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2019

## Student-of-the-Week Literacy Tasks

Danielle L. DeFauw

Shellie Forgione

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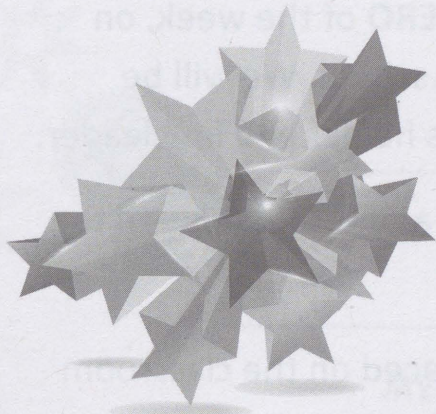
DeFauw, Danielle L. and Forgione, Shellie (2019) "Student-of-the-Week Literacy Tasks," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 51 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

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# Student-of-the-Week Literacy Tasks

by Danielle L. DeFauw, Ph.D. and Shellie Forgione



**Danielle L.  
DeFauw, Ph.D.**



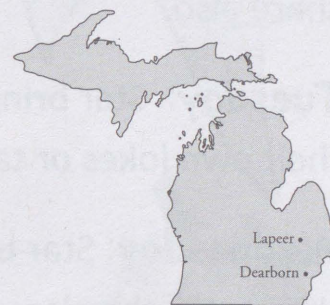
**Shellie Forgione**

The first month of first grade, Danielle's daughter, DeLainey, brought her STAR letter home (Figure 1). Ecstatic to be star of the week (i.e., student of the week), she completed each task to prepare for her week's worth of daily shining moments in Ms. Forgione's class. For Monday's class, DeLainey chose 10 pictures to showcase on the bulletin board. Using invented spelling, she completed her "my favorites" paper, which included a list of her favorite people, hobbies, and preferences (see Figure 2 for the template). Tuesday, she read five jokes she gathered from the Internet and a book of poems in her at-home library. Wednesday, DeLainey read aloud her favorite nursery rhyme, *Humpty Dumpty sat on a Wall*, by Mother Goose. Thursday, she shared a short autobiography detailing her family members, birthday, and favorite memory. Friday, she struggled to choose between sharing her favorite picture book and a story she wrote, herself. She decided to read her favorite book, *Mommy, Carry Me Please*, by Jane Cabrera. To honor DeLainey as the star of the week, her classmates wrote compliments to her in an anthology she still treasures (Figure 3). Daily, DeLainey chose a new friend to join her as she shared "show and tell" items. Also, she fulfilled the classroom jobs of line leader and Ms. Forgione's special helper.

Many educators encourage students to do various types of student-of-the-week tasks to build classroom community, especially during the first few weeks of school. Ms. Forgione chose to use the student-of-the-week

tasks purposefully to meet curricular requirements. As highlighted in Figure 4, this set of tasks built upon student-of-the-week teaching strategies (Rule & Kyle, 2009; Scully & Howell, 2008) to not only build the classroom community and honor students' and their families' funds of knowledge—experiences, knowledge, and learning (Dyson, 1993; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)—but to also encompass the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS, National Governors Association for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

This article highlights how Ms. Forgione provided first-grade student-of-the-week tasks that could be modified to transfer to all elementary grade levels. Students created a classroom community as they developed their literacy through authentic reading, writing, speaking, and listening opportunities that encompassed



