Transition Tips and Tricks
for Teachers
This book is dedicated to my aunts, Mary McCracken and Elizabeth Zimmerman, who added a little magic to my childhood.
Prep...are for changes in
the day and focus their attention
with these smooth, fun, and
meaningful transitions!

Jean Feldman
Illustrations K. Whelan Dery

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Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Kathy Charner, who is the best editor and magician of all! She can take my ideas and scribbles and turn them into a wonderful book for teachers.

Thanks to all the teachers who so generously shared their ideas and “tricks” with me so that I could pass them on to you.

Thanks to the children whose smiles, laughter, and twinkling eyes continue to verify that the activities in this book do work.

And thanks to my family who humors me, supports me, and is, indeed, the wind beneath my wings!

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction** ....................... 9

**Chapter 1—Starting the Day** ........ 13  
Mozart–Food for the Brain! .............. 14  
Greeter .................................. 15  
Sign-In Poster .......................... 16  
Morning Matchup ...................... 17  
Hugs, Smiles, Shakes, and High Fives . 18  
Hello, Neighbor! ...................... 20  
Everybody Shake a Hand .............. 21  
I Like You! ............................ 22  
Secret Password ...................... 23  
Brain Sprinkles .................... 24  

**Question of the Day** .................. 37  
**News Time** ......................... 38  
**What’s Your Bag?** .................. 39  
**Teacher of the Day** ................. 40  
**Concept Song** ..................... 41  
**Flip Your Lid!** ..................... 42  
**Firecracker Boom!** ................. 43  
**Birthday Song** ..................... 44  
**A Special Birthday Cake** .......... 45  
**Birthday Bag** ....................... 46  
**Roll and Review** ................... 47  

**Chapter 2—Group or Circle Time** .... 25  
Hand Hug ............................. 26  
I Like to Come to School ............. 27  
Choo Choo ............................. 28  
Stop and Drop ......................... 29  
Wiggle Wobble ....................... 30  
Teddy Bear ............................ 31  
Sitter Spots ......................... 33  
Rolly Polly ............................ 34  
Surprise Sack ......................... 35  
Anticipation Window ............... 36  

**Chapter 3—Clean Up! Line Up!**  
**Let’s Go!** .......................... 49  
**Five-Minute Person** ............... 50  
**Twinkle Cleanup** .................. 51  
**Clean-A-Saurus** .................... 52  
**Say, “I Am!”** ....................... 54  
**Little Red Wagon** ................. 55  
**If Your Name Begins With** ....... 57  
**Please Come and Read With Me** .. 58  
**Dismissal Rhymes** ............... 59

---


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## Chapter 4—Attention Grabbers, Puppets, and Finger Fun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention Grabbers!</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind Chime Time</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freddie Flea</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Hush</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Plate Theater</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Ears</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here Is a Turtle</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caterpillars</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criss-Cross Applesauce</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ooosha Mama Freeze!</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4-6-8-10</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen Please!</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Love Macaroni</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 5—Great Ideas for Rainy Days (or any day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crossover Movement</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance Beam</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Your Boat</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Be Nimble</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossover Movement</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance Beam</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Your Boat</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Be Nimble</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jukebox</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Sticks</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here We Go Round the</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days of the Week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm a Nut</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twinkling Stars</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color Word Song</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnyard Friends</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Little Fish</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Little Birds</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speckled Frogs</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gumball</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing the ABCs</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 6—Sing, Rhyme, and Chant!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jukebox</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Sticks</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here We Go Round the</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days of the Week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm a Nut</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twinkling Stars</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color Word Song</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnyard Friends</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Little Fish</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Little Birds</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speckled Frogs</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gumball</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing the ABCs</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Transition Tips & Tricks

Windup Key .......................... 60
A E I O You May Be Dismissed .... 61
Tickets, Please ..................... 62
I'm Ready ........................... 63
Marshmallow Feet ................... 64
Put Your Feet on the Line ........ 65
Play Time Roundup .................. 66

Blue Bird ........................... 89
London Bridge ....................... 91
Lassie and Laddie ................... 92
Let's Do a Little Twirling .......... 93
There Was a Wise Teacher .......... 94
Sunshine Band ....................... 95
Ride That Pony ...................... 96
Chugga Chugga ....................... 97
Robots .............................. 98
Mother Goony Bird .................. 99
Popcorn ............................ 100
Space Ball .......................... 101
Can Catch .......................... 102
Paddle Ball ........................ 103

Sample provided by iActiveLearning.com, all rights reserved.
Think Buddies ..................190
Good-Bye Book ...............191

Chapter 9—End of the Day ........193
Yee Haw, Good-Bye! ............194
On Our Way Home ...............195
What Did You Do in School? ....196
Recall Roundup ..................197
Paper House Recall ..............198
Memory Book ....................199
Left at Home and Bring Right Back ..200
Special Delivery .................201
Yearbook .......................202
Timeline .......................203
Tune Into Children and
Tune Into Learning!

