

Math Moments that Matter

FIRST GRADE

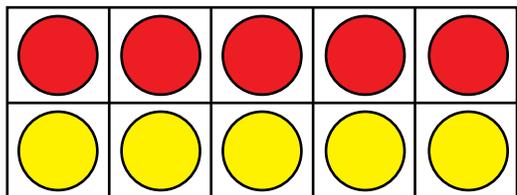


Equations and the Meaning of the Equal Sign

In 1st grade, students learn that an equation is like a balance—both sides must show the same amount. They use tools, drawings, and simple number sentences to see that the equal sign means “the same as,” not “the answer comes next.” These experiences help students make sense of how numbers relate to each other and build a strong foundation for solving equations with understanding.

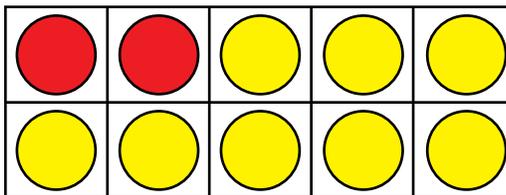
Students use ten-frames and counters to show that two different number stories can make the same total. In the image, one side shows $5 + 5$, and the other shows $2 + 8$. Both fill the ten-frame to make 10. When students build both sides, they see that the equal sign means “the same as.” These simple models help students understand equations and explain their thinking in clear, student-friendly ways.

EXAMPLE: Ten-frame showing 5 red counters and 5 yellow counters



$$5 + 5$$

EXAMPLE: Ten-frame showing 2 red counters and 8 yellow counters



$$2 + 8$$

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Communicating Reasoning in Math

In 1st grade, students learn that they can talk about their math thinking! When they work with equations, they practice explaining their ideas in simple ways and listening to others. They learn to:

- Tell what the equal sign means—that both sides show the same amount
- Use counters, drawings, or numbers to show how they know
- Listen to a classmate’s idea and build on it
- Use friendly math phrases like “equal means the same as” or “both sides match”

These experiences show students that math is something they can talk through and make sense of—not just something for which they find an answer.

What You Might See in the Classroom

Students building and comparing groups to see if both sides of an equation match.

Teachers asking:

- “How do you know both sides are equal?”
- “Can you make a different equation that also makes 8?”
- “What does the equal sign mean?”

Students using cubes, counters, or drawings to “balance” equations, such as $5 + 3 = 4 + 4$.

Students sharing ideas and deciding whether an equation is true.

Quick partner talks: Students connecting addition and subtraction to the idea of matching both sides.

What You Can Do at Home

Use snacks or small toys to compare amounts: “I have 3 grapes and 2 grapes. You have 5 grapes. Do we have the same?”

Ask your student: “What does the equal sign mean?” or “How can we make both sides the same?”

Try it with everyday items. Make two small piles and check whether they match.

Talk together: “Is $7 + 2$ the same as $6 + 3$? How do you know?”

Make new equations: “If 10 is the same as $6 + 4$, what else makes 10?”

Make it a Math Moment!

Math is talk! When students explain how both sides of an equation match, it helps them understand that the equal sign means “the same as.”

Tap or Scan for Interactive Tools and More Resources!

