

# KCONS

*A Shape-Based Identity System  
for Kindergarten Classrooms*



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*Stitchery Seat Covers*  
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*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything  
as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency comes from God.*  
—II Corinthians 3:5

*When love and skill work together,  
expect a masterpiece.*

*—John Ruskin*

# Kcons

## A Shape-Based Identity System for Kindergarten Classrooms

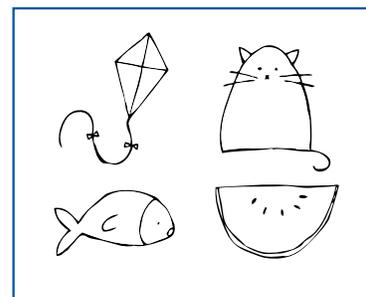
**I**f you're a kindergarten teacher looking for a way to reduce your stress as a teacher and, at the same time, help your students become more successful, you've come to the right place. You're about to discover a student management strategy I've created for your classroom that was inspired by Project Highscope, the foundation of the Headstart program. It's called Kcons,<sup>†</sup> and I think you and your students are really going to enjoy it.

A part of that joy is that the whole thing is incredibly simple yet highly effective. That's a good combination. There's enough complexity in the classroom as it is without someone adding even more. Kcons can be as simple as you wish or as elaborate as you dare to make it. And although I'm going to get you started with a few easy-to-do suggestions, I have a feeling that, before too long, you'll be coming up with your own exciting new ways to use it.

For students, Kcons offer two big benefits. For one, it's going to add a bit of fun to your classroom. In his book, *The Quality School Teacher*, Bill Glasser identifies five student needs which he feels must be met in the classroom in order for students to become truly engaged in the learning process. One of those five needs is *fun*. (The other four are *power, freedom, love, and safety*.) Kcons will add a double helping of fun to your room. A bigger benefit, though, is that Kcons will enable your beginning-of-the-year non-readers to feel not quite so lost and confused during the course of the day. How you ask? Read on.

### In a Nutshell

Kcons are symbols that kindergarten students will use to navigate what has traditionally been a name-based environment. In the example shown to the right, you can see that the artwork has been designed so that each student will be able to reproduce his own Kcon with a pencil or crayon. (More on that later.)



<sup>†</sup> Icons, as I'm sure you know, are the small pictures and symbols that a computer displays which enables you to more easily use it. Kcons, in similar fashion, are small pictures, or symbols, that you'll display in room which will enable your kindergarteners to more successfully make their way through the day.

## Why not just use names?

That's a good question. After all, names have been used to identify student cubbies or mailboxes, the rosters of reading groups, and to indicate which students will be helping out with which jobs for the week. All good stuff. That's assuming, of course, that you can actually read your name.

Unfortunately, not every kindergarten student is able to read or write his first name at the beginning of the school year. Consequently, the non-reading student is going to have a difficult time making his way through the course of the day without significant help from the teacher.

Let's look at a couple of hypothetical interactions that could realistically occur during the first few weeks of school. I'm going to use myself as the student in these scenarios.

## Kindergarten Theater: A Drama in Two Acts

A brief introduction: Hi, I'm Rick. I'm a kindergarten student on his second day in the classroom. It was a very confusing first day because there were words throughout the room, not one of which I could read. And to make matters even worse, it seems as if half of my class *can* read the words. What's wrong with me?<sup>†</sup>

As you read this guide, you might want to picture yourself playing my part. And to get a feeling for what I'm about to go through, imagine that you just been dropped off in the middle of Tokyo. Your task is to: 1) find some AA batteries; and 2) make your way back to your hotel. Yeah. Imagine that.

### Act One: Which Cubbie Is Mine?

Scene: A typical kindergarten room; mid-morning of the second day of school.

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Handing non-reading Rick one of his assignments she had corrected:

*Here you go, honey. Please put this paper in your cubbie.*

RICK

Somewhat hesitantly:

*Which one is mine?*

TEACHER

*It's the one with your name on it, remember?*

<sup>†</sup> Nothing's wrong with Rick. He just hasn't been exposed to reading the way some of his classmates have. However, too many more days of feeling as if he's way behind everyone else is going to severely hamper his self-confidence.

