

# **40 WEEKS OF MEANINGFUL MESSAGES FOR SCHOOL STAFF**

*Two Ready-to-Use Choices for Every Week of the School Year*

A practical resource for principals and school leaders

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## **How to Use This Guide**

This guide provides two short message choices for each of forty school weeks. It is designed for you to choose the message that best fits your school and staff. Each message begins with a quotation from an educator, philosopher, spiritual thinker, public leader, writer, or other respected voice and is followed by a brief reflection connected to the work of schools.

Principals may copy and paste a complete option into a weekly staff email, newsletter, meeting agenda, or internal message. The headings may be retained, changed, or removed to match the principal's own voice and communication style.

The weeks are organized around the natural rhythm of a school year: beginning well, building belonging, strengthening teaching and learning, persevering through the middle of the year, renewing purpose, communicating through conflict, finishing strongly, and reflecting with gratitude.

Quotation wording has been kept brief and checked against the works identified in the References section at the end of the guide. Translations of ancient and spiritual works can vary, so the edition or translation used is identified whenever practical.

## **A Note About the Messages**

The reflections are intentionally written in a warm, inclusive voice that can be used with teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, office staff, custodians, food-service employees, and other members of a school team. Principals are encouraged to personalize any message so it sounds natural and reflects the needs of their own staff.

# Weeks 1–5: Beginning the Year Well

These messages focus on purpose, relationships, expectations, and the influence of a strong beginning.

## Week 1

### Option A: The Importance of the Beginning

*“The most important day of a person's education is the first day of school, not Graduation Day.”*

— Harry K. Wong

The opening days establish more than routines; they establish trust, expectations, and a sense of belonging. The way we welcome students and one another can shape the entire year.

### Option B: Education as Daily Life

*“Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”*

— John Dewey

Every interaction in our school is part of a student's education. Today is not merely preparation for something important later; today is part of the important work itself. Consider the impact you are going to have on your students not only for the rest of the year, but for the rest of their lives.

## **Week 2**

### **Option A: A Worthy Beginning**

*“The beginning is the most important part of the work.”*

**— Plato**

A strong beginning does not require perfection, but it does require purpose. The care we take now in building relationships and routines will support everything that follows. Beginning the right way takes effort; we can not just fly into something by the seat of our pants and expect to be successful.

### **Option B: Learning by Doing**

*“For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.”*

**— Aristotle**

Students and adults grow through meaningful practice, not simply through explanation. Let us make room for trying, adjusting, and trying again. Giving students real-life experiences and examples will help them retain what they have learned.

## **Week 3**

### **Option A: The Power of Example**

*“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.”*

**— Jesus of Nazareth**

Our students notice the example we set through our words, decisions, and daily conduct. The good work they see in us can quietly invite them to act with greater purpose. Actions speak louder than words. Be the kind of person that when your students or others see you, they want to be like you.

### **Option B: What Great Teachers Share**

*“When you study great teachers, you will learn much more from their caring and hard work than from their style.”*

**— William Glasser**

Teaching does not depend on having one particular personality or performance style. Students respond most deeply to adults who care consistently and work faithfully on their behalf. Remember, students do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

## **Week 4**

### **Option A: Preparing the Environment**

*“The first aim of the prepared environment is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult.”*

**— Maria Montessori**

A well-prepared classroom helps students know what to do, where to find support, and how to take responsibility. Clear environments create both freedom and security. In its own way, the classroom is like the world. What kind of world do you want your students to experience during your time with them? What do you want them to remember?

### **Option B: Purpose Before Activity**

*“Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.”*

**— John F. Kennedy**

Schools are busy places, but activity alone is not progress. When our daily choices remain connected to a clear purpose, our energy becomes more effective. Sometimes it seems like we are just spinning our wheels in our profession. That is why we must have clear and meaningful goals. Remember, a ship can have great sails, but without a rudder it will just go in circles.

## **Week 5**

### **Option A: Winning for Humanity**

*“Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.”*

**— Horace Mann**

Education offers daily opportunities to win small victories for others. A student encouraged, included, challenged, or protected is a meaningful victory. Remember the starfish story; it matters to each and every student that we connect with. We save students one person at a time.

### **Option B: Planting for the Future**

*“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”*

**— Ralph Waldo Emerson**

A single act of teaching or encouragement can contain the beginning of something much larger. The work we do today may grow far beyond what we can presently see. We can not predict how much our efforts will impact humanity. We could be teaching a future president, or someone who will be harmful to our society/.

## Weeks 6–10: Building Relationships and Belonging

These messages emphasize appreciation, listening, inclusion, trust, and the importance of community.

### Week 6

#### Option A: Connection Before Influence

*“A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.”*

— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Trust and friendship are built through sincere attention, reliability, and respect. Strong relationships create the foundation from which meaningful learning and honest correction can grow. Relationships are everything when it comes to teaching, leadership, or being part of a team.

