



Family Letter — Unit 1

Algebra 1 — Unit 1: Variables and Expressions

1 FAMILY LETTER

Dear Families, Welcome to Algebra 1! We're excited to begin a year of mathematical discovery with your student.

What Your Student Will Learn in Unit 1

This first unit builds the foundation for all of algebra. Students will:

1. **Use variables** to represent unknown quantities
2. **Write expressions** from verbal descriptions
3. **Apply GEMDAS** (the order of operations) to evaluate expressions accurately
4. **Substitute values** for variables and simplify
5. **Combine like terms** and use the distributive property
6. **Apply algebra to real-world financial situations** — like calculating discounts and sales tax

Standards covered: Minnesota math standards 9.3.5.5, 9.3.5.7, and 9.3.5.8

Key Vocabulary You Might See

Term	Simple Definition
Variable	A letter that stands for an unknown number
Expression	A math phrase with numbers, variables, and operations
Coefficient	The number in front of a variable
GEMDAS	Grouping → Exponents → Multiply/Divide → Add/Subtract
Evaluate	Find the value of an expression
Like terms	Terms with the same variable part (like $3x$ and $5x$)

How You Can Help at Home

• Ask your student: “**What does GEMDAS stand for?**” (Grouping, Exponents, Multiplication/Division, Addition/Subtraction) • Have your student explain why $3 + 4 \times 2 = 11$ but $(3 + 4) \times 2 = 14$ • Talk about math in everyday life: “**If we buy 3 notebooks for \$ 2 each and use a \$ 5 coupon, how would we write that as an expression?**” • Ask about “**Code Match**” — the Prime Time game they’ll play in class

Prime Time PBIS Games

Unit 1 features **Code Match**, a card-matching game where students pair expressions with their values. It’s a zero-device, team-based game that builds fluency while practicing GEMDAS and evaluating expressions.

MN Companies in Our Problems

Students will see problems connected to Minnesota companies including **Target** (Minneapolis), **General Mills** (Golden Valley), **3M** (Maplewood), **Best Buy** (Richfield), and **Land O’Lakes** (Arden Hills). These real-world connections show how algebra is used every day in our own community.

Cultural Connections

Our curriculum honors Minnesota’s Native American heritage per **MN 120B.021**. Unit 1 incorporates **Ojibwe and Dakota** cultural contexts in mathematics, including beadwork patterns (symmetry of equivalent expressions) and wild rice harvesting (using expressions to track yields).

Assessment

Students will take short quizzes throughout the unit and an end-of-unit test. All assessments are tagged to Minnesota state standards, and results will be available through the school’s learning management system.

Questions?

If you have questions about the unit, please reach out to your student’s teacher. Thank you for partnering with us in your student’s mathematical journey! **Merit Education Group**™