RICK

Picking up on the tension but not wanting to make a mistake:

*Uh, can you help me?*

TEACHER

Doing her best to maintain her cool:

*Come on. I'll show you. But you'll need to learn how to read your name. Okay?*

Try as she might, the teacher wasn't really able to disguise her slight annoyance at having to help an under skilled student take care of what she thought was a simple task. And as much as he didn't want to disappoint his new teacher, Rick got the feeling that he had.

## Act Two, The Missing Bears

Scene: Same classroom; 15 minutes later.

TEACHER

Addressing her students who are gathered on the meeting rug:

*We're going to be working on reading activities for the next 30 minutes. You'll be working with your reading group.*

Pointing to the three reading group charts on the bulletin board:

*Today's schedule shows that the Lions will be at the listening center and the Tigers will be in our classroom library reading with some room parents. The Bears are going to return to their desks to look over their new book until I call them to the reading table.*

Rick is a bear. Sadly, though, he's already forgotten that bit of information. And the fact that he can't read his name on the list of students who are bears makes it doubtful that he'll be joining the bears any time soon. It's most likely going to take a verbal reminder from his teacher.

TEACHER

Having called the Bears to the reading table but not seeing Rick and his non-reading classmate, Danielle:

*Rick and Danielle! You need to join our group right now. You two are Bears. It says so on our reading group chart.*

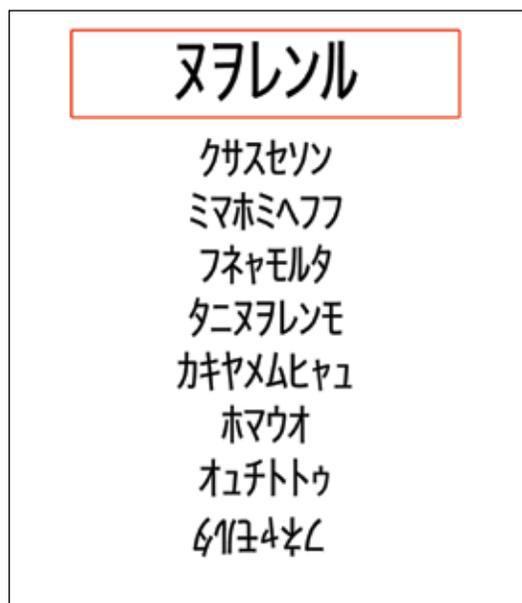
Granted, his teacher and the majority of his classmates can comprehend the reading group chart and are aware of the fact that Rick is a Bear. The information is right there on the wall for everyone to see. What's the big deal?

### Bears

Amanda  
Armon  
Briann  
Danielle  
Desmond  
Patricia  
Rick  
Waleed

The big deal is that for Rick, and any other non-reading student in the room, the chart looks like the one to the right.

It's basically meaningless because he can't read. He can, on the other hand, spot the nearest McDonald's when he's riding with his mom in her car. He's got that one down. And the funny thing is that he's not even trying to make sense of the letters that make up the word. He's just reading the golden arches. And, to him, the golden arches spell M-c-D-o-n-a-l-d's: his favorite spot for lunch. It's a right-brain thing which, according to the research, is sadly under-utilized in most classrooms.<sup>†</sup>



Now then, what if Rick's teacher had used this same concept to create an easy-to-read symbol system? What would that do to his ability to find his way around the room?

Let's replay our little drama and see if Kcons can help our young protagonist triumph over adversity. Before we raise the curtain, though, let's see what's different on the set.

To start with, Rick was shown a number of cartoon-like symbols and was asked to choose one as his own symbol. He chose the crown.

Among other things, Rick's teacher made a file label with a small crown and Rick's name printed on it. She's attached this label to the front edge of Rick's cubbie.



### Act One: Which Cubbie Is Mine?

Scene: A kindergarten room using Kcons; mid-morning of the second day of school.

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Handing non-reading Rick one of his assignments she had corrected:

*Here you go, honey. Please put this paper in your cubbie.*

<sup>†</sup> Research indicates that children stop using their right-brains at five years of age. That's when they begin kindergarten and everything becomes left-brain dominant.

RICK

Knowing which one is his because of his beloved crown:

*Sure.*

Rick makes his way over to the cubbies with his assignment in hand. A quick scan of the cubbies has him spotting his crown. He knows that the funny marks next to the crown is another way to say Rick. His teacher told him that when she showed him the file label she had made. Of course, he's not too worried about that right now. He's just glad he was able to find his cubbie without needing someone's help or upsetting his teacher.

