

Parent Handbook

Mrs. Kiepert's
First Grade Class



Dear Parents,

I am really looking forward to spending the school year with you and your children! This booklet will give you some general information about me, and about first grade at Hudsonville Christian School. Let me apologize right now for its length...I went into a lot of detail about the subject areas just in case you are interested. You don't really have to read the whole thing if you don't want to. Feel free to skip ahead to the Other Important Information if you are pressed for time. Please contact me with any concerns or questions you have. 😊

About Me:

This will be my 22nd year of teaching (gasp!)--all of which have been in Christian education. I want to thank you for choosing Hudsonville Christian. Christian education isn't just the Bible lesson and devotions we have each day. Our faith is infused into everything we do at school—the subjects we teach, the way we speak to each other, the way we treat each other, the way we act, and the way we respond to someone who has made a mistake. I am so blessed to be able to work in such an environment!

I began my teaching career in first grade at Zeeland Christian School. I taught there for 6 years, then I headed over to Hudsonville Christian to teach first grade for one year in the old white building and third grade for three years. Then I got married and moved to Chicago, where I taught in a 5th/6th grade classroom at Daystar School for two years. We moved back to Michigan nine years ago and I love being back at HCS! It is amazing to see how God has worked in our school! First grade is one of my favorite grades to teach because the kids learn so much in the span of a school year. Prepare to be amazed! I have learned a lot about kids and learning over the past several years and I enjoy putting that learning into practice in my classroom. In addition to teaching first grade, I am a lead teacher for grades PreK-2, which includes some administrative duties that I really enjoy.

Some random thoughts about me...I am married to Kevin, who works as a real estate research analyst for Meijer. We have a kitty named Dandelion, who is sometimes naughty, but completely adorable. If it wasn't frowned upon by the general public (and my husband), I would have a houseful of kittens. I love to read and share books with people—especially first graders and other teachers! I am solely responsible for keeping amazon.com up and running...I have an addiction to

books. I am working on a Masters degree in educational leadership from Grand Valley. I live in Hudsonville behind that house that has animals in the front yard on 36th Street. We often wake up to the sounds of turkeys, peacocks, and roosters (sometimes too early!). For those of you who live in my neighborhood, we are not “lawn people”...please don't judge, we have other gifts. I am also unable to keep plants alive. I don't watch much TV, but I do have a slight obsession with *The Great British Baking Show* and *Master Chef Jr.* I absolutely do not like clowns. I am sure you'll hear many more stories about me as the year goes on. Please believe only half of them...I will do the same for the stories I hear about you. 😊

What Do We Do All Day In First Grade?

In first grade, we spend much of our time on Language Arts (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and Math. We want the kids to have a strong foundation in these two areas so they can be successful in their later school years. Of course, we also learn about Bible stories and study Science and Social Studies concepts. In addition, I spend a lot of time on procedures, routines, and building community in our classroom so the children know they are in a safe and caring learning environment. Following are the major parts of our school day:

Morning Work:

Each day we take time to meet together and share stories. We also sing together and do several quick activities to practice a variety of math and language arts concepts.

Devotions: In first grade we do something called God's Big Words Devotions. Each day, we read a children's book that goes along with a certain word about God or about following Jesus. We learn a Bible verse that goes along with that word and take time to reflect on each word in writing. I love starting the year with the words IMITATE and IMAGE. We read books and discuss how we are to imitate Jesus and how He lived. We also learn about how we are ALL made in God's image and each one of us is unique and special. This is one of my favorite parts of the day.

Writing:

First graders are typically just starting to use their knowledge of letter sounds to write words, sentences, and stories. I spend a lot of time modeling how this is done at the beginning of the year using mini-lessons. Mini-lessons are short (5-10 minute) whole group lessons where I teach or reinforce a new skill. The lessons will focus on the different types of writing people use and how to become a better writer. After the lesson, students have time to practice writing and I am able

to help students as they work independently. In first grade, students will learn how to write personal narratives, opinion pieces, how-to stories, and non-fiction reports.

Bible:

We take time each day to read or act out a Bible story. Our main focus in first grade is on the Old Testament stories, but we will spend time later in the year talking about the life of Jesus, the disciples, and the early church. We see God's love and care for his people, the Israelites, even when they mess up repeatedly. We will be learning a new memory passage about once a month. We will practice in school, but I'll need your help at home with this, too. A copy of the passage will go home with your child and you can look for a due date in my weekly newsletter.

