



BACK TO SCHOOL SURVIVAL GUIDE

How to set your child up for a successful year



DR. MARILISA MOREA
LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

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Transitioning back to school can be an exciting time. But, let's face it, it can also bring up a lot of questions and worries for families. That's why I have crafted this guide for parents (and kiddos, too) as the first step to help with school being back in session. If you have a teen heading to High School (or Middle School) or Higher Ed, I have free copies of guides specifically for them that can be easily accessed on my website - check them out!

The aim of this guide is to offer you some information, things to consider, and tips to help mitigate and manage many of the fears or worries that are part and parcel of the back to school jitters. In an effort to offer you detailed and easy to follow information in a concise manner, I have sectioned this guide into three separate parts: The first section focuses on preparing your child for the return to school adventure even before school starts. Second, managing stressors once school is in session will be addressed. And, lastly, the goal will be to offer you tools for a successful school year.

Before you get started, here's a bit about me, too! I am a Licensed Clinical Psychologist working with individuals of all ages. I was a Lead Psychologist at a Toronto-based Children and Adolescent's Mental Health Clinic for 10 years, and I am now the proud owner of my own practice, Monarch Therapy + Wellness Centre. To learn more about me, and for more resources and information on all things mental health, check out my TikTok or Instagram pages **@dr.morea** or head to my website: **www.monarchtherapy.ca**



ENJOY,

DR. MARILISA MOREA
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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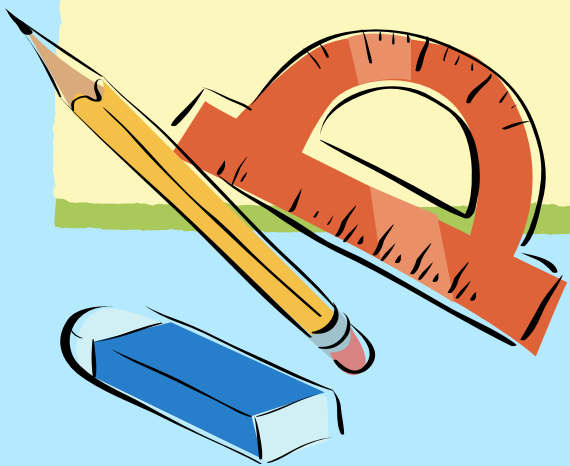




SECTION 1:

Summer's Almost Over!

Okay, let's get started! This section will focus on things that you can do to prepare for a successful school year. While heading back to school can elicit feelings of anxiety, being prepared can help manage some of the fears that your child might experience.



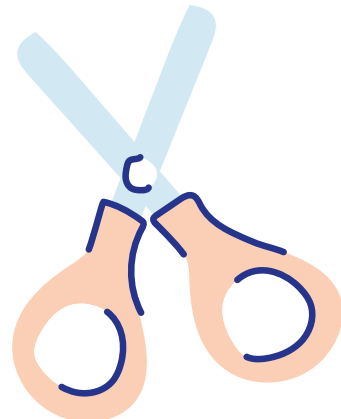
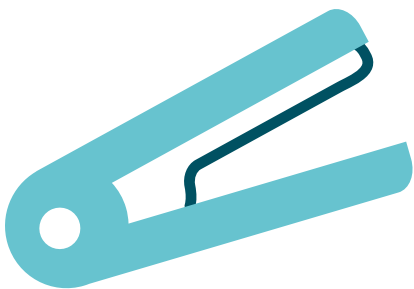
Keeping Realistic Expectations

To begin, in order to set up a successful school year, it's important to have and hold realistic expectations. The messages that our children receive will shape how they emotionally walk into school. Thus, it's important to set a tone that fosters support, growth, compassion, and understanding. This includes meeting your child where they are at.

For instance, if your child excels in one area but has some learning challenges in another, by only focusing on the growth areas, it sends a message that they are not good enough, even if done unintentionally. Likewise, focusing solely on academic success without considering all other areas of strength your child holds, will again send a negative message to them.

Having unrealistic expectations can create a sense of anxiety and perhaps even low self-worth if they are not able to meet the standards set for them. Having healthy and appropriate expectations, alternatively, will promote confidence and a sense of agency for them. Remembering to celebrate all successes, no matter how small they might seem, illustrates to your child that their efforts are not going unnoticed.