Within in a month, he'll be able to recognize the letters that make up his name as well as he can spot the crown. Fortunately, though he didn't have to start the year feeling that he was less capable than many of his classmates. He was up and running within the first week.

## Act Two, The Missing Bears

Scene: Same classroom; 15 minutes later.

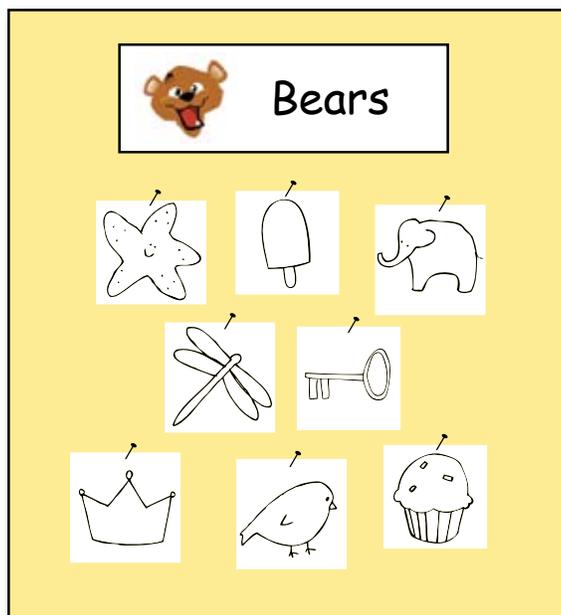
TEACHER

Addressing her students who are gathered on the meeting rug:

*We're going to be working on reading activities for the next 30 minutes. You'll be working with your reading group.*

Pointing to the three reading group charts on the bulletin board:

*Today's schedule shows that the Lions will be at the listening center and the Tigers will be in our classroom library reading with some room parents. The Bears are going to return to their desks to look over their new book until I call them to the reading table.*



**FIG. 1**  
This simple chart could be "read" by 4-year olds.

Rick quickly glances at the reading group chart for the Bears.

He can see his crown under the cartoon of a bear. He nods his head with confidence, fully cognizant that he's a member of the Bears. He just needs to wait until his teacher calls for his group.

TEACHER

With a smile in her voice:

*I'd like all of the Bears to please join me now. Don't forget to bring the book I gave you yesterday.*

On his way to the reading table, Rick

stops by Danielle's desk to remind her about the group meeting. Rick had seen Danielle's dragonfly symbol on the chart and realized that she hadn't heard the teacher calling the group.

RICK

Pausing at Danielle's desk:

*Dani. Come on. It's our group's turn.*

In one fell swoop, Rick has been transformed from a somewhat helpless student to one who not only can take care of himself but is also able to lend a helping hand to his classmates.

What a difference.

## Getting Started

With all of the things you need to get through on the first day of school, don't feel you need to throw Kcons into the mix. Since this is an idea you'll be able to use all year, there's really no need to rush. On the other hand, the sooner you and your students start using the Kcon system, the easier it will be for everyone, and especially your non-readers, to function successfully in your classroom.

*Suggestion:* Introduce Kcons on the second or third day of school.

There are four simple steps to complete in order to put the power of Kcons to work in your classroom. The first three can be done in your classroom. The last one needs to be done online at the [newmanagement.com](http://newmanagement.com) website.

- ✓ **Make xerox copies of the one-page Kcons master sheet.**
- ✓ **Allow students to choose a Kcon.**
- ✓ **Create a chart showing the names of your students and their Kcons.**
- ✓ **Download the Kcons your students have chosen.**

### ✓ **Make xerox copies of the one-page Kcons master sheet**

You're going to need a simple way for each student to: 1) see all of the symbols that are available; 2) indicate which symbol he would like to have; and 3) share his choice with you. With that in mind, I've created a one-page document that has all 40 symbols on it. You'll find it on the last page of this teaching guide. (For the record, it's also located on the Kcons page of the [newmanagement.com](http://newmanagement.com) website.)

Make a copy for each student. (Make a few extras just in case.)

As soon as you have copies of the master sheet, you're ready to share Kcons with your class so that everyone can select one and start using it.

You might want to allow some time for the students to play around with the Kcons by having them attempt to draw some of them. After all, they're going to be drawing their symbols on a regular basis anyway. A little bit of time now to get to know the Kcons would be beneficial. Also, some of the Kcons are more complex and, therefore, more difficult to draw. It's possible that a student might decide against choosing a particular Kcon because he was not able to reproduce the symbol accurately. I think it would be better for a student to realize this before he chooses his symbol than after he has chosen it. Just a thought.



