

First Day of School

by Judy Soloway Kay





Getting Ready to Read

Pre-reading Questions: With a partner or in a small group, answer the following questions.

1. Do you remember your first day of school?
2. How did you feel? Were you excited, nervous?
3. How did you feel when you first started learning English?
4. Were you afraid to make mistakes?
5. Did people laugh at you? What did you do when they laughed?



Vocabulary Preview

A preview of the story follows. With a partner, try to guess the meanings of the words in bold.

Rose is very **excited** on the morning of her first day at school. She **pretends** that she is not **nervous**, but she has butterflies in her stomach. She doesn't know what to expect when she gets to school. Her older sister, Frances, tells her not to **worry**. She is **confident** that Rose will like her school and her teacher.

Using the Vocabulary

Fill in the blanks below with the bold words from the preview. Then, with a partner, compare your answers.

Julio has just been selected as one of the players on his university's soccer team. Tomorrow is the first game of the season. Julio _____ that he is not _____. He tells himself that there is nothing to _____ about. Of course, he is _____ about being chosen to be a member of the team. He just wishes that he were more _____ about playing well in this important game.



Journal Writing

Take a few moments to remember your first day of school in a new school. Then complete the following statements.

I wore _____.

I brought with me _____.

My teacher's name was _____.

The lesson was about _____.

The other students were _____.

At the end of the day I felt _____.

If you remember anything else about that day, add it to your list.

Idioms and Expressions

getting up—waking up

butterflies in your stomach—a nervous feeling

hold your horses—wait, don't be in a hurry

catch up—walk quickly

pick on—be mean to someone

take your time—don't hurry

a cinch—easy

piece of cake—easy

stories—floors of a building

Look through the story and find the idioms listed below. Then write the whole sentence that contains the idiom on the line.

Example: getting up I'm getting up.

butterflies in your stomach _____

hold your horses _____

catch up _____

pick on _____

a cinch _____

stories _____

piece of cake _____

take your time _____



Meet the Author: Judy Soloway Kay (1950–)

Judy Kay was born in New York and attended public schools in New York City. She originally wanted to be a journalist and wrote for the school newspaper in high school. Kay eventually became a teacher and continued writing in her free time. Kay stopped teaching for a while to raise her four daughters, but she returned and currently teaches ESL in Florida. She always had an interest in other languages and has studied Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Hebrew, and Latin.

The following story is based on a story about her aunt's experiences as a young girl who had come to the United States from Poland. Rose and her family arrived during the wave of immigration that brought

millions of people to the United States from Italy, Ireland, Russia, and Poland at the beginning of the 20th century.

If you'd like to read more by Judy Soloway Kay, see "The One-Day War" and "The Mirror."

THE STORY

First Day of School

by Judy Soloway Kay

"I'm afraid the teacher will yell at me and think I'm stupid."

CHARACTERS

Rose: a 10-year-old girl from Poland

Frances: Rose's older sister, 12 years old

Mama: Rose and Frances' mother

Miss Berg: Rose's teacher

SETTING

Time: September 1910

Place: New York City

BACKGROUND

Rose and Frances are two sisters who arrived in the United States from Poland three months ago. Their neighbors Izzy and Joseph, who are brothers, have been teaching them English over the summer. It's the first day of school.



SCENE 1: *A house in a lower middle-class neighborhood in Brooklyn, a section of New York City*

Mama: Wake up, wake up. Rose, it's time for school. Hurry up or you'll be late.

Rose: Okay, Mama. I'm getting up. (*Looks at her sister's bed.*) Where's Frances?

Mama: She's dressed already and having breakfast. What do you want for breakfast?

Rose: I'm not hungry. My stomach hurts.

Mama: You have to eat. You have butterflies in your stomach because you're nervous about school. I'll make you some cooked cereal. It will make you feel better.

Rose: Okay, Mama. I'll be ready in a minute.

Mama: When you're dressed, I'll brush your hair for you.

Rose: (*talking to herself*) I have to remember to pack my school bag. I have an eraser, a pencil, a notebook, a handkerchief, and the two shiny pennies Daddy gave me for good luck. I hope I remember all the English Izzy and Joseph taught me. Frances says if I'm not good enough in English, I'll have to go in a class with the little kids.

