

Ideas for Teaching the Dewey Decimal System to Your Class

This unit is designed to teach the Dewey Decimal System and the types of books that one can find in each section to students of various ages. It includes information about each Dewey section along with a hand sign for each section.

I have given the information all at once. It is not separated into specific lessons or lesson plans. This is intentional. I know that everyone's schedule is different. I wanted to make this fun and easy so you can use a few minutes here and there to present and review. I have included some ideas as to when you might teach this to your students.

I am the librarian and I teach library classes to the different classrooms, so I have only about 15 minutes once a week with each class for a lesson. I need to do this quickly so I have time for a story. In grades 1–4, I present one or two Dewey levels along with the hand signs each week in my library classes. Students make the hand signs along with me and we repeat together the number of the section and what kind of books are there. For example, we will make the hand sign while we all say, “The one hundreds are Who Am I? The two hundreds are Who is My God?”, etc. The next week we review what we learned previously and add one or two more. If students seem to be having trouble remembering, I just review and add the next sign when I feel they are ready. Students seem to remember better if they use the hand signs. When I am teaching this to upper grade students, I personally use the hand signs as I am presenting the information, but I do not worry if upper grade students don't make the signs along with me. I just present the information and review until they knew it. I don't test or grade students on the information. I just ask verbal quiz questions and try to make it fun.

Multi-grade Schools: If I were teaching in a multi-grade school, one idea would be to teach this to the whole school at the same time and then have your older students review with the younger ones and help them with the hand signs. This will help the older students remember better and younger ones will enjoy working with the older ones. I would suggest you teach one hand sign each day and review the ones you had learned before adding the next level. The bookmark included can be a way to help students learn the sections. I usually copy this on colored cardstock or construction paper and hand them out.

Teachers are very busy and may not feel that they have time for this, but each sign only takes a minute or two to present. This could come at the beginning of the reading lesson or at the end of it. It could also come while lining up to go to lunch, or just before students leave for home. If you taught one Dewey sign each day, you would be through with all ten in two weeks. Then to keep students remembering them, have a short verbal quiz each day or a few times a week. For example, ask “What kind of books can be found in the 200s? In which Dewey hundred would I find a book about art?” As students begin to learn the easy ones, start making them a bit harder for a fun challenge. Who knows which Dewey section has books about World War 2? Students will have to first figure out that World War 2 is an historical event, therefore it will be in the history section – 900s. Or ask “Where would I find books on World War 2?” The answer is tricky. Information about World War 2 will be in the 900s, equipment used such as tanks would be found in the 300s, and stories about the Holocaust can be found in the 800s. Students can even come up with the quiz questions.

I hope you and your students enjoy this unit. It is meant to be educational and fun, too.

Dewey Decimal Lesson

By Audrey Mayden Campbell and Joy Palmer

I believe it is important to teach the Dewey Decimal Classification system to your students. This library organization method will be useful to them for years during their educational years and then afterwards as they use other libraries. My assistant, Joy Palmer, came up with a great method using hand motions to help them remember the hundreds and the kinds of books that are found in each section.

We use and teach this method in grades 1 – 4 and teach each Dewey Hundred along with the hand motion at a library lesson. Most of the time I can teach one or two Dewey sections along with the hand motions at a time. The next week I review previously taught Dewey sections before adding one or two more. We review until the children know in a general manner what kind of books can be found in each section and also where each section is in the library. We also encourage children to check out books from the sections that we are learning about at each visit.

Each lesson below is intended to take approximately 1 – 2 minutes each. This does not include time for questions or discussion.

The Dewey Decimal System is arranged a little like a person growing up.

100's - Who Am I? (Psychology)

Finger Motion: Hold up one finger and point to yourself.

When we are little, we think only of ourselves. Have you ever seen or heard a baby or toddler say, "Mine!" or "Me, Me, Me!?" The books in this section have information that a person might want to know about himself. Books on thoughts, feelings, and friendship would be included in this section.

200's – Who is My God? (Religion)

Finger Motion: Hold up two fingers and point up toward heaven.

As we grow a little older we start to wonder where everyone came from. These books explain the world and how it was created. Books on religions are located here. (Also books on Mythology, but we don't usually include these in our lessons!)

300's – Who is My Neighbor? (Social Science)

Finger Motion: Hold up three fingers and sweep horizontally across the classroom including everyone.

Once you learn about other people, you want to find out more about others. What do they do and where do they live? Books on careers, jobs, holidays, folktales are located here. These books are all about the social world.