**FIG. 2**  
The Kcon master sheet can be found at the end of this teaching guide.

*Note:* If a student is having difficulty drawing a symbol he really likes—the robot, for example—you might want to try to have him turn the image upside down. According

to Betty Edwards, author of *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, seeing the image inverted helps to encourage the child to draw what he is actually seeing instead of drawing from the internal memory he may have of the image. If, for instance, you were to ask a child to draw a tree, I can almost guarantee that you will something that looks like a stalk of broccoli. Trees rarely look like broccoli; nonetheless, that's the image most people summon up and try to draw. They don't even look at the tree when they draw it. They just rely upon the mental image and attempt to reproduce it.

### **Allow students to choose a Kcon**

*Challenge:* Don't be deterred by what may appear to be a rather time-consuming symbol-assigning process. You only have to assign symbols one time and then you'll be able to use them all year.

Since I'm a believer in the power and importance of self-determination, I strongly recommend that you try to stay out of the Kcon selection process as much as possible and allow your students the opportunity to take care of most of it. All you need to do is facilitate the whole process.

I can think of two options for allowing students to choose a Kcon. Although the first option seems like the most efficient way to go, I encourage you to make modifications and adjustments to my suggestions.

Please bear in mind that I've never used this system with students before. I only read about a primitive version in the Project Highscope study and felt that, with a bit of effort, it could have a tremendous impact upon the management of a kindergarten classroom. What that implies, though, is that I'm not creating this guide from my experience. I'm merely giving you my best guess as to how to proceed. Please feel free to ignore my suggestions completely and assign Kcons the way you think it should be done.

### **Option One: All symbols on one sheet of paper.**

#### **Choosing a Kcon, Round One**

1. Give each of your students a copy of the symbol sheet.
2. Have each student circle the symbol he would like to have. (If you're feeling brave, you might want to ask them to circle three symbols. Have them draw two circles around their number one choice.)
3. As soon as they have chosen, have them bring you their sheets.
4. Ask each child to write his name on the sheet. If he is not able to do this, write it for him.
5. Place the sheets in a pile until you have the time to process them.

**Processing the sheets:**

1. Make eight stacks of papers by sorting them into symbol rows. That is, if the child chooses a symbol from the first row of five symbols, his sheet goes into a pile with all of the other students who chose a symbol from that row.
2. Keep going until each sheet is in one of eight piles.
3. Go through the sheets in the row one pile.
4. If one of the five symbols was chosen by just one student, circle the symbol with a highlighter and place the sheet in a stack of “chosen symbols” sheets.
5. If one of the five symbols was chosen by more than one student, place the sheets in a stack of “needs to choose again” sheets.

**Choosing a Kcon, Round Two**

1. On a blank master sheet, put a big “X” on all of the Kcons that were assigned during Round One.
2. Make Xerox copies of the X-marked sheet so that you have enough copies to equal the number of students who weren’t assigned a symbol in Round One.
3. Give each student who had a sheet in the “needs to choose again” stack a copy of the X-marked sheet.
4. Let them know—gently—that their first choice was selected by someone else and that, since more than one student chose it, you didn’t assign it.
5. Ask each of them to make another selection. (Note: A student can choose the Kcon he selected in the first round if he so desires. They would, of course, need to hear this from you.)
6. Collect and process the new sheets the way you did in Round One.
7. Keep going until each student has chosen a Kcon.

**Option Two: Large symbols on a bulletin board or whiteboard.****Choosing a Kcon**

1. Download the 4-inch symbols—found on the Kcons page on the New Management website ([newmanagement.com](http://newmanagement.com))—and print out a copy of all ten sheets. Cut the sheets so that you end up with 40 separate Kcons.
2. Tape the sheets to your white board or pin them on a bulletin board.
3. With your students seated in front of the display of symbols, tell them that you are going to point to each of the symbols, one at a time.
4. If a student would like to have the symbol you are pointing at, he raises his hand.
5. If you only see one hand up, write the name of the student on the symbol sheet. Tell the child that he now has a symbol and won’t need to raise his hand again.

6. If more than one child raises a hand, announce that you can't give it away yet.
7. Keep working your way through the symbols until each child has his name written on a symbol sheet.

