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In the Classroom: The Winter Tradition Project (Feb. '91)


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IN THE CLASSROOM

Michael P. French, Bowling Green State University
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The winter tradition project

Barbara Elaine Sargent

In an effort to involve all students and, to educate them about the cultures of other countries, I developed a "winter tradition" project. The project required that students write brief descriptions of things their families do during the holidays or winter months. These were compiled into a class booklet. The winter tradition project proved to be an excellent activity for middle school students because it allowed them to learn about each other while increasing their writing, computer, and interpersonal skills. I introduced this five-day project to five language arts classes of 20-25 students each.

I began the winter tradition project in mid-December by asking the class to make a list of 10 things they and their families did to prepare for the winter season. The students spent some time discussing their lists, which included taking out winter clothes, stocking up on firewood, decorating the house for the approaching holidays, and planning winter vacations. The students then chose one item from their lists to expand into a short article. Many students wrote about their families' holiday traditions. Some students even wrote about a particular food their families prepare during the winter months and later included recipes as part of their description.

The next day, the students exchanged their papers with a partner for a brief revising/editing conference. After the conference, the students wrote a revision of their stories, taking into consideration their partner's suggestions. Then the class voted on a title

for their booklet. Some of the titles the students chose for their class booklets included "Decking the Halls," "Holiday Happenings," and "Winterfest."

We spent the third day in our school's computer room where the students made use of a word processor to

type their articles. When they had typed and printed a copy, the students exchanged papers with a partner one last time for final proofreading, after which they printed a final copy of their work (see examples).

On the fourth day, we divided into

Examples of children's writing

My Family Traditions

Every year my Mom has a big Chanukah party for all my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. She always has it on a Sunday and it is usually the closest Sunday near Chanukah. Something that she always makes is potato latkes and some new dinner that she has never tried before. The adults bring a lot of gifts for the kids and they also bring a male or female gift for the adult grab bag. Something special the kids do is play driedel until somebody has most of the pennies. When it gets dark we light the Chanukah candles and say the blessings. Everybody goes home when the kids start getting cranky.

by Erica Frankel

Family Tradition

The worst part of the holiday season is getting the Christmas tree. Everybody gets in a bad mood because either the tree won't fit through the door or in the stand or my mother will claim that she had just cleaned for the guests and the tree's needles are making a mess! But by the time we're getting out the decorations and putting them up, everyone is in a holiday spirit again!

by Kate Winkler

Holiday Celebration!

Diwali is a traditional festival which is passed on to us for generations. We worship god Rama and goddess Laksmi for health, wealth, and happiness, on this day which is called Deepawali. Members of the family gather under one roof. We all wear new clothes, decorate the whole house with colored lights, and light some candles for prayer. We say our prayers to all the gods, and wish each other happiness for the coming year! We all enjoy the delicious, festive meal. Usually this day falls on a weekday, so time is cut short. However, on the weekend, we go to parties and celebrate Diwali with music, dance, and best of all firecrackers. I am always looking forward to this day "Diwali" (Di-vah-lee).

by Sanjana Setia

My Mom's Famous Cream Cheese Cookies!

Every year for Thanksgiving and Christmas, my mom makes cream cheese cookies. I love them! They come in different shapes and colors. She makes green fir trees, pink wreaths, and yellow camels. Most of the time the camels' heads fall off when she tries to take them off the cookie sheet. I get to eat these because they are defects and my mom would never give a defective cookie as a holiday gift.

by Barbara Sargent

two groups. One group worked on the layout for our booklet. The other group selected a design from the Apple *Print Shop* program and created a cover. Once the booklets were complete, I made copies of each page for all students in the class.

On the fifth day we shared our traditions. We collated the booklet, we settled comfortably on the floor, and talked about what we had written. Some of the students even brought in baked goods made from the recipes they had contributed. By the end of class, we not only had a wonderful sharing experience, but also had a written account of our family traditions.

Sargent teaches language arts at West Windsor-Plainsboro Middle School in Plainsboro, New Jersey.

Using Children's Choices books to enhance math and health instruction

Elizabeth Cancienne Webre

Knowing which trade books appeal to children is helpful in making available books that reinforce and expand content area learning. Content area teachers can successfully introduce their students to interesting trade books by utilizing Children's Choices, the annotated list of books chosen by children and published in the October issue of *The Reading Teacher* each year since 1975 by the IRA Children's Book Council Joint Committee.

