

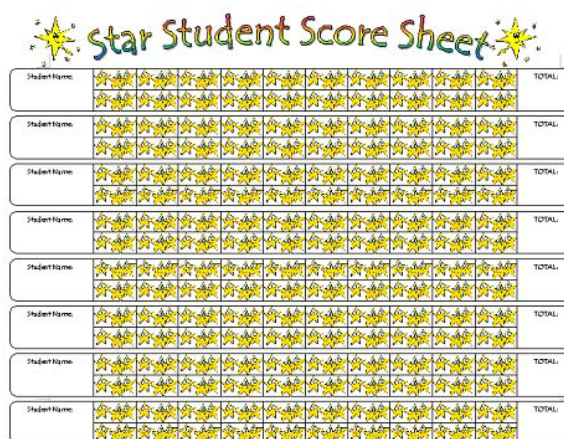
Ideas for Positive Reinforcement: Star Student Awards

Overview:

English Raven's 'Star Student Awards' are a simple idea for Positive Reinforcement in Young Learner Classrooms, targeted to grades 1-5 of the Elementary Education sector. There are three types of materials associated with the process, any or all of which can be used to encourage students to become more aware of their classroom performance and set goals for themselves in terms of improvement and achievement. Note that this system is generally intended to focus on students' attitudes and efforts in class, not necessarily the kind of 'academic' achievement one may associate with such things as testing. In many ways, this kind of positive reinforcement can actually comprise a form of informal assessment to accompany the more formal evaluation that takes place through testing processes. It is generally recommended that the system not be introduced for the first two to three months of instruction (in the case of outright beginners), and it may also be useful to have a bilingual teacher explain the process to the students so that they know exactly how it works and what they need to do in order to do well.

How to Apply:

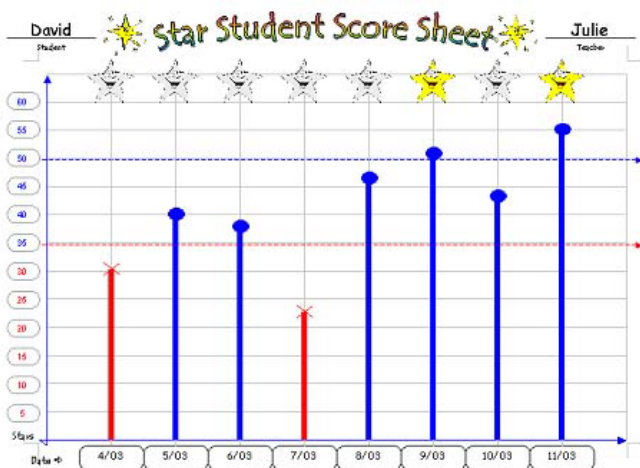
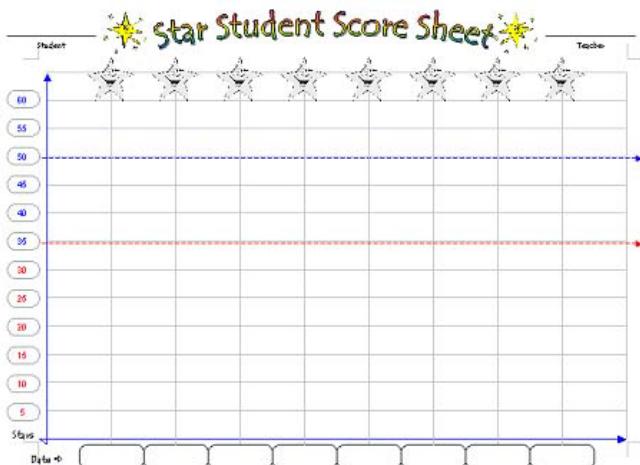
At the basic level and in terms of daily classroom application, 'Star Students' involves a colorful wall chart. The chart features a bar for each student, broken into 20 sections, each containing 3 stars (for a total of 60 stars in the entire bar). The associated download is named 'Star Student Score Sheet' and has enough bars for up to 17 students (print out additional copies of the second page of the download if you are applying this to classes with more than 17 students). Basically, for each daily class in a 20-day session, students are starting out with 3 stars. To maintain all three of them each day, they need to refrain from using their L1, try hard on tasks, listen to the teacher, and work well with their peers.



Of course, individual teachers should and will come up with their own criteria for what constitutes good classroom performance in application to particular ages and classes, but the key is to set some basic criteria and to consistently adhere to it. It could also be useful to compile a clear list (in both English and the students' L1) describing specifically what is required for students to maintain a 'three star rating' for each lesson, and to post the list on the classroom wall and/or make it available to parents. For classes with 12 students or less, there is an opportunity to allow for more leniency without necessarily interrupting either the flow of the lesson or the amount of English being produced in class, in which case I recommend a 'three strikes' rule for each star (basically, three violations results in the loss of a star). For larger classes, classroom management becomes more difficult and I recommend that teachers of such classes be a little more stringent.

When a student breaks the basic pre-determined classroom rules, the teacher goes to the chart, cross references the students name on the list, and crosses out one of the gold stars for that student for that day. It is also a good idea to take the student to the chart so that they and the other students can see the star being removed, followed up with a clear explanation from the teacher as to why the student is being penalized. At the end of the twenty days, tally up the total stars remaining for each student to find a total score, which is listed in the far right-end section of the bar.

This system alone should really help to make the students aware of their performance and to try and avoid the sorts of behavior that result in loss of stars on their chart, but the system can be extended in one or both of two ways.



Additional Comments:

It may be pointed out the star student system outlined here focuses a little too much on penalties rather than rewards, but in testing the system in YL classrooms I have noticed that the daily chart actually shows students what they have the potential to achieve and illustrates what comprises fundamentally appropriate basic behavior in the classroom at all times - the 'classroom norm'. Students are rewarded for sticking to these fundamentals until they become good study habits, which is quite different from starting out with nothing as the equivalent of 'inappropriate' classroom conduct and then rewarding those students who happen to act differently (i.e., doing the 'right' thing).

The Star Student Progress Graph (illustrated top left, with a completed example middle left) is a means of showing students their performance for each twenty day/lesson period, and of allocating Star Student Awards. This is a chart that can be applied to individual students, and can be displayed on the classroom wall or kept in a file to be regularly added to and shown to the students. Once students become used to the system, they may even be trusted to complete this chart for themselves.

For this graph, the total number of stars for each student in a 20 day period is entered as a 'bar' on the graph, with the date listed underneath. The color and appearance of the 'bar' will depend on the score and whether it reaches a certain height. If the total number of stars for that session was less than 35, the line representing that score will be red and topped with a cross to signify that this was a poor performance overall (a score less than 35 means that on average the student was losing one or more stars each day of the 20 day period). Scores above 35 are recorded with blue lines topped with circles (to indicate 'acceptable' performance).

A score above 50 indicates 'Star Student' status, in which case the student is entitled to color in the star at the top of the chart for that month and receive a special 'Star Student Award' (illustrated bottom left). Signed and laminated awards like this given out with a little pomp and ceremony at the end of each twenty day period will help the students to feel like they achieved something special, and hopefully motivate other students to try harder. The key is to find a system that makes achieving star student status neither too easy nor too difficult.