Reading:

Our reading block will consist of several different activities each day. They are:

Sight Words/Phonics: First graders will be learning a list of words that should be recognized by sight by the end of the school year. They are either tricky words that can't be sounded out or words that appear very frequently in print. Phonics skills are taught in a variety of ways. We will often use poems, books, our names, and a variety of word games to learn the sounds of letters, blends, digraphs, and word families. Both the sight words and the phonics skills will be practiced in a whole group setting and individually during our reading workshop time.

Mini-Lessons: First graders have pretty short attention spans, so much of our language arts curriculum is taught in 5-10 minute whole-group lessons. We cover things like phonics skills, sight words, vocabulary development, spelling skills, and reading strategies during this time. The mini-lesson is followed by some independent reading time for the kids. During this time, I meet with individuals or groups to focus on specific needs.

Read Alouds: Reading aloud to kids helps them to know what fluent reading sounds like and introduces new vocabulary and comprehension skills. Experiencing great stories inspires children to become readers (and writers) themselves. I read lots of books out loud to the kids at school and I hope that you will do this at home as well.

Math:

We use the Math Expressions curriculum at HCS. The curriculum focuses on story problems, making partners of ten, addition, subtraction, place value, and basic geometry. A strong emphasis is

placed on the kids working through problems and then sharing with the group how they arrived at their answer. The focus is on the process of solving the problems rather than on just getting the answer or just using a formula. We will begin our math lessons in a whole group format and then gradually transition into teaching small groups so we can better meet the needs of each student.

Science and Social Studies:

We will have a new science or social studies unit approximately every month. Topics include Families, Needs and Wants, Places, Light and Sound Waves, and more. Our main focus is to introduce the students to new ideas through books and engaging activities. Keep an eye on my newsletter for any special events or activities associated with these units of study.

Chapel: Most Fridays, the kids attend chapel in the elementary gym at 10:00. Parents are welcome to join us! Check out the Home Communicator each week to see what type of chapel we'll be having. During chapel, we might listen to a speaker, hear a story, watch a skit or video, sing together, hear scripture, and pray. Afterwards, we spend some time reflecting on what we learned in our faith journals.

Specials:

Our special classes happen from 1:00 to 1:40 (except for Library). We also visit the computer lab periodically. The schedule of number days will appear in the Home Communicator each week. Here is the schedule for our class:

- Day # 1: Spanish
- Day # 2: Music
- Day # 3: P.E.
- Day # 4: Art
- Library will take place every Tuesday afternoon from 1:40-2:20

Recess and Lunch Times:

Snack recess: 9:30-9:50 (Fridays: 9:35-9:55)

Lunch recess: 11:30-11:50

Lunch: 11:50-12:15

Other Important Information:

- **Star Student:** Starting in September, each student will take a turn being our Star of the Week. You will need to send in 5-10 pictures that your child would like to share with the class (please put these in a baggie or envelope labeled with your child's name). I will choose a set of pictures randomly each week and we will learn about that person throughout the week. We also interview the Star on Fridays and do a writing activity about each person.
- **Birthdays:** We love to celebrate birthdays and half-birthdays (for those with summer birthdays)! Usually, children bring in a small snack to share with the class on their birthday. If you send brownies or cake or something similar, please make sure the dessert is cut and the proper utensils and other items are provided (napkins, plates, etc.) The best time for a birthday treat to happen is right before snack recess—right around 9:15 or so. You can either send the treat along to school with your child or drop it off for us sometime before 9:15. Let me know if you need to make other arrangements and I will be happy to accommodate.
- **Birthday Parties:** If you decide to have an after-school or weekend birthday party for your child or if your child is invited to a party that does not include all of the girls/boys in our class, please remind your child how important it is to keep that information to themselves. Every year we have at least one situation where lots of feelings are hurt and kids feel left out. I'd love to avoid this if possible.
- **Phone Calls:** There may be times when you need to reach me after school hours. If you have a question about something or have a child in tears because she just *knows* she's supposed to have 24 cupcakes for a class party tomorrow and you have no idea what she's talking about, please call me on my cell phone. My number is 616.403.3165. Calls before 9:00 pm would be most appreciated. 😊
- **Email:** I check my email quite frequently, so this is also a good way to get a hold of me after school hours. Depending on the day, I don't always have time to check my email during the school day, so if you have an urgent message, please call the office and they will pass along the message. This is my school email, but I can also access it from home:
 - tkiepert@4hcs.org
- **Transportation:** If your child is going home with a friend, riding a different bus, getting picked up instead of riding the bus, or any other variation of going home differently from the norm, please, please, please send me a note or an email to let me know. Four out of