#### Option B: The Need to Belong

*“The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.”*

— **William James**

Recognition is not flattery; it is noticing another person’s effort and value. A sincere word of appreciation can strengthen both students and colleagues. Do you take the time to do the small things that others need? What are things you do to make others feel important and valued?



## **Week 7**

### **Option A: A Culture of Welcome**

*“Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.”*

**— Henri J. M. Nouwen**

A welcoming school creates emotional space for people to arrive as they are. Our words, expressions, and routines can help every person feel that there is room for them here. What are you doing to make students feel welcome in your classroom? Students listen more when they feel welcome and invited.

### **Option B: Seeing the Individual**

*“It is the individual who is not interested in his fellow men who has the greatest difficulties in life.”*

**— Alfred Adler**

Schools become healthier when we look beyond our own duties and notice the needs of others. Interest in people is not an extra task; it is part of our shared work. Teaching is a profession of meeting the needs of our students. Remember Maslow’s hierarchy? Connecting with people is a must in our daily work.

## **Week 8**

### **Option A: Listening First**

*“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”*

**— Stephen R. Covey**

Listening is one of the clearest ways we communicate respect. Before solving, correcting, or defending, we can first make sure the other person feels heard. The next time you are in a conversation, ask yourself, am I really listening, or am I just thinking about what to say next? Listening to others is a skill that must be developed and practiced.

### **Option B: The Gift of Attention**

*“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”*

**— Simone Weil**

Giving someone our full attention can be a powerful act of care. Even a brief, undistracted conversation may help a student or colleague feel valued. Time is a limited resource. When we give a student our time, we are actually giving them a piece of ourselves. We can not take back our actions or words. Paying attention especially to the students who are outliers, loners, or different can make all the difference.

## **Week 9**

### **Option A: Belonging and Courage**

*“Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect.”*

**— Brené Brown**

People are more willing to learn, risk, and grow when they know mistakes will not remove them from the community. Belonging gives people the courage to participate honestly. It is ok to be yourself and make mistakes; give yourself permission to make mistakes and mess up. Letting others see that you are not perfect makes you more approachable.

### **Option B: Each Person Matters**

*“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of another.”*

**— Charles Dickens**

Every role in a school contributes to the well-being of others. When we make someone's work or day a little lighter, we strengthen the whole community. It is the small acts of service and kindness that make a difference in our school. Let us build a culture of service and kindness.

## **Week 10**

### **Option A: The Measure of Community**

*“The quality of mercy is not strained.”*

**— William Shakespeare**

Mercy does not eliminate accountability; it shapes the spirit in which accountability is offered. Students and adults respond differently when correction preserves dignity. Disciplining students by using threats, intimidation, or demeaning them only builds resentment and anger. Give someone mercy so one day you will be able to receive mercy.

### **Option B: A Place for Everyone**

*“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”*

**— Martin Luther King Jr.**

No one in a school succeeds entirely alone. The well-being and progress of each person affects the learning community we share. We need to lean on each other to be successful, and we need to teach students that it is ok to help others and ask for help.

## Weeks 11–15: Teaching, Learning, and Curiosity

These messages celebrate curiosity, independent thought, reflection, and the lasting influence of teaching.

### Week 11

#### Option A: Awakening Curiosity

*“The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds.”*

— Anatole France

Curiosity turns compliance into genuine learning. Our best questions and learning experiences invite students to wonder, investigate, and make meaning. Are your lessons boring, or do you make learning come alive for your students? What have you done recently to awaken curiosity in someone?

#### Option B: The Aim of Education

*“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.”*

— Plutarch

Students need knowledge, but they also need reasons to care about it. Teaching is most powerful when it awakens thought rather than merely delivering information. Master teachers build fires in the minds of their students. What kind of fire are you building?

## **Week 12**

### **Option A: Thinking for Oneself**

*“Truth gains more even by the errors of one who thinks for himself than by the true opinions of those who do not.”*

**— John Stuart Mill**

Independent thought includes the possibility of error. Our classrooms should be places where students can reason, revise, and learn without being afraid to think. Be careful of how you give feedback on assignments and other work. Always give positive comments when discussing mistakes.

### **Option B: Questions That Matter**

*“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.”*

**— Albert Einstein**

Good questions keep learning alive. We can help students see uncertainty not as failure, but as the beginning of discovery. Teach students how to ask questions, encourage them to ask questions, and then help them find the answers themselves.

## **Week 13**

### **Option A: Learning and Freedom**

*“The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change.”*

**— Carl R. Rogers**

The world will continue to change long after students leave our classrooms. Our deeper task is to help them become adaptable, reflective, and capable learners. Teach them about change and help them gain skills to adapt to changes that will happen.

### **Option B: Experience and Reflection**

*“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.”*

**— Francis Bacon**

Learning deepens when we read, discuss, and put our thinking into words. A strong school gives people more than one way to process and understand important ideas. How well you teach students how to process information and then express it determines how effective you are in imparting knowledge to your students.