# I AM A STAR PLAYER!

MY FULL NAME IS

---

MY FAVORITE COLOR IS

---

MY FAVORITE FOOD IS

---

MY FAVORITE ANIMAL IS

---

MY FAVORITE SPORT IS

---

MY FAVORITE T.V. SHOW IS

---

MY FAVORITE SONG IS

---

MY FAVORITE BOOK IS

---

MY FAVORITE PART OF THE SCHOOL DAY IS

---

MY FAVORITE THING TO DO AFTER SCHOOL IS

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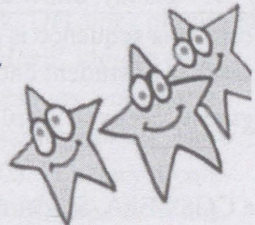
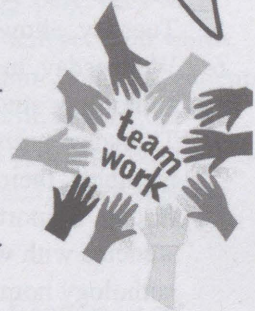
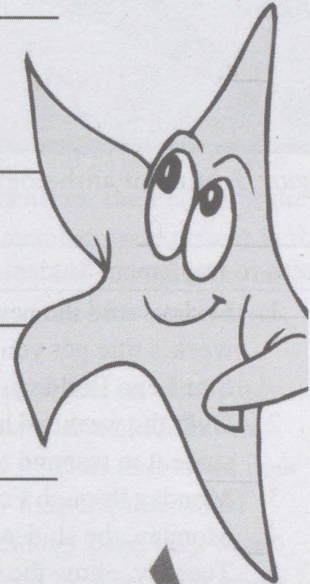
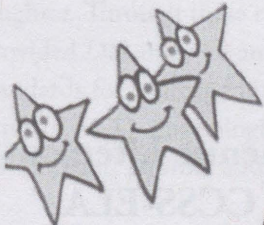
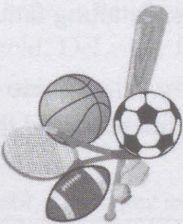
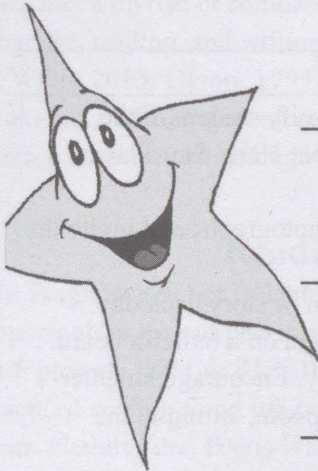


Figure 2. "My Favorites" paper.

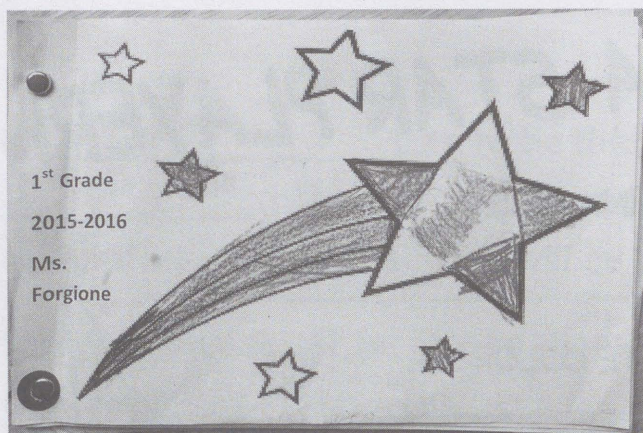


Figure 3. Student anthology cover.

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### Steps to Implement Student-of-the-Week Literacy Tasks

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1. Friday, send the new student of the week's family a letter (Figure 1). Specify student of the week's title per your classroom theme (e.g., Starfish, Star Astronaut, Super Hero, Star Player, Star Lego Builder).
2. Over the weekend, encourage parents to help their student find 5 to 10 photographs and invite the student to respond to a "my favorites" writing prompt (Figure 2).
3. Monday through Friday, allow the student to share a "show and tell" item or story each day.
4. Monday, the student shares "my favorite" paper and 5 to 10 pictures posted on a bulletin board.
5. Tuesday, allow the student to read aloud three to five jokes using prosody. Encourage laughter!
6. Wednesday, invite the student to read aloud a favorite nursery rhyme or poem, sitting in the author's or student-of-the-week's chair.
7. Thursday, prompt the student to write an autobiography to share with classmates, detailing family members, their birthday, and a favorite memory.
8. Friday, support the student to read aloud from a book he or she reads successfully. Also, guide students with writing letters to the student of the week to provide specific compliments. Send the anthology home with the student.
9. Friday, allow student to select, randomly, the next student of the week.

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*Note.* This sequence is one example. Student-of-the-week literacy tasks may be implemented in any order a teacher or student chooses.

Figure 4. Steps to implement student-of-the-week literacy tasks.

the CCSS-ELA. Students (a) presented photographs highlighting their favorite memories; (b) read aloud their chosen or self-written jokes, nursery rhymes, and poems; (c) shared an autobiography; (d) participated daily in "show and tell;" (e) read aloud from a favorite book; and (f) received a treasured keepsake of compliments their peers wrote. The weekly routine of authentic literacy tasks provided formative assessment opportunities for Ms. Forgione to evaluate students' literacy development.