Frances: Hurry up, Rose. I want to get to school early. Izzy and Joseph are meeting us outside.

Rose: Hold your horses. I'm coming.

Mama: Rose, you didn't have breakfast. Here, take a piece of toast.

Rose: (*grabs the toast and rushes out the door carrying her schoolbag in the other hand*) Wait for me, everybody.

Frances: Izzy and Joseph said we should catch up with them. They're on the next street with some kids they know.

Rose: Thanks for waiting for me.

Frances: (*smiling*) Are you nervous?

Rose: Yes. But I'm also excited. What about you?

Frances: I hope the girls don't pick on us because we can't speak English.

Rose: I'm afraid the teacher will yell at me and think I'm stupid. Will you meet me after school so we can walk home together?

Frances: Sure. I promise.

(Frances and Rose meet Izzy, Joseph, and several other children, and they all walk to school together.)



SCENE 2: *At school*

Rose: *(looking at the school)* It's so big, Frances. It's five stories high.

Frances: *(looking scared)* I know. *(pretending to be confident)* Well, we're in America. Everything here is big. We'll get used to it. You'll see. It will be a cinch, a piece of cake. *(She puts her arm around Rose and smiles.)* I'll see you at three o'clock.

Rose: *(walking up to the teacher who is standing at the door to the school)* Could you tell me where my room is?

Teacher: What's your name?

Rose: Rose Goldman.

Teacher: *(looking at her list)* You're in Room 204. One flight up and to the right.

Rose: Thank you.

(Rose walks up the steps, down the hall, and stops in front of room 204. She sees a paper tree on the door with lots of names written on paper leaves. Her name, Rose, is written on an orange leaf. She enters the room.)

Miss Berg: Hello. What's your name?

Rose: *(very quietly)* Rose Goldman.

Miss Berg: Hello, Rose. Welcome to our class. My name is Miss Berg. Find the leaf that has your name on it, and pin it on your dress. You may sit in the second seat in the third row.

(She gets the leaf, pins it on her dress, and sits down in a seat. There are only girls in her row. The boys are sitting in rows to her left and right. Everyone is quiet and looking at everyone else.)

Miss Berg: Children, I'm going to take attendance. When I call your name, say "here" or "present."

(She calls the names and the children answer. She checks their names in her book.)

Miss Berg: I'm going to give each of you a reading book. You must take very good care of this book. I want you to cover it to protect it from the rain. *(She hands each child a book.)* Now, let's do some reading.

(Each child reads a few sentences, and soon it is Rose's turn.)

Rose: My English is not very good.

Miss Berg: Don't worry. I'll help you. *(She smiles at Rose.)*

Rose: (*reading slowly*) “The leaves began falling, and the children knew that winter was coming early that year.”

Miss Berg: Thank you, Rose.

Rose: (*looking down at her desk. She feels that all the children are staring at her.*)



SCENE 3: *After school is over that day*

Miss Berg: Rose, I'd like to speak to you before you go home.

Rose: I'm sorry I read so slowly today.

Miss Berg: How long have you been in the United States?

Rose: Three months. (*She starts to cry.*)

Miss Berg: Why are you crying, Rose?

Rose: Because my English is bad, and you're going to put me with the little children.

Miss Berg: But your English is very good. How did you learn to speak so well?

Rose: (*drying her eyes*) Our neighbors Izzy and Joseph taught us every day since June.

Miss Berg: Well, I'm impressed. They're very good teachers.

Rose: They said we had to pronounce everything perfectly. If we made a mistake, we had to start all over again. They were very strict.

Miss Berg: (*smiling*) They did a great job, and I don't want you to worry about the reading. You're a good reader. Take your time. The words will come, and it will be easier. It takes time to adapt to a new country and acquire a new language. Would you like to borrow a book from me to take home? It's about one of our presidents, Abraham Lincoln. He loved to read.

Rose: Did he come to America when he was a boy?

Miss Berg: No. He was born here, but he didn't have many books. When he got a book, it was very special to him. It was a treasure.

Rose: I'll take good care of this book, Miss Berg. I promise.

Miss Berg: I know you will, Rose. I know you'll treat it as a treasure, too. I'll see you tomorrow.

Rose: (*holding the book tightly under her arm*) Thank you, Miss Berg.

Miss Berg: You should thank your other teachers, too.