## **Week 14**

### **Option A: The Work of the Teacher**

*“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”*

**— Henry Adams**

Educators rarely see the full reach of their influence. A lesson, standard, encouragement, or act of patience may continue shaping a life for years. Years could pass by, and if you are lucky, you may be able to find out your influence in a student's life.

### **Option B: Opening Doors**

*“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.”*

**— George Washington Carver**

Learning expands a student's choices and ability to shape the future. Every skill we help a student build opens another possible door. Employers hire the skills that a student can do. Giving them multiple skills in different areas expands their capacity to be successful in the world of work.



## **Week 15**

### **Option A: Teaching the Whole Child**

*“It is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to use it well.”*

**— René Descartes**

Knowledge becomes meaningful when students learn to apply it with judgment and purpose. We are helping young people develop not only ability, but wise use of ability. Teaching students to think critically and objectively is one central purpose of education.

### **Option B: Growth Through Challenge**

*“The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.”*

**— Aristotle**

Learning is not always comfortable or immediately rewarding. Our role is to help students persist long enough to experience the confidence that comes from genuine growth. Sometimes the best lessons come from the most difficult assignments.

## **Weeks 16–20: Perseverance Through the Middle of the Year**

These messages acknowledge fatigue and difficulty while encouraging patience, perspective, rest, and steady effort.

### **Week 16**

#### **Option A: One Step at a Time**

*“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”*

**— Vincent van Gogh**

Midyear progress is often built from ordinary, repeated efforts. Small improvements in instruction, relationships, and routines can accumulate into important changes and growth. Remember, it is hard by the yard, but the inch it is a cinch.

#### **Option B: Steady Effort**

*“The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.”*

**— Ecclesiastes**

Progress does not always belong to the fastest or most naturally gifted. Steady effort, thoughtful adjustment, and endurance still matter. Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare; steady effort over time produces change and growth.

## **Week 17**

### **Option A: Beginning Again**

*“The greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it.”*

**— Epictetus**

Difficulty can make worthwhile work feel more meaningful when it is finally accomplished. The challenge before us may become part of the strength we gain. If students are not truly challenged, they will not feel a feeling of accomplishment later.

### **Option B: Strength Through Difficulty**

*“Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.”*

**— Helen Keller**

Difficult seasons are real, but so is the human capacity to adapt and overcome. Our school community becomes stronger when we face challenges together. Learning to rely on others and then also help others teaches students how to face adversity.

## **Week 18**

### **Option A: Doing What We Can**

*“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”*

**— Theodore Roosevelt**

We may not control every circumstance, resource, or decision. We can still use what is available today to make a positive difference. Sometimes we just have to wing it and go with what we have. Learn to be flexible in doing things.

### **Option B: Faithful in Small Things**

*“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.”*

**— Jesus of Nazareth**

Faithfulness in small responsibilities builds trust and prepares us for greater ones. The ordinary details of school life often reveal the quality of our commitment. Giving students opportunities to make promises and then keep them gives them a chance to learn about commitment and loyalty,

## Week 19

### Option A: The Obstacle and the Way

*“The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.”*

— **Marcus Aurelius**

Challenges can reveal the next skill, support, or change we need. Instead of seeing every obstacle only as an interruption, we can also ask what it is teaching us. Learning to overcome obstacles and use them to our advantage builds resilience.

### Option B: Endurance and Hope

*“Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.”*

— **Paul the Apostle**

Hard experiences can produce more than fatigue; they can also deepen patience, wisdom, and hope. Growth often becomes visible only after we have moved through difficulty. Character is built by overcoming hard things and doing hard things.

## **Week 20**

### **Option A: Growth Through Change**

*“Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”*

**— George Bernard Shaw**

Professional growth requires the humility to reconsider what is not working. Changing our minds in response to evidence is a strength, not a weakness. If we do what we have always done, we will get what we always have got.

### **Option B: The Courage to Learn**

*“I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”*

**— Pablo Picasso**

Growth places us temporarily in the uncomfortable position of being a beginner. Trying something new is evidence of professional courage. It is easy to stay in our rut and just go along with what we know; getting out of our rut and learning something new can make all the difference.

## Weeks 21–25: Renewal, Growth, and Fresh Starts

These messages invite staff to begin again, learn from mistakes, embrace change, and recognize possibility.

### Week 21

#### Option A: Becoming Better

*“We are what we repeatedly do.”*

— Will Durant, summarizing Aristotle

Improvement is built through repeated choices rather than occasional inspiration. Small professional habits eventually become part of who we are. Developing positive habits will yield great change and growth.

#### Option B: The Gradual Work of Growth

*“Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.”*

— Confucius

Learning requires both thoughtful study and careful reflection. Knowledge becomes more useful when students and adults examine what it means and how it applies.