For example, several Children's Choices are useful for the math teacher and the health teacher. Often the math teacher has some difficulty overcoming students' fear of math. *The I Hate Mathematics! Book* (Burns, 1975) presents math as a useful tool. The book can be used as an amusement source for all ages. A portion of the book, for example, is devoted to "Street Math." One activity suggests taking note of different shoelaces—in effect, an introduction to statistics. Another activity, from a section titled

"Maybe Grown-ups Aren't as Smart as You Think," suggests charging for a chore, beginning with 1 cent on the first day and then charging twice as much on succeeding days (an introduction to exponential growth).

Another book for the math center is *How Much Is a Million?* (Schwartz, 1985), an "amazing-but-true" book. The amazing facts can help students visualize a million, a billion, and a trillion in terms of students, stars, and goldfish. For example, a fishbowl big enough for a million goldfish would be big enough for one whale. The information at the book's end explains how the author computed each of the amazing facts. Using the computational information, students could create their own amazing-but-true facts and then bind them into a class book for the math table.

The health teacher, too, can take advantage of books listed in Children's Choices. The book *Good for Me! All About Food in 32 Bites* (Burns, 1978) asks and answers such questions as "Honey, Is It Healthier?" "Have You Ever Tasted a Home Grown Tomato?" and "Do You Really Have to Eat Your Vegetables?" The book is a potpourri of nutritional facts and trivia. Students could use the book as a source for designing their own trivia game for a nutrition unit.

Another health-related book, *Book Sense and Body Nonsense* (Simon, 1981), discusses bits of advice such as "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," "Fish is brain food," and "Carrots are good for your eyesight." Each common saying is discussed, leading the reader to decide whether it is sense or nonsense. This book could lead students to investigate other similar bits of advice and evaluate their validity.

The two lists that follow include Children's Choices discussed above and others that may be informative and entertaining as students study math and health.

Health

Burns, M. (1978). *Good for me! All about food in 32 bites*. Ill. Sandy Clifford. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

A potpourri of fact, trivia, and experimentation about food and nutrition. Here you can learn the history

of carbonated water, why tomatoes were once considered poisonous, and how to check if a food contains fat. Lively cartoons further enhance the mood.

Clymer, E. (1975). *Hamburgers—and ice cream for dessert*. Ill. Roy Doty. New York: Dutton.

The perfect book to share with kids who won't try new foods, this story shows the folly of rigidity. The text encourages discussion and can be used in connection with the study of food groups and lunchroom eating habits.

Simon, S. (1981). *Body sense, body nonsense*. Ill. Dennis Kendrick. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott.

Common bits of advice that children have heard having to do with their health and well-being are examined by a science educator and a cartoonist. Some make sense, others are nonsense. Young readers respond to the book as they do to a guessing game.

van der Meer, R., & van der Meer, A. (1989). *Your amazing senses: 36 games, puzzles, and tricks that show how your senses work*. Ill. the authors. New York: Aladdin.

Children enjoy this book because they are actively involved with the text and get to participate and experiment on every page. As one child put it, "You don't have to go find the stuff so you can try the experiment. Everything is right there for you!"

Mathematics

Adler, D. (1977). *Roman numerals*. Ill. Byron Barton. New York: Crowell. Reasons for the development of the Roman numeral system, its usage today, and interesting possibilities as to how the symbols might have been chosen for each number provide new incentive for learning this number system.

Burns, M. (1975). *The I hate mathematics! book*. Ill. Martha Hairston. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

This book proves to be an all-purpose amusement center for children of all ages. A fourth-grader used it for his birthday party games; his 19-year-old sister used it to stump her dates; his mom loves it for rainy-day assistance. It presents

math as the most useful tool that it really is.

Schwartz, D. (1985). *How much is a million?* Ill. Steven Kellogg. New York: Lothrop.

To count from one to a billion will take you 95 years. This is an amazing-but-true whopper book for the math table with computational information at the end.

Vreuls, D. (1977). *Sums: A looking game*. New York: Viking.

A wordless picture puzzle book in which familiar objects have been divided into pieces (addends) and are presented in the format of addition problems. The addends appear on the right-hand page, the whole (sum) appears on the left when the page is turned. Clear, simple black-and-white drawings of the objects and their sums challenge eager children to try each puzzle and then check their answers.

For a more extensive list, see:

Webre, E.C. (1989). *Content-area-related books recommended by children: An annotated bibliography selection from Children's Choices 1975-1988*. Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 303 775)

Webre is an assistant professor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, Louisiana.

Science learning centers: Seatwork alternatives

Pat Piech

In my first-grade classroom, I have found science learning centers to be a valuable teaching tool. I have used a number of such centers, but am especially fond of our frog center. Even though our frog center included nine activities, I kept only two or three activities open to the students at one time, so children would not become confused or forget what needed to be done at each center.

