A Look Into Ms. Houston's Second-Grade Classroom

It's Wednesday, and students file into Ms. Houston's classroom, put their things away, and head to their tables. One student from each table heads to the *resource table* to retrieve the folders, *Efficacy Notebooks*, and *table journal* for their *home group*. Another student takes the *table journal* and looks for Ms. Houston's comments on how well they worked together yesterday. In one group, Gabriella reads the comments from the *table journal*, which were mostly good, except for them needing to return materials to the *resource table* so others can use them. The group members all nod or give a thumbs-up to signify they'll work on that today. Then they individually read Ms. Houston's comments on their *Efficacy Notebooks* and work in their individual folders. Sam had two completed work papers with Ms. Houston's "completed" stamp on them, so he takes those out of the folder and puts them in another folder to take home. Next, he starts up his computer, puts on headphones, and watches Ms. Houston's videotaped "Morning Message." In it, she comments on how mature they were when they went to the assembly yesterday. She reminds them that today they will have a travel agent in the "Expert's Corner" from 11:00 to 12:00 and tells them to make sure each group has signed up for a timeslot to meet with her and ask the questions they wrote about planning a vacation. She then shares that she has added a few *small-group mini-lessons*, so they should be sure to check to see if any interest them. Sam had scheduled the morning yesterday, so he gets right to work on the activities he chose to do.

The students are working on two challenges. They are planning a family vacation and they are creating campaigns to stop squishing ants, based on the story *Hey Little Ant* that they are reading. Lena and Cassie are buddy-reading *Hey Little Ant* and taking turns summarizing the viewpoint of the boy and the ant. Each has to agree with the other's summarization before they go on to the next page. Billy signed up for a "Rhyme Time" learning center and is matching words that rhyme; next, he'll create 10 more rhyming pairs — 5 for nouns and 5 for adjectives. Ms. Houston pulls up a chair next to him and asks him to share how he's going about matching the words. One group is sharing the opening line of their "vacation pitch" with one another. Each reads their first line; then each student has to say something they liked about it; then each student starts with "What if . . ." and gives an idea the writer could use to make the pitch even better, using the rubric to give suggestions. On Monday, Ms. Houston offered a *benchmark lesson* on the power of an opening line by sharing several and asking students how they felt. Students then worked on activities related to writing a powerful first line, and this is one of them — called an application activity.

Ms. Houston is offering a *small-group mini-lesson* on "How Characters Respond to Challenges." This was a section on the *activity list*, and there were several choices; Justin decided to join the teacher's lesson. Three other students have joined the lesson as well, one of whom was given an invitation in her folder to join — which means Ms. Houston really felt like she needed the help. Ms. Houston puts up a chart for what characters do, think, feel, and say. She reads a passage and explains how the characters responded by using the chart. She does that twice, then reads a passage and asks the students to think about their answers before responding. Then she has them work on one together, and next gives them a booklet of five more examples for them to work on. Ms. Houston watches as they get started and then lets them work while she checks in on the rest of the class. Stephen has his name on the *help board* for help with his questions for the guest expert. He wants to come up with better questions than the ones he had, so she asks him a few questions to guide him toward developing stronger questions. Once he says he's got

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it, she goes back to the *small-group mini-lesson* table to observe the students finishing up. She walks through one of the examples, asking them to offer up what they wrote. She then tells them to put the booklets in the "Work Completed" side of their folder and she'll look at them later. They then return to their work.

It is almost time for "Quiet Time" — a half-hour during which students can only work individually on quiet activities. Pearl takes out a creative writing assignment as she likes to write when it is quiet. Jaxson reads his choice book because Ms. Houston reminded him in her comments on his folder to read during quiet time so he could concentrate. Ms. Houston continues to facilitate, quietly. When she realizes Masa could use some help in creating the budget for his trip, she asks him to come to the *small-group mini-lesson* table so as to not disturb others with their conversation. She then works with him on creating the list of expenses and finding costs online.

When quiet time ends, Parker's *home group* has scheduled a time to meet to discuss their brainstorming notes together. They use that row of the rubric to help one another while passing around a plastic "discussion duck" to help them take turns and share. The timekeeper notices that it is almost time to go to art class and reminds the group that they have five minutes left before they have to leave. They wrap up their discussion and each student writes a short reflection in their *Efficacy Notebooks* to answer two questions: 1) What knowledge did you gain from the *home group* discussion? and 2) How will you use what you learned to tackle the challenge of planning your family vacation?

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