## Week 22

### Option A: Rest and Renewal

*“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.”*

**— Jesus of Nazareth**

Rest is not a failure of commitment; it is part of sustaining meaningful work. Even brief moments of quiet, connection, or renewal help us return with greater patience. Sometimes, even when we are busy, a short break and just walking away for a moment helps us be successful on the things we are trying to accomplish,

### Option B: Keeping Perspective

*“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.”*

**— Jesus of Nazareth**

The future can become overwhelming when we try to carry it all today. Giving full attention to the work in front of us can restore calm and perspective. Sometimes when we are overwhelmed, we need to break things into smaller, doable steps and work on these steps one at a time instead of worrying about the bigger picture.



## **Week 23**

### **Option A: The Value of Mistakes**

*“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”*

**— Samuel Beckett**

Improvement requires the willingness to try again after something does not work. A healthy school culture treats failure as information and encourages a wiser next attempt. Babe Ruth struck out twice as many times as he hit a home run. Failure is just one more step towards success,

### **Option B: Falling and Rising**

*“For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.”*

**— Book of Proverbs**

Resilience is not the absence of setbacks; it is the decision to rise and continue. Students learn courage when they see adults recover constructively. We need to teach students that all they have to do to overcome adversity is to just get up one more time than when they fell.

## **Week 24**

### **Option A: A New Beginning**

*“Behold, I make all things new.”*

**— Jesus of Nazareth**

Renewal is possible even after a difficult beginning or disappointing season. We can make thoughtful changes and approach the next part of the year with fresh purpose. Sometimes, just changing up a routine can make all the difference.

### **Option B: Renewing the Mind**

*“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

**— Paul the Apostle**

Lasting change often begins in the way we think about students, challenges, and ourselves. A renewed perspective can produce renewed action.

## **Week 25**

### **Option A: Possibility in Every Child**

*“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

**— Book of Proverbs**

The guidance and habits children receive now can remain with them for years. Our daily influence helps students develop pathways they may continue to follow. Lifelong habits are developed early. We are in a powerful position to help students develop positive habits.

### **Option B: Hope and Action**

*“Hope is a waking dream.”*

**— Aristotle**

Hope in schools is not passive optimism; it is the belief that effort can create a better outcome. We give hope credibility when we connect it to thoughtful action. Without hope, we will not be successful. We need to have hope and give hope to others.

## Weeks 26–30: Communication, Conflict, and Cooperation

These messages focus on listening, self-control, respectful disagreement, peacemaking, and repairing relationships.

### Week 26

#### Option A: The Soft Answer

*“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”*

— **Book of Proverbs**

Tone can either lower or raise the temperature of a difficult conversation. Calm words do not weaken a message; they make it more likely to be heard. A negative tone will only escalate a conflict.

#### Option B: Understanding Before Judgment

*“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”*

— **Stephen R. Covey**

Conflict often grows when people feel unheard. Listening carefully before explaining our own position can change the direction of a conversation. Truly listen to what the other person is saying; do not just think about what you are going to say next.

## **Week 27**

### **Option A: The Space Before Response**

*“Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things.”*

**— Epictetus**

Events do not determine our response by themselves; our interpretation also matters. Pausing to examine the story we are telling ourselves can protect relationships and improve decisions. It is the stories that we tell ourselves that help or hinder us.

### **Option B: Self-Control**

*“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.”*

**— Book of Proverbs**

Strength is not measured by how forcefully we react. In tense moments, self-control allows us to protect dignity while still addressing the problem. Losing control will only cause more problems; it will also cause regret in the future for what we said and did.

## **Week 28**

### **Option A: Disagreement Without Contempt**

*“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”*

**— Evelyn Beatrice Hall**

Healthy schools make room for respectful disagreement. We can challenge ideas firmly without attacking the worth or motives of the person expressing them. Trying to suppress, edit, or control what others think or say is not the way of positive growth and change.

### **Option B: Peace Begins Within**

*“Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love; this is an old rule.”*

**— The Buddha**

Conflict cannot be healed by returning hostility for hostility. Respect, patience, and goodwill give people a different path forward. Sometimes, we need to be the one to be conciliatory and let down our guard; we need to be willing to be vulnerable to reach others and resolve conflict.

## **Week 29**

### **Option A: The Work of Peacemaking**

“True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force—tension, confusion or war; it is the presence of some positive force—justice, goodwill and brotherhood.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Peacemaking requires more than keeping disagreements quiet. It means addressing problems fairly, restoring trust, and helping people treat one another with dignity. Teachers can help students learn that real peace is built through justice, empathy, and respectful action. Teachers should model and teach students the steps and process of peacemaking.

### **Option B: Cooperation**

“We live by each other and for each other. Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

— Helen Keller

Working together allows people to combine their strengths and support one another when challenges arise. Strong schools are built when staff members share responsibility instead of working in isolation. Meaningful success is almost always the result of cooperation. We as individuals and professionals are also healthier and happier when we have a team and collaborate with others.

## Week 30

### Option A: Repairing Harm

*“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”*

— James the Apostle

Honest acknowledgment is an important part of repairing harm. When we admit our part and seek restoration, we model responsibility and give trust room to return.