Rose: My other teachers?

Miss Berg: Yes, Izzy and Joseph. They were your first teachers.



Understanding the Story

Answer the following questions to make sure you understand the story. Then compare your answers with a partner.

1. How old is Rose?

2. Where did she come from?

3. What does Rose have in her schoolbag?

4. How does Rose get to school and who goes with her?

5. Why is Rose nervous about going to school?

6. How does Rose know what classroom she's in?

7. What does Miss Berg tell the children when she gives them their books?

8. What happens when the teacher asks Rose how long she has been in the U.S.?



Reading between the Lines

Circle the answer that best completes each statement.

1. Rose's stomach hurts because
 - a. she ate too much dinner.
 - b. she exercised a lot.
 - c. she is nervous.
 - d. she ate a butterfly.

2. Rose thinks the teacher will yell at her because
 - a. she didn't eat a big breakfast.
 - b. her English is not perfect.
 - c. she is from Poland.
 - d. she walks to school.

3. Miss Berg asks Rose to stay after school, and Rose thinks
 - a. she will be put with the little children.
 - b. Frances will worry about her.
 - c. she will go back to Poland.
 - d. Miss Berg will take back the book.

4. When Miss Berg says a book is a treasure, she means
 - a. books cost a lot of money.
 - b. old books are hard to find.
 - c. someday we may not have books anymore.
 - d. books are very special because we learn from them and enjoy reading them.



Practicing Vocabulary

Exercise 1: Look at the story and find the following vocabulary words. Guess what the word means. Then find a meaning in the list on page 32 that matches your guess. Check your guess with the meanings listed. Work with a partner.

Word	Guess
1. nervous	_____
2. stomach	_____
3. eraser	_____
4. adapt	_____
5. prepare	_____
6. grab	_____
7. excited	_____
8. pretend	_____
9. confident	_____
10. leaf	_____
11. worry	_____
12. borrow	_____
13. treasure	_____
14. acquire	_____

MEANINGS

- a. something that rubs away writing
- b. seize, take
- c. worried
- d. a part of the body that digests food
- e. feel anxious or nervous
- f. having a good feeling about oneself, having good self-esteem
- g. get ready, make
- h. get used to or adjust
- i. happy, looking forward to something
- j. something of great value
- k. use something you have to return (opposite: lend)
- l. grows on a tree and changes color in the fall
- m. use your imagination, make believe
- n. possess

Word Forms

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverbs
acquisition	acquire		
adaption	adapt	adaptable	adaptive
confidence	confide	confident	confidently
excitement	excite	excitable, exciting	excitedly
nerve		nervous	
preparation	prepare	prepared	
pretense	pretend	pretentious	pretentiously

Exercise 2: Many of the new vocabulary words have to do with being nervous or anxious. Here are some others. Fill in the blanks below.

nervous afraid headache stomachache
scared sweat laugh

Rose was _____ about going to school. She thought the other children would _____ at her English. Her mother told her to eat breakfast but Rose had a _____ and couldn't eat.

Sometimes when people are nervous they _____ or perspire. Their hearts beat quickly because they are nervous. When people are tense, they get pains in their heads that are called _____.

What happens to you when you are nervous?

When I'm nervous, I _____.



Talking about the Story

Discuss these questions in a small group.

1. Describe the relationship between Rose and Frances. Use sentences from the story.
2. Describe Rose's feelings as she looks at the school.
3. How does Frances help her sister, Rose?
4. How does Rose feel in the classroom?
5. How does Mrs. Berg treat Rose?
6. How do you think Rose feels after her first day in the new school?



Learning New Skills: Cause and Effect as Sentence Structure

In the left column are parts of sentences that will be completed by joining them with choices in the right column. The **cause** is in the left column. The **effect** is in the right column. Draw lines to complete the sentences. Understanding cause and effect is important for writing stronger and more interesting sentences.

Cause

Effect

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. If I'm not good enough in English, | a. and he didn't have many books. |
| 2. Will you meet me after school, | b. we had to start all over again. |
| 3. Could you tell me | c. I'll have to go in a class with little kids. |
| 4. I want you to cover it | d. so we can walk home together. |
| 5. If we made a mistake, | e. where my room is? |
| 6. His family was poor, | f. to protect it from the rain. |



Writing about the Story

Choose one of the following topics, and write about it.