Take a look at the following categories. Work with your child to set some goals in each of these areas. Do this goal setting separately first and then review them together with your child to see if your goals are aligned. This will not only give you insight into what they value, but what causes them some worry.



Keeping Realistic Expectations



Academic



Social



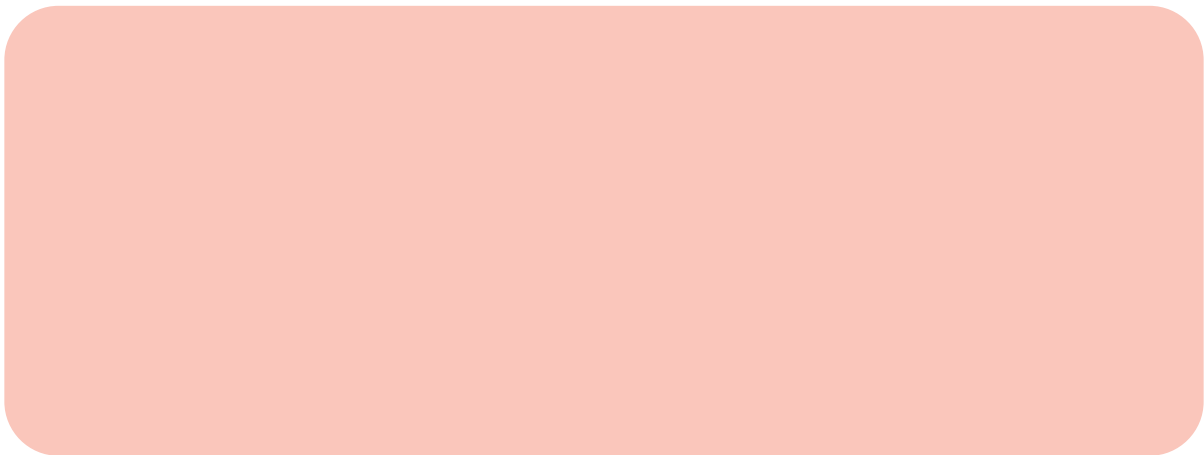
Emotional

Take a look at the goals each of you set. Did anything surprise you?
How can you adjust your expectations to meet them more at their
starting point if they are not similar?

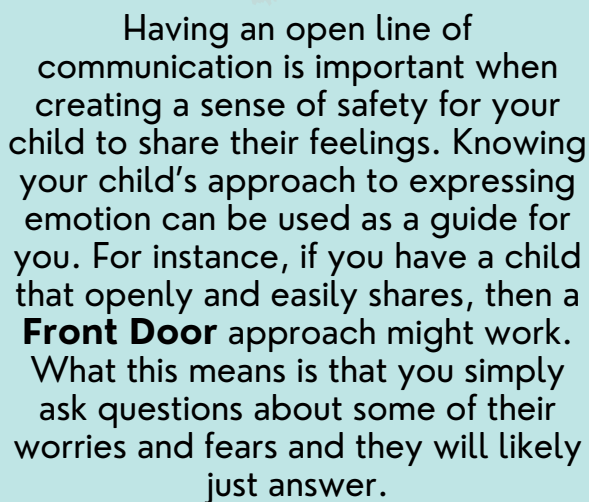
Normalizing Fears

Another way we can prepare for the start of the school year is to acknowledge and accept that fears are a natural element of the experience. Sometimes we can carry our own worries that shift to our children, too. Trying to acknowledge and manage our own feelings, without creating fears within our children can be challenging. But, it is also imperative to allow space for them to shape their own feelings and thoughts about starting and returning to school, without influence from the feelings of their caregivers.