five doctors say that children and teachers who know what to expect are much happier people (okay, I made that up, but I'm pretty sure it's true 😊). PS...if you need to make a transportation change after about 1:30, you will want to call the main office and they'll get the message to me. Once the kids get back from specials in the afternoon, I don't often have time to check my email.

- **Homework:** Your child is in first grade so he or she will not have mounds and mounds of homework. However, there are three basic things I'd like you to try to do during the week: read (Any kind of reading is awesome—kids read, you read, older sibling reads...whatever! I really want you to spend time enjoying books for a few minutes every night—make it an enjoyable experience, not a chore), math homework (this will come home with your child on Mondays...except when I forget, which happens at least 4 times a year...and will need to be turned in on Fridays), and Bible memory (having a copy of the verse in the car has been helpful for some families).
- **Book Bags:** I am hoping to get these going relatively soon after the school year begins. Your child will be choosing a book to take home to read to you or with you. I will send a note with the first book so you know what to expect. As soon as your child returns the book, he or she can choose a new one. At first, their choices might not be so great, but I will be working with the kids this year on how to choose good books for themselves. It's an important skill and one that takes a lot of practice. From time to time, I may also include a book or two that I choose for your child to read at home.
- **Snack and Lunch:** Your child will need a snack to eat before recess every day. Lunches should be brought to school each day unless your child orders hot lunch. We do not have a microwave available for heating up lunch items. Also, if your child needs a spoon or fork for her lunch from home, please try to remember to send one along—I try to have extras in the classroom, but I can't guarantee that. 😊
- **More About Snack:** As first grade teachers, we have found it VERY HELPFUL if your child places his or her snack for the day in a special backpack pocket **OUTSIDE OF THE LUNCH BAG**. It takes the average first grader about 23 minutes (possible exaggeration) to open up his lunch bag, choose something for a snack (Hey! I think I'll eat my sandwich at 9:30!), and then zip up the lunch bag and put it back in his locker. Your help with this could mean a very valuable savings of time and frustration. Thank you!

- **Cookie Fridays:** It looks like chocolate chip cookies will once again be available every other Friday for the students. Cookies are \$0.25 each. The Home Communicator will mention when those cookie Fridays will occur. It is SUPER HELPFUL if your child knows what \$0.25 looks like and knows if they are actually getting a cookie or two on Friday morning. 😊
- **Hot Lunch:** Our hot lunch and milk comes from Hudsonville Public Schools. Each child has an account with the program, and you will need to put money into it if your child takes milk or hot lunch. Menus will be available online. It will help our day to begin smoothly if your child knows what he or she is doing for lunch each day. Thanks for your help with this! Please check out the hot lunch website if you need more information:
www.jenhudfood.org
- **Classroom News:** My classroom newsletter has morphed a bit over the past couple of years and I have now gone paperless. News from the classroom will be sent in an email once a week, usually on Fridays. You'll find out information about the curriculum, dates of special events, and cries for help or supplies in that communication. It will also give a link to our classroom website where you can find even more information.
- **Embarrassing Admission:** During the first few weeks of school (and maybe longer if I don't see you often), I may stare at you blankly if you stop by school to say hi or pick up your child. You might think to yourself, *"I don't think Tricia remembers who I am!"* And you will probably be correct. 😊 One reason for this is that I am simply getting old. A second reason is that I meet so many new people at the parent orientation night and open house that I get a bit overwhelmed. If you stop by, you would really be helping me out if you just tell me who you are. 😊

Hopefully this covers most of what you want to know about life in first grade (and hopefully I haven't put you to sleep!). I am really looking forward to working with you and your children this year. Exciting things are happening at Hudsonville Christian! I can't wait to see what God has in store for us this school year!

In Him,

Tricia Kiepert