1. Write a dialogue between Izzy and Rose during one of their language lessons.

2. Write a dialogue between Rose and Frances on their way home from school.

3. Write a dialogue between Rose and her mother after Rose comes home from school.

4. Pretend you are Rose. Write in your diary about your first day of school.

5. Pretend you are Miss Berg. Write in your diary about your first day of the school year.



Grammar Review: Personal Pronouns

You've already learned that a **noun** is the name of a person, place, or thing. Instead of repeating nouns over and over again, we often use pronouns in place of nouns.

For example: Maria enjoys doing yoga, and Maria takes a class every Saturday.

Maria enjoys doing yoga, and *she* takes a class every Saturday.

Which sentence sounds better? In the second sentence, the word *she* was used instead of Maria. *She* is a personal pronoun and is used as a subject of the verb *takes*. Pronouns, like nouns, can be subjects of sentences. When the pronoun is doing the action, it is a subject pronoun.

Here are the subject pronouns:

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
First person	I*	we
Second person	you	you
Third person	he she it	they

* The pronoun *I* is always a capital letter.

Exercise 1. Read the following paragraph that contains many nouns.

Maria and Vladimir are in the same class. Maria and Vladimir are good friends. Maria has trouble with math, but Vladimir is very good in math. Vladimir helps Maria with Maria's math homework.

This paragraph is boring, isn't it? See how you can improve it by rewriting the paragraph on the lines below using some of the pronouns from the chart above. Do not change the first sentence.

Pronouns can also be used as objects. Like a noun, when a pronoun receives the action of the verb, it is an object.

For example: Vladimir taught Maria.

Maria is the object because she received the action of the verb *taught*. If we use a pronoun, the sentence will be: Vladimir taught *her*.

Here are the **object pronouns**:

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
First person	me	us
Second person	you	you
Third person	him her it	them

Exercise 2. Change the nouns in the following paragraph to subject or object pronouns by rewriting them on the lines below the paragraph. Do not change the first sentence.

Marcel and Trudi are from different countries. Marcel is from France, and Trudi is from Germany. Marcel wants to take Trudi to Paris. Then Marcel and Trudi will travel from France to Germany to visit Trudi's parents. Marcel and Trudi will rent a car for the trip. Meanwhile, Marcel is teaching Trudi some French, and Trudi is helping Marcel learn German.

Exercise 3. Underline the pronouns in the following sentences selected from the story. Then write above the underlined pronoun the letter “S” if the pronoun is used as a subject. Write the letter “O” if the pronoun is used as an object.

For example: S
 You have to eat.

1. It will make you feel better.
2. I hope I remember all the English Izzy and Joseph taught me.
3. Izzy and Joseph are meeting us outside.
4. She enters the room.
5. They did a great job, and I don't want you to worry about reading.

Irregular Verbs

Present	Past	Past Participle (<i>have, has, had</i>)
teach	taught	taught
say	said	said
do	did	done
don't	didn't	haven't done, hadn't done
write	wrote	written
get	got	gotten, got

Read the following dialogue with a partner. Write the correct form of the irregular verb on the line.

Mark: Did you _____ a letter from your friend?

Joan: Yes, she _____ to me last week.

Mark: What did she _____?

Joan: She _____ about her trip to Australia.

Mark: Did she have fun? Where _____ she travel?

Joan: She went to Sydney where she is going to _____ school.

Mark: Did she _____ in the United States?

Joan: Yes, she _____ in the U.S. for five years.

Literary Elements of the Story

Refer back to the Literary Elements of the Story for *The Dinner Party* on page 20. Now, see if you can figure them out for *First Day of School*. Compare yours with the chart that follows.

SETTING Brooklyn, New York, September 1910

CHARACTERS Rose, a ten-year-old girl; Frances, her older sister; Mama, their mother; Miss Berg, Rose's teacher

PLOT Rose and her sister, Frances, are going to school for the first time in their new country. Rose is worried that her English is not good enough. The teacher encourages her and makes her first day become a good experience.

CONFLICT The conflict is between Rose's desire to succeed and her fear of failure.

THEME It's difficult to move to a new country and learn a new language. Hard work is usually rewarded, especially when people help each other.

ENDING Rose learns that her English is better than she thought.