### Connecting Authentic Literacy Events and the CCSS-ELA

The student-of-the-week requirements provided authentic literacy tasks that created literacy events or practices (Bloome & Willis, 2013). Maurer (2010) defined literacy events as "either an individual or shared behavior centered on reading, writing, speaking, or listening in which children try to construct meaning about language and/or interpret symbols of language" (p. 354).

Before Ms. Forgione asked students to complete these tasks, she modeled the daily expectations during the first week of school to introduce herself to her students. Daily, for 15 minutes or less, students learned about her as she shared photographs and read from her “my favorites” paper. She modeled “show and tell” and read aloud jokes, poems, her autobiography, and picture books. The students wrote their first letter to Ms. Forgione. This first anthology of compliments became a mentor text.

Seemingly simple, the authentic student-of-the-week tasks met a myriad of complex CCSS-ELA as students’ language, reading, and writing evolved socially (Bloome & Willis, 2013; Dyson, 1993; Maurer, 2010; Overturf et al., n.d.). Ms. Forgione formatively assessed students’ literacy development through each literacy task.

## Reading

Ms. Forgione granted DeLainey an additional set of opportunities to read poetry, jokes, and nursery rhymes with prosody (RF.1.4; RL.1.10). At home, DeLainey practiced reading aloud her poems and discovered Kenn Nesbitt’s site, Poetry4kids.com. She read jokes, which began a whirlwind of joke telling in the DeFauw household. DeLainey felt motivated to read aloud various genres to her classmates (Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015; Strachan, 2014).

At school, DeLainey sat in the student-of-the-week chair and read aloud five jokes, fully enjoying her peers’ laughter. Through these read aloud tasks, Ms. Forgione provided DeLainey an authentic opportunity to meet standards for reading foundational skills for print concepts (RF.1.1), phonological awareness (e.g., rhyming; RF.1.2), and phonics and word recognition (RF.1.3).

## Writing and Language

DeLainey crafted an autobiography. At school, she detailed her family members, birthplace, and favorite memory. Due to Ms. Forgione’s modeling, this task warranted an opportunity to meet the writing standards for narratives (W.1.3; W.1.8) and to expand her genre knowledge (Strachan, 2014).

Writing requires language; thus, students’ writing also requires meeting language standards (e.g., L.1.1-2). Ms. Forgione required students to complete their own writing; thus, even when DeLainey asked her mother for help with spelling words, her mother encouraged her to write the sounds she could hear as best she could. Formatting her sentences, she wrote to the best of her ability to share her experiences with her classmates. The motivation she felt to complete the tasks shone.

Similarly, DeLainey’s peers wrote compliments for her in an anthology. Unlike Rule and Kyle (2009), who dictated students’ compliments for the student of the week while his/her family members were present in the classroom, Ms. Forgione provided an authentic, independent letter writing opportunity for her students.

The letter writing incorporated foci on word study, sentence structure, vocabulary, capitalization, and punctuation. For example, students read aloud their writing to Ms. Forgione or the paraprofessional before turning in their anthology page; they were also supported to use the word wall for sight words. Throughout the year, Ms. Forgione observed students’ development with writing content, language, and handwriting. See Figures 5 and 6, comparisons of one boy’s and one girl’s beginning- and end-of-the-year writing samples, respectively.

## Speaking and Listening

Each day, as student of the week, DeLainey prompted conversation through “show and tell” literacy events (SL.1.1-5). Students created questions—not statements—to further their understanding of the “show and tell” item or story (SL.1.1.C). “Literacy is communication; it’s active, it’s alive” (Bloome & Willis, 2013, p. 63). Through “show and tell,” students built upon their at-home language abilities to develop more literary conversation that transferred to written language (Michaels, 1981). Also, children used their own language and experiences to create a community (Maurer, 2010).

Ms. Forgione chose to participate as an active listener within the classroom community. She refrained from

