the concept of pattern with your child. This idea will be broadened and expanded throughout the year enabling the children to discover the interrelatedness of all mathematical ideas

Marv Baratta-Lorton

October 21, 19__

Dear Parents,

The children are now sorting and classifying in their mathematics program. They will be involved with a wide variety of activities during the next few weeks: sorting geometric shapes, collections of small objects one another according to colors of various clothing, designs on the geoboard, and many materials in the natural environment. Each material is sorted in a variety of ways and the appropriate vocabulary describing the relationships of size, shape, color, texture, etc. is concurrently developed.

Through sorting and classifying activities the children learn to think analytically and to express their thoughts clearly. Forming classes and dealing with relationships within a class and among different classes encourages the growth of clear and logical thinking, which is the basis of good mathematical reasoning.

If you would like to reinforce sorting and classifying with your child at home during the next few weeks, you might do any of the following activities:

1. Have your child help out away the dishes, his or her own clothes, tools in the garage, and the groceries. Discuss why various items are kept together: All the glasses go together on this shelf. All the knives go here. Your socks go in this drawer and your shirts hang up on this side of the closet. All the screwdrivers go together here. The nails go in this can and the screws here in this other one.

Help your child understand that people group things together so they are organized. This makes things easy to find. Play a game with your child, asking him or her questions such as, Why does this go here? (Because it's a can of peaches and the cans go on this shelf.) Can this go here? (No, it's a glass, so it goes up there, not with the nuts and pans.) Encourage your child to verbalize why an object can or can't go in a particular place.

2. Look through a book such as the Sears catalogue. Turn to different sections and ask your child to tell you which room in the house the item would most likely be found in: Towel (the bathroom), a clock (the bedroom, kitchen, etc.), couch (the living room), a lawnmower (the garage) etc.

3. While watching TV, make a list of the subjects of commercials. Have your child add to the list and predict together what the next subject will be. Are there more food commercials? More about cars? Drug items? Other TV shows?

Thank you for reinforcing the concept of sorting and classifying with your child.

Remember, our field trip to the Duvinek Ranch is scheduled for this Wednesday. The bus will leave promptly at 9:00. Warm, old clothes will be best.

Sincerely,

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

November 13, 19__

Dear Parents,

The children are working on comparing activities in their mathematics program now. They are comparing weight, length, volume, height, time, and quantity. The children make a great many measurements and describe these comparisons mathematically.

During the next few weeks the children will be comparing their height and weight, their fingerprint patterns and the length of their names with their classmates names. They will apply the appropriate vocabulary of more, less, and the same to each comparison. The children will learn to play several comparing games: "Squares", "Tic Tac Toe", "Stack, Tell, Spin and Win", and "Handfuls". They will compare various containers and discover volume is not necessarily a function of height: for example, this jar



As the children weigh a variety of common objects they also discover weight is not necessarily a function of size: A small steel ball may be much heavier than a much larger rubber ball.

These comparing activities prepare the children for graphing, geometry, and measurement, and is the mathematical foundation for understanding the relationships between one number and another.

If you would like to reinforce comparing with your child at home during the next few weeks, you might do any of the following activities:

1. When you have a moment to talk informally with your child, ask questions like the following: Are the buttons on this shirt larger or smaller than the ones on your brown shirt? Does this suitcase weigh more or less than you do? (Put it on the bathroom scale and check.) Are there more spoons or more forks in the drawer? Will it take longer to clean up your room or to take your bath? (Guess how many minutes it will take for each and write down the guess. Then do both, time them, and compare the results with your guess.) Is your toy spear longer or shorter than your fire engine? Can you find five things in the house that are exactly the length of this shoe string?

2. Keep a chart of your child's weight and height. Add to it every six months. (Put the date for the next measurement on the calendar.)

3. Go outside on a sunny day and look at shadows. Take an umbrella with you and see how the shadow changes when it is held in various positions. Does your shadow get larger or smaller if you climb on a ladder? If you get close to the ground? Does your shadow look the same at 9:00 in the morning at 12:00 noon and at 3:00 in the afternoon?

Thank you for reinforcing comparing with your child at home.

Two musicians from the San Francisco symphony orchestra will visit our classroom on Thursday afternoon at 1:00 to show us their instruments, play some music and answer the children's questions. If you are free, you are welcome to join us.

Sincerely,

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton

November 28, 19__

Dear Parents,

During the next few months the children will be working with number concepts and various mathematical computations. The ideas of patterning, sorting and classifying, comparing, counting, and graphing which the children have been working on during the last few months is the foundation on which this work with number is based. The children will explore the relationships between the operations of addition and subtraction, representing these relationships first with concrete materials and then with abstract symbols.

Research has shown that too many children learn to give the correct answers to problems they have no understanding of whatsoever. Children should not be asked to decode symbols on a page and try to convert those symbols into meaning for the purpose of filling in the "correct answer." Children should have meaningful mathematical experiences and use mathematical symbols to record those experiences. For example, the children might explore the number 6 with toothpicks and create designs like the following:



Then the children might analyze their work and write an equation to describe their designs:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{1) } 1+2+3=6 \\ \text{2) } 5+1=6 \\ \text{3) } 2+4=6 \\ \text{4) } 1+4+1=6 \\ \text{5) } 1+1+1+1+1+1=6 \\ \text{6) } 3+3=6 \end{array}$$

In this activity each individual child's thinking and contribution is highly valued. The child's senses, creative powers, and mathematical skill is involved at a much higher level than with pages and pages of drill.

If you would like to reinforce number concepts at home during the next few months, you might do any of the following activities:

1. Ask your child to guess the number of any of the following items in your home and then go and count the items together: beds, rooms in the house, pillows, windows, doors, dolls, trucks, stuffed animals, clocks, shoes, stairs, drawers, or chairs.

2. While watching TV, count the number of commercials they show during each commercial break. Do they show the same number of ads during breaks in the first half of the show compared to the last half? Is there a common number of commercials during breaks in the news? During movies? Can you guess how many commercials there will be during the next break? How many commercials are there altogether during different 1/2 hour programs?

3. Look for objects around the house that have numbers on them: clocks, telephone, house number, radios, shoes, clothing labels, speedometer, TV set, bathroom scale, gas meter, prices on cans, page numbers in books, newspaper ads, etc. Discuss the purpose of the numbers with your child.

4. Check to be sure your child can tell you his or her phone number, address, and full name.

I hope you had an enjoyable Thanksgiving holiday and that you enjoyed the potato turkey your child made for you. Did you notice the pattern your child created in the tissue-paper shellack tail?

Sincerely,

Ms. Mary Baratta-Lorton