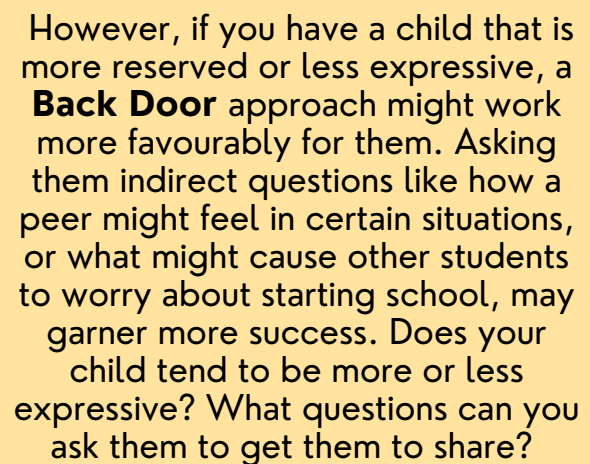
Think about the worries you hold and list them below:



How can you work on separating your fears from the worries your child may have?



Having an open line of communication is important when creating a sense of safety for your child to share their feelings. Knowing your child's approach to expressing emotion can be used as a guide for you. For instance, if you have a child that openly and easily shares, then a **Front Door** approach might work. What this means is that you simply ask questions about some of their worries and fears and they will likely just answer.



However, if you have a child that is more reserved or less expressive, a **Back Door** approach might work more favourably for them. Asking them indirect questions like how a peer might feel in certain situations, or what might cause other students to worry about starting school, may garner more success. Does your child tend to be more or less expressive? What questions can you ask them to get them to share?

Regardless of the approach, it's going to be critical that if and when your child talks about worries, that these are validated and not dismissed. It's quite common that as caregivers, we don't know how to respond when a worry is brought to our attention. So, here I will offer you some suggestions of how to reframe worry thoughts that might surface:

Instead of these:

- Stop worrying
- It's going to be fine
- You're thinking too much
- Think happy thoughts

REMINDER...

Try These:

- Your feelings are valid and it's okay you feel this way
- Let me know if there's something specific I can do to help you
- You're allowed to feel this way, even if you don't know why
- This is tricky, I'm here to help if you need me
- I can see your emotions are strong right now, would you like to go somewhere quiet together?

Routine & Structure for the Win!

The end of the summer break can cause a lot of distress for kids as they know that their fun times are ending and the hard work is coming. That's why slowly shifting them back prior to starting school can help ease the blow a bit. Using the last week or two of summer is generally a good time to start creating more structure and routine. Devising a plan and sharing it with your child can also help them mentally prepare for how things will change.

If shifting the routine and structure is not feasible for your family, then at least revisit your expectations. For instance, allowing children to have late summer nights that lead to daily sleep-ins, but then expecting them to wake early the first weeks of school without issue is a failure set-up. So, recognizing that the first few weeks back will be full of growing pains might help with moderating expectations and stress levels in the home.

To help your family get organized, I've put together a list of common activities and a calendar. Track your commitments and activities to help set you up on the right foot:

- Bedtime
- Homework
- Grooming habits
- Eating habits
- Morning routine
- Extracurriculars
- Meal times
- Socialization
- Down time
- Chores