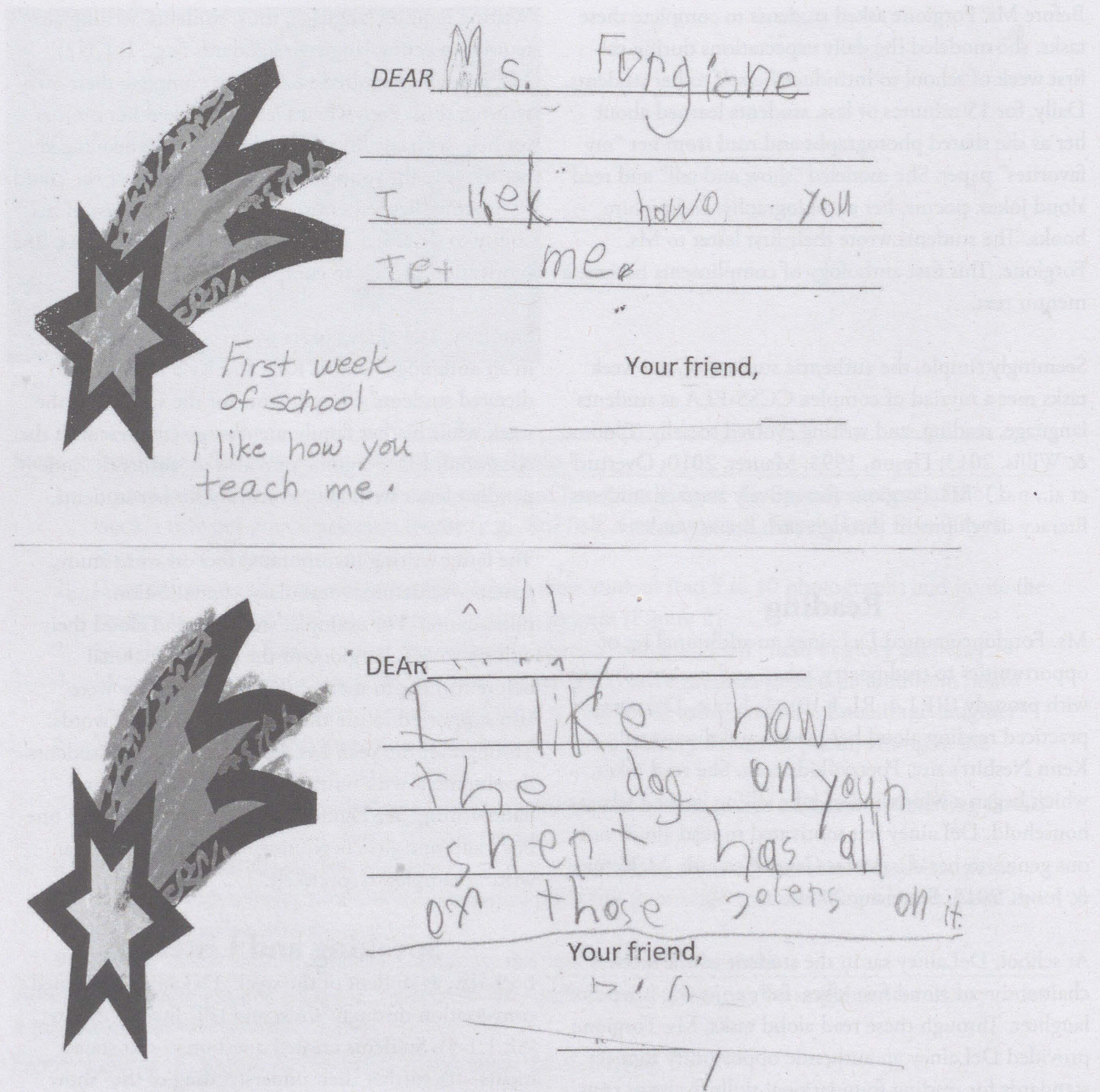
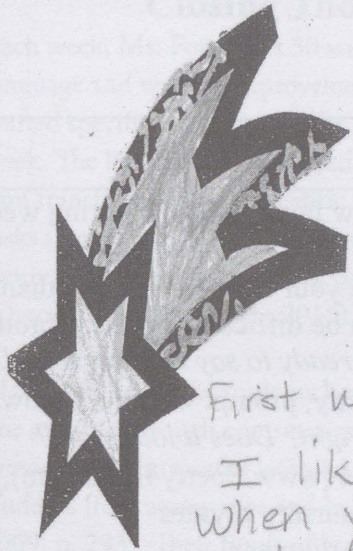


Figure 5. Male writing sample.

checking emails, preparing for lessons, or conferencing with the paraprofessional during student-of-the-week time. She modeled effective listening as she sat with the audience. She also modeled questioning, complimenting, and waiting her turn with her hand raised. She did not facilitate the conversation, but allowed students to take ownership of the discussion.

### Supporting Families

This activity promoted family involvement. Table 1 highlights strategies families may have implemented at home to add to the literacy and educational support they provided (Compton-Lilly, 2009). These strategies helped to ensure that students completed the literacy tasks so their work could be reviewed and formatively assessed.