If you get yourself in a situation where two or three students are adamant about wanting the same symbol, you might want to take it out of consideration and ask those students to select a new symbol.

The other possibility is that you allow the students sit together at a table and see if they can resolve the issue unassisted. That would be a sweet thing to see and well worth your time and effort.

### **Download the Kcons your students have chosen**

Now that you know which Kcons your students have chosen, download them from the New Management website. (It's easier than it sounds.) The symbols are shown on—and accessible from—the Classroom Tips page.

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### Kindergarten Symbols (K-cons)

Here are the first forty of what will be fifty symbols you can use in your classroom to help your non-reading students navigate more easily.

To get a symbol:

1. Click on it.
2. When you see the larger version, right-click (PC) or control-click (Mac) on it.
3. Choose "Save Picture As..." (PC) or "Save Image As..." (Mac).
4. Create a folder called "K-cons" and save the image in your new folder.
5. Repeat this process for each image you want.

The images--png files--can be imported into most word processing or page layout programs so that you can create name tags, bulletin board images, check-off lists, or anything you can think of to take advantage of the these kid-friendly shapes.






















### CLASSROOM TIPS

**K-cons**

- Talkative Students
- 3R Class Pledge
- Math Chant
- Math Poems
- The Plural Y Song
- Keeping Calm
- Identifying Blacklines
- Extra Assignments
- Job Application Form
- Direction Game
- Classroom Signs
- Classroom Clean-Up
- Moment of Silence
- Paper Planes
- Red Basket
- "Could you do a sample?"
- Water Bottles
- Kindergarten Clap
- Taking Turns by Days
- Red Hands for Blurting
- "Take Five"
- Student of the Day

**FIG. 3**  
This is the page you want in order to download the Kcon artwork.

**Directions for Windows users:**

1. Create a folder on your desktop called Kcons.
2. From the newmanagement.com website, click on a Kcon.
3. It will appear on your screen as a large image.
4. Right-click on the large Kcon.
5. Choose “Save picture as...”
6. Save image in the Kcons folder you created in Step 1.
7. Keep downloading until you have all 40 symbols safely stashed away on your computer.

**Directions for Mac OSX users:**

1. Create a folder on your desktop called Kcons.
2. From the newmanagement.com website, click on a Kcon.
3. It will appear on your screen as a large image.
4. Control-click on the large Kcon.
5. Choose “Save image as...”
6. Save image in the Kcons folder you created in Step 1.
7. Keep downloading until you have all 40 symbols safely stashed away on your computer.

**A Kcon Chart**

To help make the Kcon system easier to use, I recommend you create some kind of a chart that displays each of the symbols chosen and which student chose it. You can either make the thing yourself or, if you're willing to let go of the reins, you could allow your students to help you create it.

*Reality:* Unless you're just that kind of person, I suggest you create a rather simple chart at first. Although you can always make a more elaborate one later on if you so desire, for right now, simple makes the most sense.<sup>†</sup>

And speaking of simple, using a vinyl pocket is a quick and easy way to go.

**Kcon Chart using a vinyl pocket chart**

1. Print out a set of the 4-inch symbols and cut them apart. (On the website—newmanagement.com—you can also find a set of 3-inch symbols as well.)

*Suggestion:* Save the unassigned Kcons for any students who are assigned to your room after the Kcon selection process has occurred.

2. On a strip of construction paper, print the first name of a student.
3. Place the Kcon and the child's name in the pocket chart.
4. Hang prominently in your classroom.

<sup>†</sup> If you need to appease the over achieving side of your teacher personality, just remind yourself that the primary purpose of the Kcon Chart is *function*—the name/Kcon information it provides—and not *form*—how pretty it looks.