WEEKLY PLANNER

Weekly priorities

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Notes

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Checklist

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Appointment

Reminder

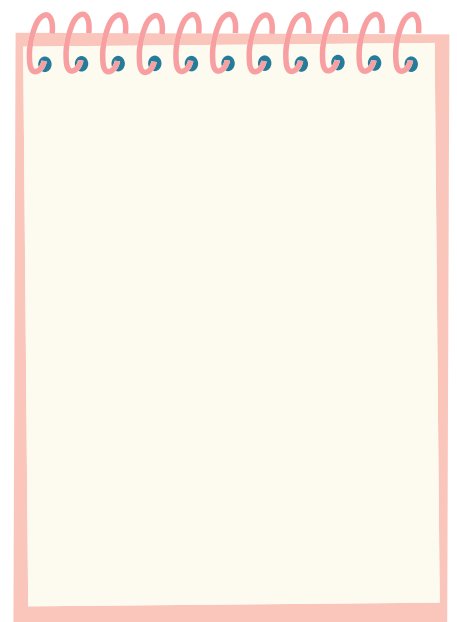
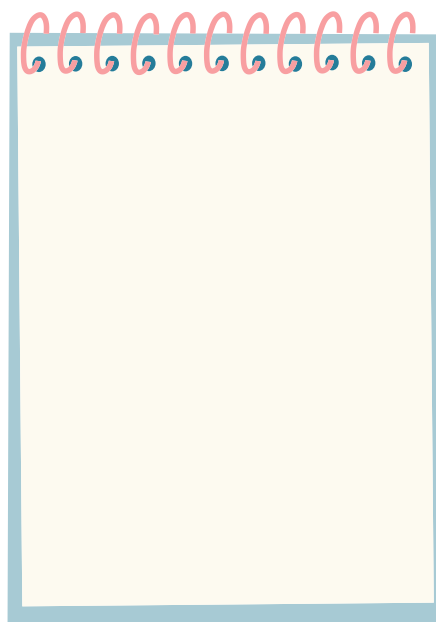
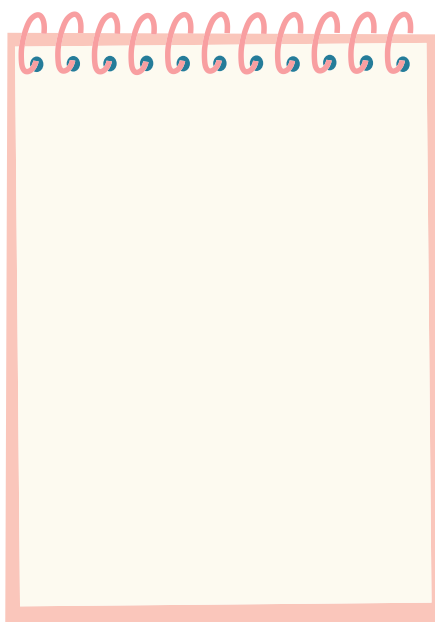
Shifting the Focus: A Recipe for Success!

It's easy to get caught up in the worries of what returning to school might bring. One strategy to help with this is to shift the focus from what worries we have onto what provides excitement to starting off the school year. Hence, pivoting from what can go wrong to what can go right.

Below are a few suggestions on ways to entice excitement for your child:



What list can you create of things that will shift the focus more positively in your home?





SECTION 2: School's in Session

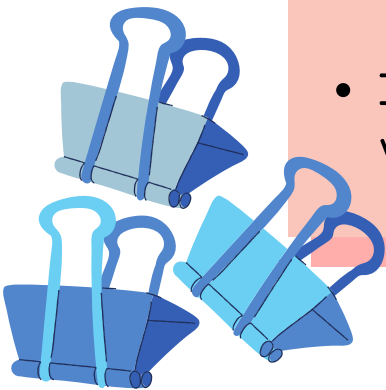
As we learned in the previous section, being proactive is critical to paving the road to success. In this section, the focus will be on understanding ways to manage these fears once school is in session.

Adjusting to Transition

The adjustment back to school can take up to 3 months, depending on the temperament of your child and the expectations at school. Oftentimes, parents will start to see a positive shift after the Winter break. And while this may be quicker or slower for some children, having realistic expectations are important for a positive academic experience.

So how do you know how their adjustment is going, especially if your child isn't much of a sharer? If you feel stuck and don't get much information from your child, it may be that you are asking yes or no questions (did you have fun today?) Here are some good questions to ask about their school days that might create more thoughtful responses:

- Who was someone you played with today?
- What was your favourite subject today? What did you learn?
- What was a fun game at recess you participated in?
- What was the most boring part of the day? How come?
- If you could change one thing at school, what would it be?
- If you could do more of something at school, what would that be?



Is it time for Support?

If you are still unsure how to gauge school progress, here's a few things to consider that school might be challenging for them:

- Your child comes home with daily worries
- Homework takes quite long and is a constant battle to finish
- Your child is having a hard time being social or making friends (plays alone, doesn't talk about anyone from school, feeling left out a lot, etc.)
- Your child says school is dumb, the worst, too hard, not worth it
- They fight heading to school each morning

Complete a list of what "tells" your child has that school is challenging for them:



Access support from a pediatrician, teacher, or head directly to a therapist if you feel in need.

Remember that you know your child best, so asking for a check-in with your child's teacher if any of these are a constant occurrence is a good place to start. If your concerns seem to be supported by their teacher, having a conversation about them with your child is important, too. Letting them know that support is there for them can ease a lot of their worries.



SECTION 3:

Success-Building Habits

What better way to foster success than to build positive habits. This section is more of a reminder to be mindful of the balance that life needs. It also offers some tools when life feels a bit tough.