### Option B: Words That Build

*“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”*

— Book of Proverbs

A well-chosen word can be both truthful and beautiful. Even correction can be delivered in language that preserves dignity and hope. This is an art that takes considerable effort, self-control, and perseverance.



## **Weeks 31–35: Courage, Service, and Finishing Strong**

These messages emphasize integrity, service, persistence, and giving worthy work our full attention.

### **Week 31**

#### **Option A: Teaching From Who We Are**

“Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”

— **Parker J. Palmer**

The final weeks of school test more than our instructional methods; they reveal the patience, steadiness, and character we bring to our work. Students benefit when the adults around them remain genuine, grounded, and dependable. Who we are in the classroom matters as much as what we teach. Staying the course is important right now.

#### **Option B: Connection Still Matters**

“Kids don't learn from people they don't like.”

— **Rita F. Pierson**

Relationships remain important even when everyone is tired and the calendar is full. A little humor, warmth, and personal attention can keep students connected to learning. Students will work harder for adults they believe genuinely care about them. Do the little things that show you care; make sure you have some type of contact with each student each day.

## **Week 32**

### **Option A: A Place of Possibility**

“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.”

#### **— bell hooks**

Every classroom offers students the possibility of discovering new abilities, new ideas, and new confidence. Even late in the year, a teacher can help a student see a future that once seemed out of reach. Education remains powerful because possibility is always present. Continue to keep your vision and theme that you developed earlier in year; see it through.

### **Option B: Education and Courage**

“Education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage.”

#### **— Paulo Freire**

Teaching requires the courage to believe that people can grow. It asks educators to remain hopeful even when progress is slow or difficult to see. Each time we refuse to define a student by a mistake, we practice both courage and care. We need to see students as people, not as test scores or data. They have real lives and real homes.

## **Week 33**

### **Option A: The Measure of Success**

“Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do the best of which you are capable.”

— **John Wooden**

Success is not measured only by scores, recognition, or comparison with others. It is also found in knowing that we gave students our honest effort and best professional judgment. Finishing strong means doing the work well because the work still matters. The work helps students progress and become better people. The work helps students grow.

### **Option B: The Strength of Persistence**

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated.”

— **Maya Angelou**

Setbacks are part of every meaningful school year, but they do not have to determine our final attitude or effort. We can acknowledge disappointment while still choosing to continue with purpose. Resilience is often the decision to rise one more time. By doing this, we model what resilience is to our students.

## **Week 34**

### **Option A: Doing What Is Possible**

“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”

— Arthur Ashe

We do not need perfect circumstances to make a difference. We can begin with the time, resources, relationships, and abilities available to us today. Small, purposeful actions can still create meaningful results for students. By looking around and accessing the resources at hand, we can make plans and decisions in the best interest of our students and decide how to use these resources to serve them.

### **Option B: Strength Through Difficulty**

“Difficulties strengthen the mind, as labor does the body.”

— Seneca

Challenges can exhaust us, but they can also develop judgment, patience, and professional strength. What we learn through difficulty may become one of the year’s most lasting gains. Hard seasons can prepare us to serve students more wisely in the future. Also, teaching students to do hard things prepares them for life. Life is hard; it is not a video game. Students in our day need to learn this. Remember, it is hard by the yard, but by the inch it is a cinch.

## **Week 35**

### **Option A: The Power of Education**

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

— Nelson Mandela

Education changes the world one learner and one opportunity at a time. Every skill taught and every mind opened gives a young person greater power to shape the future. The influence of a school reaches far beyond its walls. The quality and amount of education a student receives will impact them for the rest of their lives. It will determine how much money they make, the lifestyle they will have, who they will influence, and the impact they will have on others.

### **Option B: One Teacher Can Matter**

“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”

— Malala Yousafzai

The work of education is built through individual relationships and ordinary tools used with purpose. A single teacher may awaken confidence or possibility in a child that changes the direction of a life. Never underestimate the power of one caring educator. Who was your favorite teacher? Was there one teacher in your life that changed your world? Be that teacher for our students.

## **Weeks 36–40: Reflection, Gratitude, and Closure**

These messages help staff reflect on the year, recognize influence, express gratitude, and close with purpose.

### **Week 36**

#### **Option A: Learning Through Reflection**

“We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.”

— John Dewey

A school year becomes more valuable when we pause to examine it honestly. Reflection helps us preserve what worked, learn from what did not, and make better choices in the future. Experience becomes wisdom only when we take time to understand it. Teaching students to evaluate what they have learned during the year and the skills they have gained may be a meaningful activity. Things such as culminating projects, journals, and presentations can provide great closure to the year.

#### **Option B: The Questions We Ask**

“It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.”

— Eugène Ionesco

The right questions can turn evaluation into genuine growth. Instead of asking only whether the year was successful, we can ask what students needed, what we learned, and what deserves to change. Honest questions open the door to stronger practice. Asking questions of our students and parents about their experience in our class will help us improve for next year. Do not be afraid of feedback even if it is difficult. Feedback will help us grow.