Teaching and guiding children through daily transitions requires a little magic, and this book is full of special tricks for you! With these activities your day will move more smoothly, behavior problems will decrease, and you will be stimulating children’s brains. Above all, children will be delighted with the songs, puppets, props, stories, and games.

Brain research provides insight to help us “tune into” children and how they learn. This book integrates brain research with practical classroom experience. Not surprisingly, the applications brain experts suggest are the very ones loving, child-centered teachers and parents have used for centuries!

Underlying brain research principles reflected in this book include:

The brain loves novelty. The best way to get children’s attention and interest is to surprise them with something new!

The brain likes to be challenged. Children are naturally curious and interested in the world around them. The brain enjoys thinking—that’s what it was designed to do! We can enhance thinking by asking open-ended questions.

Sensory stimulation is essential to learning. The best way for information to reach the brain is through the senses. The more senses involved in an activity, the more likely it is that learning will occur.

Feedback is critical to learning. The more immediate the feedback, the more likely that permanent learning will occur.

Children thrive in a safe, secure environment. If children feel threatened or are stressed, they will not achieve optimal development.

The brain responds positively to schedules, routines, and rituals. Schedules and routines help children know what to expect. Daily rituals, such as greetings and songs, “jump start” the brain and act like “indicators” to elicit desired behaviors.

Children need caring, consistent relationships and positive role models. Because children learn more from our actions than our words, we should model the behavior we expect from them.

Emotional factors are important to learning. Children need to feel good about themselves and positive about school. Community celebrations and group activities can help foster these attitudes.
The brain needs healthy foods, rest, and water. Children need healthy snacks and meals for mental as well as physical growth. Rest gives the brain time to process information. Water is also needed frequently to rehydrate the brain.

Timing must be considered. The brain thrives on a balance of active and quiet periods. Children need “brain breaks” when they get up, move around, and get oxygen going to the brain.

The classroom environment has an impact on learning. So many factors in the classroom can enhance or detract from learning. For example, the brain likes natural sunlight, fresh air, and cool temperatures. It also likes plants and softness. Choose neutral background colors, so children and their work receive the most attention. Aromas, such as peppermint and citrus, can stimulate children’s brains, while lavender tends to calm behavior. Seating arrangements can also affect learning. Having children work in a circle or small groups facing each other encourages group cohesiveness.

Level of interest and play are of utmost consideration. Children are more likely to learn if it’s fun and interesting to them.

The brain learns through integration and association. Learning should be integrated and should occur within the context of daily experiences. Children need to associate new learning with previous experiences. Facts learned in isolation are soon forgotten!

Language is essential to learning. Children need to talk about their experiences to “own” them.

Laughter is good for the brain. A good laugh gets oxygen going to the brain and relieves stress.

Stories are a powerful way to store experiences in the brain. Read and tell stories frequently to children, and involve them in acting out stories.

The brain loves music and rhythm. Music, music, music! Music can be used to enhance learning, and songs and chants are a convenient way for the brain to “store” information.

Movement stimulates the brain. Running, jumping, marching, skipping, twirling, galloping, and swinging all exercise the brain.

Crossover movements “unstick” the brain. There is a line down the middle of the body called the midline. Whenever you engage children in cross-lateral activities, it wakes up the brain.

Small motor activities stimulate the brain. When children do fingerplays, work puzzles, or play with playdough, they are using their brains.

Repetition is critical to permanent learning. Children must do activities over and over again. Listen when they beg you to repeat songs, stories, and games they enjoy!
The brain is always looking for patterns. Patterns help us make connections, file new information, and predict what will happen next.

Recall can enhance learning. Give children opportunities to review what they have learned and to summarize their experiences.

Above all, remember each child's brain is unique and different. One size does not fit all; therefore, we must incorporate a variety of instructional strategies into our programs.

The goal of this book is to provide you with techniques and materials that can help you exercise children's brains by integrating the above principles. I often tell teachers, "If you're not having fun, you're doing something wrong!" Childhood is so precious and fleeting; we have a responsibility to make it as rich and wonderful as possible. My wish is that this book will add some fun, excitement, and meaningful learning experiences, and create magical childhood memories for children!

Resources and References


CHAPTER 1

Starting the Day

Begin with these activities to “jump start” the brain and prepare children for a great day!
Mozart—Food for the Brain!

Play Mozart as the children arrive in the morning, just before circle time, or any time during the day to create a positive learning environment.

