

Reading Simple Bar Charts: Making Sense of Tally and Pictogram Data in Year 1

A gentle guide to how Year 1 children learn to turn simple counts and pictures into bar charts and pictograms to understand information.

What are bar charts and pictograms?

In Year 1 (children aged 5 to 6), children learn about 'statistics', which is just a fancy word for collecting and looking at information. They start by using tally marks—small lines used to count things quickly. They then learn to turn these counts into pictograms, which are charts that use pictures to show numbers, and bar charts, which use coloured blocks or bars. These tools help children see patterns and compare amounts visually, rather than just looking at a list of numbers.

What happens in the classroom?

Your child will likely take part in simple surveys with their classmates, such as voting for their favourite fruit or counting the weather over a week. The teacher will show them how to move from counting (tallying) to drawing the data. They will learn a few key words to describe what they see: 'most' for the highest bar, 'least' for the lowest, 'total' for the whole amount, and 'difference' to describe the gap between two bars. This helps them turn raw numbers into a clear visual story.

What this means for your child

The goal is for your child to feel confident answering simple questions about a chart, such as 'Which fruit is the most popular?' or 'How many more children like apples than pears?'. This builds their mathematical thinking and helps them understand that maths is a useful tool for describing the world around them. Because every school teaches slightly differently, you might want to ask your child's teacher how they introduce these charts in class.

Simple ways to help at home

You don't need any special equipment to practice this. Try short, playful activities during your daily routine. You could count different coloured cars passing your house or sort a bowl of mixed fruit, then draw a quick 'picture chart' together on a piece of paper. Ask gentle questions like, 'Which one has the most?' or 'Which has the fewest?'. Keeping it light and fun ensures your child stays curious without feeling pressured.

Common questions from parents

Many parents wonder if their child needs to draw perfect charts. In Year 1, the focus is on understanding the concept of the data, not the artistic precision of the drawing. You may also wonder if children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language can do this; yes, these visual tools are often very helpful as they rely on pictures rather than complex text. If you have concerns about your child's progress, your child's teacher is the best person to speak with.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Mathematics programmes of study