## **Week 37**

### **Option A: Recognizing What Is Good**

“There are always flowers for those who want to see them.”

— Henri Matisse

Even demanding school years contain moments worth noticing. When we deliberately recognize growth, kindness, laughter, and progress, those moments become part of the story we remember. Gratitude helps us see the year more completely. What a great profession we have; even in the hardest of times, it is better than anything else.

### **Option B: The Practice of Gratitude**

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.”

— Cicero

Gratitude changes what we notice and how we respond to others. Taking time to recognize the contributions of colleagues strengthens trust and community. Appreciation is most powerful when it is specific, sincere, and expressed. Gratitude journals, poems, displays, and other efforts is a great way to help your students learn gratitude.

## **Week 38**

### **Option A: Revealing Strength**

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.”

— Benjamin Disraeli

Educators help students recognize strengths they may not yet see in themselves. A sincere word of confidence can influence how a young person approaches future challenges. Helping students believe in their own capacity is one of education’s greatest gifts. Relate to students the story “Acres of Diamonds.” Their riches and treasures are in their own back yard.

### **Option B: Respect for the Child**

“The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.”

— Maria Montessori

Every student represents possibilities that extend far beyond the present school year. The patience, knowledge, and opportunity we offer children are investments in a future we may never fully see. Teaching is an act of faith in what a child may become. We sometimes need to look beyond what we see in front of us and imagine that student five or ten years in the future. How can we best help them be their best selves?



## **Week 39**

### **Option A: Learning for Life**

“The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.”

— Robert Maynard Hutchins

No school year can teach students everything they will need to know. We succeed when we strengthen their curiosity, confidence, and willingness to continue learning. The best education continues after the student leaves the classroom. The lessons they have learned in your classroom will impact them for life. Teach them the joy of learning new things.

### **Option B: The Desire to Learn**

“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.”

— Albert Einstein

Curiosity keeps learning alive long after an assignment has ended. Teachers help students grow when they welcome thoughtful questions and make exploration feel safe. A student who wants to know more has gained something that no test can fully measure. Think about what activities and lessons you can use to develop this great trait.

## **Week 40**

### **Option A: The Influence That Continues**

“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”

— Henry Adams

Educators rarely see the full reach of their influence. A lesson, standard, encouragement, or act of patience may continue shaping a life for many years. The work may end for the summer, but its impact does not. Remember, you are a change agent; what a great privilege to stand at the crossroads of young lives.

### **Option B: What Students Carry With Them**

“The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you.”

— B. B. King

As students leave us, they carry knowledge, skills, confidence, and memories that now belong to them. Our work continues through what they believe they can become. That is a meaningful legacy for any educator. Think about it: all the students you have taught over the years. Where they may be, the good or bad they have done. You are a part of who they are. You have changed the world.

## **Bonus Week 1**

### **Option A: The Courage to Think**

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”

— Aristotle

Education should help students examine ideas rather than fear them. Thoughtful people can listen, question, and disagree without surrendering judgment or respect. Schools should be places where careful thinking is both expected and protected. Have students argue both sides of an issue or problem. Teach them that there is arguments for each issue they will face.

### **Option B: Learning Through Questions**

“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.”

— Socrates

The deepest learning cannot simply be handed from one person to another. Teachers create conditions in which students question, reason, and discover understanding for themselves. A strong question may teach more than a quick answer. Sharpen your skills in the Socratic method; try it out during your lessons. It will be a great change of pace for you and the students.

## **Bonus Week 2**

### **Option A: The Power of Example**

“What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Students learn from the behavior adults model every day. Patience, honesty, preparation, and respect become lessons whether we intend them to or not. Our example gives credibility to the values we teach. Make your actions louder than your words.

### **Option B: Education and Character**

“Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Academic achievement is essential, but knowledge alone is not enough. Schools also help young people develop honesty, responsibility, empathy, and courage. True education prepares students to use what they know wisely and well. These days, these things are called the “soft skills.” Yet, they are critical lessons that need to be taught. How have can you incorporate these “soft skills” into your curriculum?

## **Bonus Week 3**

### **Option A: The Work of Encouragement**

“Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being.”

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Expectations influence the way we speak to and support students. When high standards are joined with encouragement, young people are more likely to see growth as possible. Believing in students can help them begin believing in themselves. Being negative or demeaning to students will harm them for the rest of their lives. It will change how they see themselves.

### **Option B: A Community of Effort**

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

— Helen Keller

Strong schools are built through shared effort rather than isolated work. Collaboration allows people to combine insight, skill, and support when challenges become difficult. The success of students belongs to the whole school community. Teach students to be part of a team and how to be a good team member.

## **Bonus Week 4**

### **Option A: Education and Democracy**

“To make democracy safe there must be universal schooling; to make schooling safe for education there must be democracy.”

— John I. Goodlad

The founding fathers believed in education and believed that only an educated population could function as a democracy. Schools do more than prepare students for employment or further education. They help young people learn to participate responsibly, listen to different perspectives, and contribute to their communities. Every classroom can help students develop the knowledge and character needed to sustain a healthy democracy.