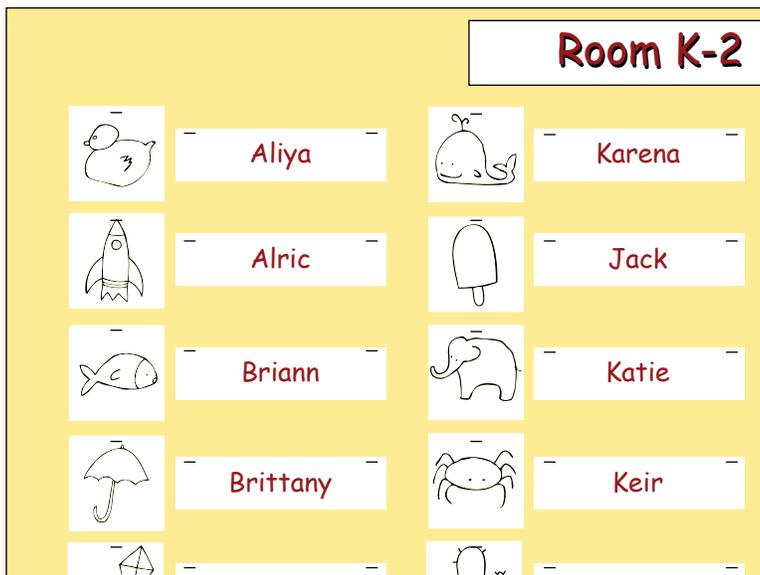
**Fig. 4**  
A blue vinyl pocket chart being used to display names and Kcons.

To make it easier to find the name of particular student as you scan the chart of names, I suggest that you organize the names on the chart in alphabetical order. Although school has always organized names by the alphabetical order of the last names, teachers might want to think about using first name order. After all, that’s what we use in the classroom as we interact with our students.

You could also create a simple chart on a bulletin board.

**Kcon Chart on bulletin board:**

1. Cut apart the 4-inch Kcons and staple them to the bulletin board.
2. Create name tags on strips of tag board and staple next to the symbols.



**Fig. 5**  
Remember: the Kcon chart doesn’t need to be fancy. It just needs to be legible and visible.

Feeling brave? Give each student a 6 X 6 inch square of white construction paper. (Cut out twice as many as you need for any and all students who need to redo the art.) Use their art on the bulletin next to the name strip you created. It won't be quite as professional, but it will definitely be more student-centered.

## Putting Kcons to Work

At this point, every student in your room has chosen a Kcon. It's possible that they've been given opportunities to practice drawing it. The time has now come to put those symbols to work for you and your students.

### Student Use for Identifying Assignments

Probably the easiest way to begin using Kcons would be to allow—encourage, actually—students who don't know how to write their names to draw their Kcon on the assignment they are working on. Although at first glance it may seem as if this would hinder their ability to learn to write, it would more likely enhance the process.

Every time I drew a crown on my paper, because I can't yet write Rick, I'm engaging in a process of identification. The fact that the identifying symbol I made was graphic as opposed to alphabetic is, I believe, a minor point. The major point is that I was able to indicate that the paper was mine. No one had to help me. And no one would be confused as to whose paper it was. It's Rick's paper. It says so right at the top where I drew my crown.

I can almost guarantee that it won't be too long before the transition is made from drawing the symbol to writing the name. Even if it takes a couple of weeks for the child to learn to write his name, I wouldn't be concerned. What's a couple of weeks when you've got the child all year? The more important thought is that, throughout the entire process, the student was confidently in control of his assignment-identifying responsibilities.

That's a powerful image.

### File Labels

Depending upon how computer savvy you are, you might want to create file labels with the Kcon and student name on separate labels. Use these to identify cubbies, etc.

**FIG. 6**  
File labels  
can be used  
in a variety  
of ways.



## Kcon Cards

If you're familiar with some of my other management strategies, you might recall that I suggest teachers take a deck of playing cards and write the names of students them, one name per card. The cards can then be used to randomly select students for helping out with activities. You could do the same thing by making a set out of construction paper and 4-inch Kcons.

### Making a set of Kcon cards:

1. Print out and cut apart a set of 4-inch Kcons.
2. Write the name of the student on the back of the card. (Write it large enough so that your students will be able to see it when you hold it up in front of everyone.)
3. Laminate the cards so that they're durable enough to put up with some rough handling.
4. Put the cards in a bag or envelope.

Whenever you need to select a student to help with an activity, you can reach into your bag and pull out a K card.

TEACHER

Rummaging around in the bag of card:

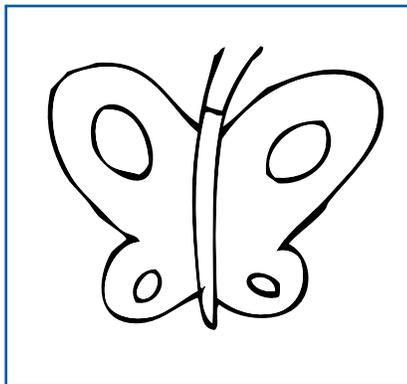
*I need a helper.*

Students are raising hands to volunteer and they plead, "Me, me."