WHAT? Mozart recording tape or CD player

HOW?
- Play the music softly in the background as children come into the classroom.
- At circle time, ask them if they noticed anything different when they came in the room. Have they ever heard music like that before?
- Tell them that the music was written by Mozart and that you’ve read that classical music by Mozart and others can help their brains work better.
- Continue playing classical music each day as children arrive at school.

WHAT ELSE?
Experiment with other types of music. What happens if you play jazz, country, ragtime, or ethnic music as children arrive at school? Does it influence their behavior?

Ask children to comment on how various types of music makes them feel.

Use background music during rest time, independent reading time, or other times during the day, and notice the effect on children.

HINT!
Your local public library has a wide selection of classical music and many other types of recordings.

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**Greeter**

Start the day right by making each child feel special with this routine.

**HOW?**

- Stand at the door as school begins and say to each child, “I’m so glad to see you,” or “I’ve been waiting for you.”
- Give them a pat on the back, hug, or handshake as they enter the room.
- Add the following chant to this routine.

  **Hello!**
  Hello! Good day!
  You’re looking mighty fine.
  Come on in,
  And have a good time.

  Hello, (child’s name).
  You’re looking mighty fine.
  Come on in,
  And have a good time.

**WHAT ELSE?**

After you have modeled this, choose a child to be the “greeter.” This could become a regular classroom job or a task for the children who arrive early.

Make a badge for the greeter, or give her a special hat to wear.

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**Sign-In Poster**

*Children sign their names or make their “marks” as they enter the classroom each day.*

**WHAT?**
- poster board
- erasable markers
- laminating machine or clear contact paper
- string or yarn
- tape

**HOW?**
- Print “Sign In, Please” at the top of the poster board.
- Laminate it or cover with clear contact paper. Hang it on the classroom door.
- Tie a piece of string or yarn to an erasable marker and tape it to the side of the poster as shown.
- Explain to the children how much it means to you to have each of them at school every day.
- To help you know they are present, ask them to sign the poster on the door before they come in the room. Each child can write her name, make a mark, or draw a little picture.

**WHAT ELSE?**
Tape a class roster beside the sign-in poster to provide children with a model for writing their names.

Use the poster at circle time to take attendance. Instead of writing their names, ask children to draw a face that represents how they are feeling.

Use a dry erase board or chalkboard instead of the poster board and markers.

**HINT!**
Choose one child each day to be your helper and erase the poster at the end of the day.
Morning Matchup

This activity nurtures children's reading skills as they arrive at school.

**WHAT?**
photographs of children
pocket chart
sentence strips
scissors
markers
shallow box

**WHAT ELSE?**
Have children match up their birthdays with their pictures.
Write children's phone numbers on sentence strips for them to match up.

**HINT!**
If you don't have a pocket chart, you can use Velcro or a flannel board for this activity. If you don't have photographs of the children, then just let them draw their pictures.

**HOW?**
- Place each child's picture in the pocket chart.
- Cut sentence strips 8” (20 cm) long, and print each child’s name on one.
- Place the sentence strips in a shallow box.
- As children enter the classroom, they find their name in the box and place it in the pocket chart by their picture.
Hugs, Smiles, Shakes, and High Fives

This morning ritual recognizes that children have different feelings. It gives them the opportunity to express their needs and start the day in a personal way.

**WHAT?**
- felt scraps
- scissors

**HOW?**
- Cut a heart, lips, hand, and the numeral five out of felt using the patterns on page 19. Enlarge patterns as needed.
- Place the shapes on the floor, and explain what each symbol represents.
  - Heart—Give me a hug.
  - Lips—Give me a smile.
  - Hand—Give me a handshake.
  - Five—Give me a “high five.”
- Children stand on a symbol, then you give them the greeting they request.

**WHAT ELSE?**
At circle time, have children greet each other with hugs, smiles, handshakes, or high fives. Talk about how people in different countries greet each other or say good morning.
Hello, Neighbor!

Brain research emphasizes the importance of using rituals and songs to start each day. This partner game will also build community and create positive feelings.

**WHAT?**
no materials needed

**HOW?**
- Demonstrate the chant and movements with a partner.
- Each child gets a partner and slowly repeats the chant and actions.
- Continue chanting the poem, changing partners each time after you turn around.

Hello, Neighbor!

- Hello, neighbor. (wave to partner)
- What do you say? (give high five)
- It’s going to be a happy day. (clap hands)
- Greet your neighbor. (shake hands)
- Boogie on down. (wiggle hips)
- Give a bump, (gently bump hips)
- And turn around. (turn around, then move to a new partner)

- Try singing the poem to the tune of “Good Night, Ladies.”