### **Option B: Learning to Care**

“If we want to produce people who will care for another, then it makes sense to give students practice in caring and reflection on that practice.”

— Nel Noddings

Kindness and compassion are not developed through reminders alone. Students learn to care when schools give them opportunities to help others, repair harm, and consider how their actions affect people. Teachers can make caring an intentional part of both classroom instruction and school culture. As a teacher, consider sponsoring some type of service project that students could do that would help each other. Service builds empathy for others.

## **Bonus Week 5**

### **Option A: Every Child Needs a Champion**

“Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.”

— Rita F. Pierson

Strong relationships do not replace effective instruction, but they make effective instruction more possible. Students are more willing to listen, participate, and persevere when they believe their teacher genuinely cares about them. Have fun with your students; do things that strengthen your relationship with them.

Source: Rita F. Pierson, “Every Kid Needs a Champion,” TED Talk, May 2013.

### **Option B: Hope for the Future**

“The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.”

— Maria Montessori

Every child represents possibilities that extend far beyond the present school year. The knowledge, encouragement, and guidance educators provide today can influence families and communities for generations. Teaching children well is one of the most meaningful investments society can make in its future.

Source: Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace*. Association Montessori Internationale quotation archive.

## References and Source Notes

Sources are listed by week and option. Because translations of ancient and spiritual works vary, the edition or translation used is identified whenever practical.

### Week 1

**Option A — Harry K. Wong.** *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher.*

**Option B — John Dewey.** *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), Article Two.

### Week 2

**Option A — Plato.** *The Republic*, Book II, translated by Benjamin Jowett.

**Option B — Aristotle.** *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, translated by W. D. Ross.

### Week 3

**Option A — Jesus of Nazareth.** Attributed in Norman Cousins, *Human Options*.

**Option B — William Glasser.** *Take Charge of Your Life: How to Get What You Need with Choice-Theory Psychology.*

### Week 4

**Option A — Maria Montessori.** *The Secret of Childhood.*

**Option B — John F. Kennedy.** Address at the University of Washington, November 16, 1961.

### Week 5

**Option A — Horace Mann.** Address at Antioch College, 1859.

**Option B — Ralph Waldo Emerson.** *Essays: First Series*, “History.”

### Week 6

**Option A — Ralph Waldo Emerson.** *Essays: First Series*, “Friendship.”

**Option B — William James.** Letter to Miss Frances R. Morse, April 12, 1896.

### Week 7

**Option A — Henri J. M. Nouwen.** *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life.*

**Option B — Alfred Adler.** *What Life Should Mean to You.*

### Week 8

**Option A — Stephen R. Covey.** *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.*

**Option B — Simone Weil.** Letter to Joë Bousquet, 1942.

### Week 9

**Option A — Brené Brown.** *The Gifts of Imperfection.*

**Option B — Charles Dickens.** *Our Mutual Friend*, Book III, Chapter 9.

### Week 10

**Option A — William Shakespeare.** *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene 1.



**Option B — Martin Luther King Jr.** Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963.

**Week 11**

**Option A — Anatole France.** The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard.

**Option B — Plutarch.** On Listening to Lectures, Moralia.

**Week 12**

**Option A — John Stuart Mill.** On Liberty, Chapter II.

**Option B — Albert Einstein.** Statement to William Miller, LIFE magazine, May 2, 1955.

**Week 13**

**Option A — Carl R. Rogers.** Freedom to Learn.

**Option B — Francis Bacon.** Essays, “Of Studies.”

**Week 14**

**Option A — Henry Adams.** The Education of Henry Adams, Chapter 20.

**Option B — George Washington Carver.** George Washington Carver: In His Own Words, edited by Gary R. Kremer.

**Week 15**

**Option A — René Descartes.** Discourse on the Method, Part I.

**Option B — Aristotle.** Attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laërtius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers.

**Week 16**

**Option A — Vincent van Gogh.** Letter to Theo van Gogh, October 22, 1882.

**Option B — Ecclesiastes.** Attributed in John Quincy Adams quotation collections.

**Week 17**

**Option A — Epictetus.** Discourses, Book I, Chapter 24, translated by George Long.

**Option B — Helen Keller.** Optimism: An Essay.

**Week 18**

**Option A — Theodore Roosevelt.** An Autobiography, quoting Squire Bill Widener.

**Option B — Jesus of Nazareth.** Luke 16:10, King James Version.

**Week 19**

**Option A — Marcus Aurelius.** Meditations, Book V, translated by Gregory Hays.

**Option B — Paul the Apostle.** Romans 5:3–4, King James Version.

**Week 20**

**Option A — George Bernard Shaw.** Everybody’s Political What’s What?.

**Option B — Pablo Picasso.** Quoted by Gene Fowler in The Saturday Evening Post, October 29, 1960.

**Week 21**

**Option A — Will Durant, summarizing Aristotle.** The Story of Philosophy, summarizing Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics.