TEACHER

*I'm going to draw a Kcon out of the bag. That will tell us who the helper will be.*

More rummaging and then a card is removed and held up for the students to see.



**FIG. 7**  
Large, laminated Kcon cards can be used to randomly select student helpers.

STUDENTS

Seeing the butterfly Kcon on the card:

*Veronica!*

School's not even a week old and non-reading students are already reading others student's symbols.

TEACHER

Beaming approval:

*Yes! This is Veronica's card. She's the butterfly. You children are reading!*

Turning the card to show what's on the backside:



**FIG. 8**  
Printing the name on the back of the card will help non-readers with name recognition.

*Here's her name. Veronica. It starts with a V. V for Veronica.*

Turning the card back to the Kcon side:

*Veronica is the butterfly. Veronica, would you please help me with the lesson?*

### Bulletin Board Displays

Give students a supply of small Kcons that they can put next to their displayed class work. The simplicity of the Kcons will add a nice element to a crowded bulletin board of student work and will enable anyone to quickly find the work of a specific child.

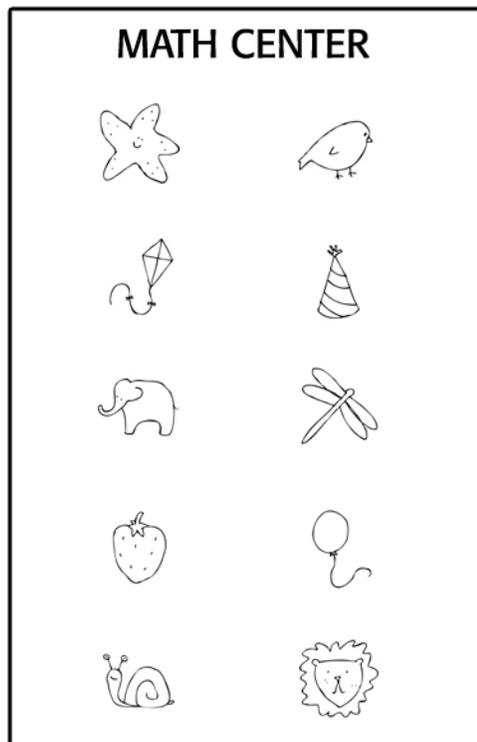


**FIG. 9**  
Figure text for bulletin board display artwork.

## Kcon Check Off List

Anyone familiar with the New Management system of student management, motivation, and engagement are no doubt acquainted with the power of a Check Off List. It's a half-sheet of paper which lists students number and can be used to collect assignments.

You could use this same strategy by merely substituting Kcons for student numbers. By placing a Check Off List near a wire basket, you'd be creating a situation in which your kindergarten students could turn in their own work and then mark off their Kcons to show that they are finished with the assignment. A quick glance at the list of unmarked symbols would apprise you of who has yet to complete the task.



**FIG. 10**  
Figure text  
for Kcon  
Check Off  
List artwork.

## Student Group Displays

This strategy, which was introduced on page 5, is to use Kcons instead of names on these kinds of bulletin boards. The whole thing would look a lot more playful yet still provide the same student information a name-based bulletin board would. *(As shown on page 3.)*

Back on page 1 there was a reference to Bill Glasser's work and the fact that he has identified five basic students needs which must be met in the classroom. One of the five needs is the need for fun. If you aren't going to provide the fun in your room, who is?

## End of the Year T-shirts

Every year, for the past 20 years of my teaching career, I silk-screened T-shirts with my students. I would purchase them wholesale from a T-shirt distributor and then, with the students' help, would screen print out class logo on each shirt.

It was always a highly anticipated project and created a unique way to identify my students whenever we were on a field trip or doing something special.

Although silk screening is a labor of love and not one I would recommend to just everyone, you could certainly do the same thing with your students by making an iron-on transfer showing everyone's Kcon in one big group.



**FIG. 11**  
Wouldn't these be fun to wear on a field trip or at a school event?

*Thought:* If the image of the whole class proudly sporting their Kcon-emblazoned shirts doesn't make you smile and say, "That is *so* cute," you might be in the wrong business.

## Appendix

On the following page you'll find:

**Kcon master sheet**

On the website you'll find:

**A set of 3-inch Kcons**

**A set of 4-inch Kcons**