Importance of a Balanced Lifestyle

Once school starts back up, the hustle and bustle of the busyness can happen quite quickly. As parents we can lose focus of what matters as life gets in the way and patience runs thin. Here's a reminder that sometimes balance is what quiets the chaos. Here's a list of things that can help with balance in your home:

FOCUS ON HEALTH - SLEEP, NUTRITION, ACTIVITY

Do your best with where you are at and kick the guilt. Find creative ways to incorporate these aspects into your life without the added pressure that it needs to be perfect. A little bit of something is better than nothing.

EXTRACURRICULARS

Remember that these should not just be for a future resume; they should be to help foster friendships and socialization, having fun and learning something new.

DOWNTIME

Make time for downtime - Because let's face it, kids get burnt out, too!

SOCIALIZATION

Encouraging socialization in many forms, when possible is critical to healthy development and to overall success as well.

Strategies for Worries

Below is a list of some coping skills that you can use with your child to set them up for success!

LOOK FOR CLUES

If you are worried that your child might be feeling anxious or depressed, keep an eye out for some of these common symptoms that may be new:

- Extra clingy to a caregiver
- Lots of defiant behaviour
- Frequent nightmares
- Change in appetite
- Easily set off or crying spells

FIND SUPPORT

Check in with your child's doctor to talk next steps, including getting some support for your family. Try calming apps and music, scheduling worry time, talking or writing about the fears, reading books and/or websites with helpful information.

BIG BREATHS

An easy and effective way to do this is "starfish" or "finger" breathing. Have your child trace their hand with a finger. As they move up the fingers inhale, when they reach a point or valley, hold, and as they trace down their fingers, exhale. Do each of these steps in counts of three, and be sure to do the whole hand.

YUMMY YUMMY

An example of grounding is by using your child's favourite food. For instance, ask them to envision eating ice cream; what does it smell like, feel like, taste like, look like. Then explore these memories with them. Who is with them, what are they doing, what happiness does it bring?

Strategies for Worries

Below is a list of some other coping skills that you can use with your child to set them up for success!

RAINBOWS AHEAD

One way to help kids calm their bodies and minds is by using each of their senses to reconnect with the present and to focus on distraction. A fun way to do this is to have your child identify things in the room and around them in all the colours of the rainbow.

LABEL OR NAME IT

By acknowledging and externalizing their worry, your child will realize that it is not "them" that is the problem but "Worry Fred" instead. Get creative with names. Then, have them draw a picture of the worry and then another picture with them conquering it.

SET LIMITS

When your child asks something multiple times, simply reply, "What was my answer to that? Ok great, you know the answer then so no need to keep asking no matter what your brain tells you." This rewires their brain to feel confident in themselves rather than feeling the need to rely on others for reassurance.

GET ACTIVE

Behavioural activation (getting up and moving) is key. Go for a walk and play eye spy, head to the park, play a sport, dance to an upbeat song. Fun fact: Getting the body moving can change a person's mood in as little as 5 minutes.

FINAL NOTE

I HOPE YOU FOUND THIS HELPFUL!

A huge THANK YOU for reading this guide. I hope that you found it helpful and useful. I know that this process can bring about a lot of questions, and my goal was to answer some of those for you. As you prepare for the academic year ahead, remind yourself that the worries will likely fade (or maybe shift), but the confidence you can help them build will last a lifetime.

If you are finding that this guide created more questions than answers, or the worries seem to be higher than average, it might be time to have a chat with your child's doctor to see about a more individualized care plan to help manage these symptoms. Prevention is also a success tool.

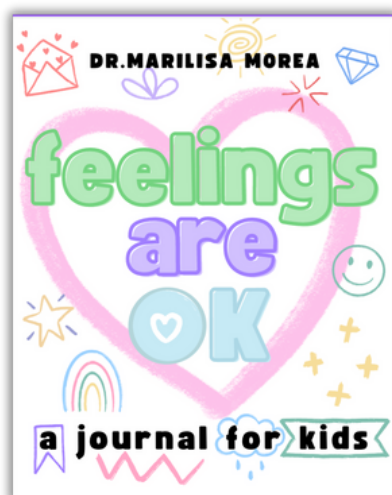
Cheers to your child's Back to School Success!