**Option B — Confucius.** The Analects, Book II, Chapter 15, translated by James Legge.

**Week 22**

**Option A — Jesus of Nazareth.** Mark 6:31, King James Version.

**Option B — Jesus of Nazareth.** Matthew 6:34, King James Version.

**Week 23**

**Option A — Samuel Beckett.** Worstward Ho.

**Option B — Book of Proverbs.** Proverbs 24:16, King James Version.

**Week 24**

**Option A — Jesus of Nazareth.** Revelation 21:5, King James Version.

**Option B — Paul the Apostle.** Romans 12:2, King James Version.

**Week 25**

**Option A — Book of Proverbs.** Proverbs 22:6, King James Version.

**Option B — Aristotle.** Diogenes Laërtius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers.

**Week 26**

**Option A — Book of Proverbs.** Proverbs 15:1, King James Version.

**Option B — Stephen R. Covey.** The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

**Week 27**

**Option A — Epictetus.** Enchiridion, Section 5, translated by George Long.

**Option B — Book of Proverbs.** Proverbs 16:32, King James Version.

**Week 28**

**Option A — Evelyn Beatrice Hall.** The Friends of Voltaire, summarizing Voltaire's attitude.

**Option B — The Buddha.** Dhammapada, verse 5, translated by F. Max Müller.

**Week 29**

**Option A — Martin Luther King Jr.,** "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," published in *The Christian Century*, February 6, 1957.

**Option A — Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan's** vaudeville presentation script, preserved by the American Foundation for the Blind.

**Week 30**

**Option A — James the Apostle.** For Better or For Worse; widely cited from Johnston's published work.

**Option B — Book of Proverbs.** Proverbs 25:11, King James Version.

**Week 31**

**Option A — Parker J. Palmer**, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Introduction.

**Option B — Rita F. Pierson**, “Every Kid Needs a Champion,” TED Talks Education, May 2013, official transcript.

### **Week 32**

**Option A — Bell hooks**, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Chapter 12.

**Option B — Paulo Freire**, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*.

### **Week 33**

**Option A — John Wooden with Steve Jamison**, *Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court*.

**Option B — Maya Angelou**, *Letter to My Daughter*.

### **Week 34**

**Option A — Arthur Ashe**, quoted in *Days of Grace: A Memoir*.

**Option B — Seneca**, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, Letter 78; wording varies slightly by translation.

### **Week 35**

**Option A — Nelson Mandela**, speech launching Mindset Network, Johannesburg, July 16, 2003.

**Option B — Malala Yousafzai**, address to the United Nations Youth Assembly, July 12, 2013.

### **Week 36**

**Option A — Widely associated with John Dewey** and consistent with *How We Think*; the exact wording is a later paraphrase rather than a confirmed verbatim sentence from Dewey.

**Option B — Eugène Ionesco**, *Découvertes*.

### **Week 37**

**Option A — Henri Matisse**, quotation published in collections of his statements and recollections.

**Option B — Cicero**, *Pro Plancio*, section 80; English wording varies by translation.

### **Week 38**

**Option A — Benjamin Disraeli**, widely attributed in established quotation collections; exact original publication has not been firmly identified.

**Option B — Maria Montessori**, *Education and Peace*.

### **Week 39**

**Option A — Robert Maynard Hutchins**, widely published statement on the purpose of education.

**Option B — Albert Einstein**, statement to William Miller, LIFE magazine, May 2, 1955.

#### **Week 40**

**Option A — Henry Adams**, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Chapter 20.

**Option B — B. B. King**, widely published statement attributed to interviews and speeches.

#### **Bonus Week 1**

**Option A — Traditionally attributed to Aristotle**; the exact sentence does not appear in surviving works in this wording. It is often treated as a paraphrase of ideas in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

**Option B — Commonly attributed to Socrates**; the exact wording is not found in Plato's surviving dialogues and should be treated as a modern paraphrase of the Socratic method.

#### **Bonus Week 2**

**Option A — Commonly attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson**; exact source uncertain. A closely related idea appears in Emerson's essays on conduct and character.

**Option B — Martin Luther King Jr.**, "The Purpose of Education," Morehouse College student newspaper, *The Maroon Tiger*, 1947.

#### **Bonus Week 3**

**Option A — Commonly attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**; English wording varies, and the exact German source is disputed.

**Option B — Helen Keller**, widely documented in published collections of her speeches and writings.

#### **Bonus Week 4**

**Option A — John I. Goodlad, Corinne Mantle-Bromley, and Stephen John Goodlad**, *Education for Everyone: Agenda for Education in a Democracy*, Jossey-Bass, 2004.

**Option B — Nel Noddings**, "The Caring Relation in Teaching," *Oxford Review of Education*, 1998.

#### **Bonus Week 5**

**Option A — Rita F. Pierson**, "Every Kid Needs a Champion," TED Talk, May 2013.

**Option B — Maria Montessori**, *Education and Peace*. Association Montessori Internationale quotation archive.