**WHAT ELSE?**
Write the words to this song on a chart.
Encourage the children to “read” the words as you point to them.

Begin the song with two children doing the dance while the other children sit on the floor. After chanting one verse, they each select a new partner. After the second round, the four children standing each select a new partner. The chant continues until every child is standing and participating.
**Everybody Shake a Hand**

*Here’s a happy tune to start your day and create group cohesiveness.*

**HOW?**

- Begin singing the song and modeling what the children are to do:

  **Everybody Shake a Hand**  
  *(Tune: “Buffalo Gal”)*

  *Everybody shake a hand, (shake children’s hands as you walk around the room)*
  *Shake a hand,*  
  *Shake a hand.*
  *Everybody shake a hand,*  
  *And walk around the room.*

  *Everybody give high five... (slap right hands together in the air)*

  *Everybody scratch a back... (scratch each other’s backs)*

  *Everybody give a hug, (end by giving hugs, then sitting down)*
  *Give a hug,*  
  *Give a hug.*
  *Everybody give a hug,*  
  *And then you take a seat.*

**WHAT?**  

- no materials needed

**WHAT ELSE?**

Ask the children to suggest verses for different things they could do, such as “bow to a friend,” “give a smile,” “say hello,” “give a bump,” etc.
**I Like You!**

*Use this tune to start your day, focus children’s attention for a story, or throughout the day to prepare children for transitions.*

**WHAT?**
no materials needed

**HOW?**
Sing the following, pointing to a different child each time.

**I Like You (Tune: “Flies in the Buttermilk”)**

I like you, (point to self, then a child)
There’s no doubt about it. (shake head, “no”)
I like you, (point to self, then a child)
There’s no doubt about it. (shake head)
I like you, (point to self, then a child)
There’s no doubt about it. (shake head)
You are my good friend. (point to children and look them in the eyes)
You like me, (point to child, then self)
There’s no doubt about it. (shake head)
You like me, (point to child, then self)
There’s no doubt about it. (shake head)
You like me, (point to child, then self)
There’s no doubt about it, (shake head)
You are my good friend. (point to children)

**WHAT ELSE?**
Discuss what it means to be a friend. Ask children to draw pictures and dictate sentences about friendship. Put their pages together to make a book called, “How to Be a Friend.”
Secret Password

The Secret Password is a clever way to repeat key information.

HOW?

• Write a letter, shape, color, word, or other piece of information on the paper. (Relate this to skills you are working on, and change it as needed.)

• Tape the paper over the door.

• Explain to the children that you will have a Secret Password above the door each day when they arrive. They have to whisper the password to you before they can come in the room.

• When the children first come into the room, be available to help them identify the password. Give them hints if they have difficulty, and provide them with immediate feedback.

WHAT?

paper
markers
tape

WHAT ELSE?

You can use this technique first thing in the morning, or use it throughout the day and have the children repeat it to you each time they enter the classroom.

Reinforce the password by putting it on the screen saver on your classroom computer.
Brain Sprinkles

Jump start children’s brains each day with “brain sprinkles.”

WHAT?
- plastic can or jar with a lid
- contact paper
- markers
- ¼ cup (50 ml) rice
- glue

HOW?
- Cover the can with contact paper. Decorate with markers and write “Brain Sprinkles” on the can.
- Put ¼ cup (50 ml) rice in the can and glue or tape on the lid.
- To start the day, tell the children you’re going to give them some “brain sprinkles” that will help them think better.
- Walk around the room and gently shake the can over each child’s head.
- At the conclusion of a learning experience or at the end of the day, ask them how the “brain sprinkles” worked. What did they learn?

WHAT ELSE?
Label cans “quiet sprinkles” or “dream sprinkles,” and use them throughout the day to prepare children for different activities. For example, before taking them in the hall, shake “quiet sprinkles” on the children, at rest time shake “dream sprinkles,” and so on.
CHAPTER 2

Group or Circle Time

The rituals, songs, and props suggested in this chapter will turn group or circle time into a magical time and nurture group cohesiveness.
Hand Hug

A Hand Hug is a good activity to use to quiet children for a group experience.

WHAT?
no materials needed

HOW?
• Demonstrate how to give a Hand Hug by gently squeezing hands with a partner.
• Ask the children to hold hands.
• Give a Hand Hug (squeeze) to the child on your right and sit down.
• That first child squeezes the hand of the person on his right and sits down.
• The second child squeezes the hand of the person on his right and then sits down.
• The children pass the Hand Hug around the circle until everyone is seated quietly.

WHAT ELSE?
Prepare children for other activities in the day by having them do the “wave.” The first child stands up, lifts his hands in the air, and sits down as the second child stands up and waves his hands in the air. Continue moving around the circle until everyone has had a turn and is focused for the next event.