

DEPARTMENT NEWS

Recorded Webinars Available

Are you looking for a bit more guidance on any of these topics:

- Balanced Literacy
- Basics to Reading Instruction
- Guided Reading
- Reading and Math Centers 101
- or Guided Math

As requested before, I finally started recording some of the webinars I have done. All the webinars listed above can be found on our department website by clicking the link below. Please ALWAYS feel free to email me if you have follow up questions or would like a resource mentioned in the webinar.
<http://elementary.conceptschoools.org/recorded-webinars/>

“I’m Looking for Someone who.....”

Are you looking to implement Guided Math this year? Maybe you’d like to enhance your literacy centers. One of the best ways to get new ideas is to visit other classrooms and meet with your fellow teaching peers. Did you know there are 50 teachers in your grade level throughout the network???

One of the best parts of my role is that I get to visit so many classrooms. Let me help connect you with someone you can visit and/or meet with. Simply send me an email with some details about what you’d like to see. I will help connect you with someone in the network to either go observe or even just to meet with virtually (Zoom webinar platform offers a free account or you can try Google Hangouts!)

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Winter Break Tech Options

Below are some kid-friendly sites that can keep little ones busy but LEARNING over their Winter Break! Take a little time over the next couple weeks to just preview these sites with your class so they have an idea of what to concentrate on (and the families will LOVE that you helped preview them ahead of time.

*****PS-Stay tuned via email for resources you can send home with your students to work on over Winter Break.*****



ABCya!

<http://www.abcya.com/>

ABCya! is an educational games website that organizes games by grade level (K-5) and subject categories, including letters, numbers, holiday games, and more. Games include arcade-style games that kids use arrow keys to play, word find games that can be played on screen or printed, racing games that can be played virtually against other players, typing games, and more.



PBSKids

<https://pbskids.org/>

The PBS KIDS Games app and online website has over 90 free learning games with the standard favorite PBS KIDS characters. They have also added an AWESOME new feature called Kart Kingdom which is an explorable world in which kids can complete quests, craft new gadgets, play mini-games, design their own custom karts, and work together with other players to make new things.



Funbrain

<https://www.funbrain.com/>

FunBrain’s games are organized into a reading section, a math arcade, and a fun arcade, and the “All Games” tab gives a detailed breakdown of them all by topic, type, and grade level. A typical game uses a storyline while presenting facts (tossing pigs, crushing asteroids, basketball) and correct answers move the story forward to win. There is also an awesome section where students can READ books (like one from famed author Kate DiCamillo) online!



Starfall

<https://www.starfall.com/>

Starfall.com is an interactive website intended for early readers (K-2). It features a number of activities to encourage kids who are learning to read. The activities build on each other, starting with learning the alphabet and its associated sounds, and followed by reading simple online books and more advanced reading activities

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the “Holidays”

by Jennifer Sajovec

Let's take a quick stroll down Sajovec Memory Lane. Way back in 2007, I was teaching 25 Kindergarteners and listening to some commentary from a parent. “Why does this school not have a Christmas music program or even a Christmas party? The school my kids just came from did.” I took a very deep breath and simply said “Well, half of the kids in this class are Jewish.” She simply didn't even realize that by hosting a “Christmas” themed gathering, we'd be endorsing one holiday over another.

Since that day, I've been hugely conscious of the need for our schools to be sensitive to ALL religious and cultural beliefs around the winter holidays. Our students should feel that we (as schools and educators) equally value their religion, culture, nationality, etc. So as educators whose calling in life is to ensure every student feels welcome and accepted, let's strive for an inclusive environment and wish everyone “Happy Holidays!”

Now I realize many of our schools have already planned some special activities for that last torturous, I mean exciting last week before winter break. So, if that's your school, please continue reading! There are definitely awesome ways to bring the holidays (ALL the HOLIDAYS) into your classroom.



Celebrate vs. Educate

This strategy should become ingrained in your memory! Our role as secular educators should be to embrace all cultural and religious holidays. The best suggestion for how to accomplish this is to actually TEACH! Instead of planning a big party for the holidays, let's use that time to expose our students to other cultures, holidays and traditions.

Educating over celebrating will keep the classroom environment inclusive and responsive to all students' needs. Always try to approach holidays in an academic way that enriches students understanding of the religious or cultural history of that holiday. One very popular method is to have stations where students participate in activities that teach them about a particular holiday. Here is a brief list of winter(ish) holidays that have deep cultural roots.

- St. Lucia Day (Swedish)
- Fiesta of Our Lady Guadalupe (Mexican)
- Hanukkah (Jewish)
- Boxing Day (Australian, Canadian, English, Irish)
- Kwanza (African American)
- Omisoka (Japanese)
- Diwali (Indian)

Special Considerations:

- Do your research! Before planning a Holidays Around the World, make sure you fully understand and have accurate information on each holiday. Students should participate in activities that teach them in depth and correct information that is relevant to their learning.
- Reinforce to students that some of the holidays you are learning about may happen NOT during December.
- Be sure it's “Holidays around the World” and not “Christmas around the World.” It's the small difference that make the most inclusive difference.

Involve Families and Communities

Your students' primary caretakers are going to be your best source of information into the child's belief system and values, and they can be your biggest ally when trying to maneuver holidays and classroom celebrations.

One idea is to do an informal survey of the traditions celebrate in each student's home(s). Family members work together to fill out a one-page form and the children illustrate the page. Better yet...once you receive the forms, go through to select some family members to serve as “guest teachers” to come in and share their particular traditions with your students.

Additionally, try reaching out to different cultural centers to find volunteers who may also be able to come in and share about their holiday!

Proceed with Caution

Do you remember that day that there was an unexpected fire drill and all of your scheduling and plans got thrown off? Can you even imagine that kind of chaos for 14 days in a row? As we are all looking forward to a relaxing winter break, for many of our students that time away from the consistency and routine of school is very unnerving.

We expect students to be super excited, but many are actually very apprehensive about being away from school for two weeks. You may start to see students acting out in response to their anxiety. All the extra talk of the HOLIDAY may be contributing to some of the anxiety your most vulnerable students. Be cautious and cognizant. Be prepared to offer extra support and scale back holiday activities when necessary. The We Are Teachers site JUST posted this article on ways to help students over the weeks leading up to winter break:

<https://goo.gl/JwywEr>

Additional Websites:

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/winter-holidays>

<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/winter-holidays/>

<https://www.counselorup.com/blog/culturally-responsive-holidays>