400's – How Do I Communicate With My Neighbor? (Languages)

Finger Motion: Hold up four fingers and put them to your lips. I wiggle them because kids like movement.

Now that we know something about other people, we might want to communicate with them. We need to learn their language, so books on other languages are here.

500's – Man Sees the Things God Made. (Pure Science)

Finger Motion: Hold up five fingers and sweep the room with your hand as you say, "Everything God made."

Books on science and nature are in this section. We learn about the heavens, the animals, and the world God made.

600's – Man is Clever and Learns "How To" Use the Science and Nature information to Work for Him. (Applied Science/Technology)

Finger Motion: Hold palm of one hand flat and use your index finger on the other hand as you would a tool to twist back and forth on palm. You have the five fingers of one hand (What God Made) plus the finger of the other hand (Man uses What God Made) to make six fingers.

Books on cars, airplanes, building bridges and other things, caring for your health, books on diseases, cookbooks, caring for pets; all these subjects are in here. This section is the "How To" section. The animal books are in the Pure science section, but caring for them (How To) is in the Applied Science section. Examples I give are as follows:

- a. Wild mustangs are found in the 500's, but Shetland ponies are found in the 600's.
- b. Fish from the ocean are found in the 500's, but aquarium fish are found in the 600's.
- c. Coyotes are found in the 500's, but dogs are found in the 600's.
- d. Plants are found in the 500's, but medicine is found in the 600's.
- e. Minerals and metals are found in the 500's, but cars, planes, and buildings are found in the 600's.

Students can come up with their own examples if you like.

700's – Man Enjoys Leisure Time. (Fine Arts)

Finger Motion: Palm of one hand is flat and the other hand used Index and middle finger as legs walking on the palm.

Since Man has learned to use science to work for him, he now has time to enjoy things like sports, crafts, music, drawing, and other hobbies.

800's – Man Likes to Tell Stories About Himself. (Literature)

Finger Motion: Hold both hands like an open book with thumbs folded inside. Focus on this being stories to read for enjoyment, not informational.

900's – Man Likes to Leave a Record of His Doings, Goings, and Comings. (History, Geography, and Biography)

Books on history, geography, states, and countries are all here. Famous people from all over the world are also here since they have done great deeds and are known all over the world. Some libraries also put their biographies in this section while others catalog the biographies separately. Teach this the way your library is organized.

Finger Motion: Hold your fingers as if around a ball creating a 'globe' for geography. (One thumb inside.)

000's – General Information (General Junk) This includes books like encyclopedias, media, newspapers, and books that have a lot of general information such as question and answer books.

Finger Motion: Hold up two fists (showing zero fingers) and say this is 'General Junk'. You could use the term 'General Information', but the kids like the words 'General Junk' and they remember it which is the whole point.

This category has information that does not fit into just one Dewey number. For example, the encyclopedia has maps, history, science, biographies, and more. It can't be cataloged into history because there is more than just history. Since there are so many kinds of information, it is cataloged in general information. Question and answer books also fit in this section. They have all kinds of information in them and there is no one place to catalog them, so they are general.

There is a bookmark that I made to help children remember this information. I copy it on card stock so it will last a bit longer than regular paper. Colored card stock works nicely. Darker colors are often more difficult to read, so keep this in mind when you are copying. You are welcome to copy this bookmark as needed.

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- 100s - Who Am I?** (Psychology)
Thinking/Feeling/Friendship
- 200s - Who is My God?** (Religion)
Bibles/Bible Stories/Other Religions
- 300s - Who is My Neighbor?** (Social Science)
Careers/Military/Government/Holidays/Folk
-tales/Immigration/Citizenship/Money/Education
- 400s - How Can I Communicate?** (Languages)
Other languages/Dictionaries
- 500s - See What God Made** (Science/Nature)
Animals/Plants/Dinosaurs/ Fossils/Biology/
Trees/Physics/Chemistry/Space/ Math/Science
Experiments/
- 600s - Man Uses the Things God Made**
(Applied Science/How To/Technology)
Bridges/Buildings/Cooking/Gardening/Pets/
Making toys/Making forts and furniture/Diseases/
Medicine
- 700s - Man Has Leisure Time/Recreation**
(Fine Arts)
Art/Music/Sports/Crafts/Drawing/Games/
Stamp collecting/Photography
- 800s - Man Tells Stories** (Literature)
Poetry/Stories (Fiction)
- 900s - Man Leaves a Record of Himself**
(History/Geography/B - Biography)
Countries/States/History/Famous people
- 000s - General Junk** (Reference)
Encyclopedias/Trivia/World Records/Facts

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