DEAR Ms. Forgione

I Look win you  
macme Laf

First week  
I like  
when you  
make me  
laugh.

Your friend.



DEAR \_\_\_\_\_

I like your pink  
cow girl boots  
a lot

Your friend,

Figure 6. Female writing sample.

Ms. Forgione also provided support if students were unable to complete the work at home. For example, if students arrived on Monday without the “my favorites” paper completed and without photographs, Ms. Forgione filled out the paper with the student. Also, she took photographs of the student with friends. She printed these and hung them on the bulletin board. A parent

volunteer could support this process, too. If the student was not prepared to read aloud, Ms. Forgione shared joke books and poetry books available in the classroom library. She also supported the student’s autobiographical writing as needed. The paraprofessional or Ms. Forgione also sat with each student to support his or her preparation for the student-of-the-week literacy events.

Table 1

*Literacy Strategies for Families to Implement at Home*

Strategy Type	Literacy Constructs
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reread favorite books and discover new favorite books during weekly trips to the library.</li> <li>• When reading tricky words, encourage your child to do more than <i>sound it out</i>. Sounding out English can be difficult. Try these prompts: <i>Use the picture clues. Get your mouth ready to say the first sound.</i></li> <li>• When your child reads a word incorrectly, prompt with the following: <i>Does that make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right?</i></li> <li>• Use the Internet to find and read poems (<a href="http://www.Poetry4Kids.com">www.Poetry4Kids.com</a>), jokes (<a href="http://www.FunKidsJokes.com">www.FunKidsJokes.com</a>), and nursery rhymes (<a href="http://www.speakaboos.com/stories/nursery-rhymes">www.speakaboos.com/stories/nursery-rhymes</a>).</li> <li>• Enjoy reading together throughout the day. Minutes add up quickly when you read five to ten minutes in the morning, after school, and before bed.</li> </ul>
Writing and Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write in response to picture books. For example, write lists of favorite toys after reading aloud a book about toys. Read the lists aloud.</li> <li>• When spelling words, encourage your child to stretch the word out like a rubber band and write the sounds he/she hears. Rather than expecting perfect spelling, encourage your child to use invented spelling.</li> <li>• Invite your child to detail moments and memories in a writer's notebook.</li> <li>• Go to <a href="http://readwritethink.org">readwritethink.org</a>. Use the Search by Keyword box to find "poetry interactives." Use a poetry interactive to write a theme, diamante, shape, or acrostic poem.</li> <li>• Use the Language Experience Approach in four steps: (a) child tells a story that parent writes, (b) parent reads the text aloud to child, (c) parent reads the text with child, and (d) child reads the text aloud to parent.</li> </ul>
Speaking and Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at photos in your electronic device. Together, tell the stories behind the snapshots. Email some photos to the teacher for the student-of-the-week project.</li> <li>• Sing songs and make up silly songs or rhymes.</li> <li>• Tell jokes and make up jokes. Enjoy the shared giggles.</li> <li>• Rather than reading a picture book, tell a story based on the illustrator's pictures. Read the book to see how close you were to the author's story.</li> <li>• Play "show and tell" at home.</li> </ul>



## Closing Thoughts

Each week, Ms. Forgione's 30 students demonstrated language and writing improvement as they presented or crafted specific compliments for the new student of the week. The literacy skills acquired through class instruction transferred to the authentic student-of-the-week tasks (Dewitz & Graves, 2014), which students were motivated to engage in as they developed community (Dyson, 1993; Jang et al., 2015).

Ms. Forgione taught students how to connect with one another through community-building tasks that provided an "integrated learning environment where all students [felt] acceptance and belonging" (Rule & Kyle, 2009, p. 293). Their funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) were celebrated. Students demonstrated more ownership of this classroom routine and were more receptive to learning when they were participating socially with their peers (Dyson, 1993). Individually, each first-grade student built upon his/her literacy skills. Collectively, the students created a community of learners.

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## Author Biographies

**Dr. Danielle L. DeFauw** is an Associate Professor of reading and language arts at the University of Michigan – Dearborn. She is dedicated to supporting preservice and inservice teachers' development of their teacher-writer voices and use of authentic writing instruction to support all student writers. She can be reached at [daniellp@umich.edu](mailto:daniellp@umich.edu).

**Shellie Forgione** has been an elementary teacher for 18 years. Her interests include family, gardening, and engaging children to be self-motivated learners. She can be reached at [sforgione@lapeerschools.org](mailto:sforgione@lapeerschools.org).