- Marilisa

Don't forget to follow me on my socials:

TikTok, Instagram, Facebook - @dr.morea

Head to my website for more freebies, too! www.monarchtherapy.ca

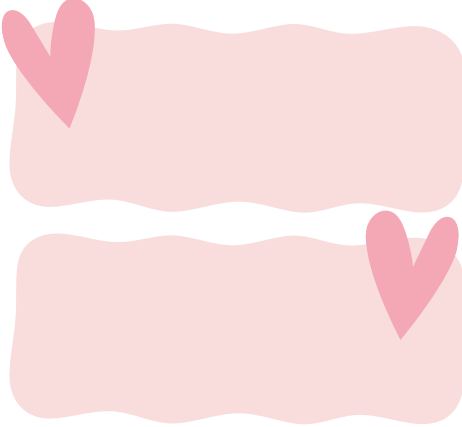


Take a sneak peek at my Kid's Journal. Head to my website or Amazon if you would like to add it to your back to school success toolkit!

FEELINGS ARE OK KID'S JOURNAL

Date: / /

What are two places that feel
SAFE and **COMFORTING** to you?



Date: / /

What are some **worries** that you
can release?



Date: / /

CHECK-IN TIME!

Today I feel...



Draw your own feelings
characters here



YOU DID IT! CONGRATULATIONS!



On behalf of our family, we want to thank you for using this journal. We really hope you are feeling more confident and proud. We also wish that problem-solving is a bit easier now.

Before you go, we want to remind you of how special and cool you really are. Don't ever forget that, even when life is tough, or people are mean. Remind yourself that the way people treat you is not about how awesome you are, but about them forgetting their manners or even maybe struggles they are having instead.

In case you need some tips for when you aren't feeling your best, remember these things:

first - being distracted can help so much. So, do something that is fun or exciting to you.

second - every problem has a solution or two, so ask for help if you're feeling stuck. Someone else might have the answer you are searching for.

third - no emotions are bad, we just need to find ways to manage them appropriately. Sometimes that even means crying it out until we feel a bit better!

Sending love your way,
~Mimi, Mallie & their Mom~



ABOUT ME!

This journal is specially made for our friends, by myself and my two littles. Full of prompts, problem-solving skill building and confidence boosting activities!

FINAL FINAL NOTE

Looking for some more support? I have you covered. I have created a series of books and resources for all ages to help support healthy well-being, transitions and life phases.

Get It Together Series!

A series of self-guided workbooks and journals aimed to foster self-esteem development and boost self-confidence through information, tips, tricks & more!



Crushing Camp Series Time to Unpack!

In the Crushing Camp - Time to Unpack Series, campers will learn all about the important things to get them settled and excited to head to camp.



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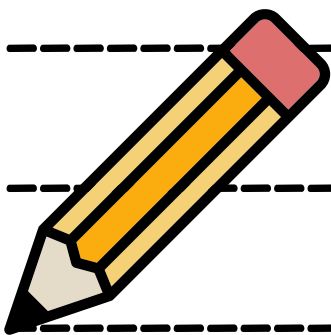
MENTAL HEALTH TOOLS, WORKSHEETS,
POSTERS AND RESOURCES FOR YOUR HOME OR
OFFICE MADE WITH LOVE BY A
PSYCHOLOGIST

SOCIALS: @DR.MOREA

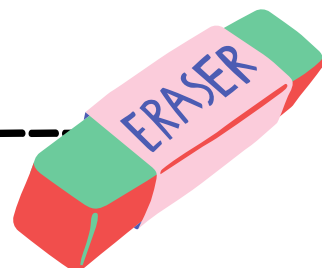
CHECK OUT MY WEBSITE
WWW.MONARCHTHERAPY.CA
FOR FREE STUFF AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
ALL OF MY BOOKS!

NOTES

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NOTES




NOTES



A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page.

NOTES

An illustration of school supplies is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page. It features a stack of three books with blue, yellow, and red covers. A red apple with a brown stem sits on top of the books. To the left of the books is a light blue pencil holder containing several colored pencils (yellow, blue, red, and orange).