Classroom size needs to be taken into consideration when setting up activities, especially if those activities call for the use of many materials. I like to keep my activities spaced throughout the room by using study carrels. This allows children at one center to work without distracting others.

Getting started

I constructed "The Life Cycle of a Frog" center with the use of a bulletin board and a table. Pictures depicting the stages of a developing frog were displayed on the bulletin board along with sentence strips explaining each of the stages. The center was initiated by setting up a frog hatchery tank. Excitement was high as we discussed the tank, aged the water, and awaited the arrival of our frog embryos. The hatchery was placed on the table near the bulletin board along with resource books, magazines, and magnifying glasses for close observation.

As an initial group activity, the children shared what they knew about frogs and toads. I wrote down their ideas on chart paper and posted it in the room. After viewing a filmstrip and reading nonfiction material about frogs, we went back to our idea sheet and revised it to include new information and delete any misinformation. We chose from this body of information important concepts and words to be studied.

Frog center activities

1. *Frog folders*: Each child constructed a "Frog Folder" which held all center work. All folders were located in a basket for easy access by students and myself. Markers, crayons, construction paper, glue, letter stamps, and a stamp pad were used in designing folders.

2. *Frog words*: Attached to the center bulletin board was an envelope labeled "Frog Words." The envelope contained frog vocabulary words, each on a sentence strip. Words such as *frog*, *toad*, *embryo*, *tadpole*, and *lungs* were drawn from our previous brainstorming activity. Each word could be matched with a picture and a definition that fit together like puzzle pieces. Definitions and words were written in

a different color.

3. *Observation sheet*: Each child maintained an observation sheet. A piece of paper was divided into six boxes. Each box provided enough room for the date, a sentence or two, and a picture. We began this as a whole-class activity by recording our observations on the day we set up the hatchery. We recorded the date in box one and decided on a descriptive sentence to explain our observations. Our second observation occurred the day the frog embryos arrived. This again was a whole-group activity and provided modeling for future independent recordings. I maintained a sample observation sheet on the center bulletin board for reference.

4. *Illustrating the life cycle of a frog*: In this activity, students illustrated the five developmental stages we had identified. Reference books and the pictures on the center bulletin board served as a guide for independent work.

5. *The life cycle of a frog*: An envelope labeled "The Life Cycle of a Frog" attached to the center bulletin board contained individual sentence strips describing the stages of a developing frog. These sentences were identical to those accompanying the pictures on the bulletin board, thus making the activity self-checking. Students could manipulate the sentences and put them in order. Paper was available for students to make their own copy of "The Life Cycle of a Frog."

6. *Frog story center*: My first graders enjoy the many adventures of Frog and Toad in the stories written by Arnold Lobel. I kept several copies at our listening center along with an audio tape of each title. After listening to several Frog and Toad adventure stories, students were encouraged to write or dictate their own stories. Time was set aside for students to share their stories with the class.

7. *Measuring tadpoles*: Representations of tadpoles of various sizes were cut from tagboard, laminated, and placed in an envelope attached to the center bulletin board. Students were to order the tadpoles from smallest to largest, measure each one, and record their answers.

8. *Frog paintings and poetry*:

Children's books and reference on frogs

- Cole, J. (1980). *A frog's body*. New York: Morrow.
- Florian, D. (1986). *Discovering frogs*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hogan, P.Z. (1979). *The life cycle of the frog*. Milwaukee, WI: Raintree.
- Lobel, A. (1976). *Frog and Toad all year*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lobel, A. (1979). *Frog and Toad are friends*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lobel, A. (1984). *Days with Frog and Toad*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Moore, J.E. (1986). *Animal life cycles*. Evan-Moore Corp.
- Morris, D. (1977). *Read about frogs and toads*. Milwaukee, WI: Raintree.
- Poppe, C.A., & Van Matre, N.A. (1985). *Science learning centers for primary grades*. West Nyack, NY: Center for Applied Research in Education.
- Simon, S. (1969). *Discovering what frogs do*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Zim, H.S. (1950). *Frogs and toads*. New York: Morrow.

Through many shared readings, the students learned to recite the following poem to help distinguish between frogs and toads:

Frogs
leaping away with
smooth and shiny skin.
Toads
hopping along are
frog's "bumpy" kin.

(Moore, 1986)

9. *Frog books*: Children were asked to write factual material about frogs and toads. Our purpose in writing frog books was to share our knowledge with others. After revisions and corrections were made, each student made a frog-shaped book cover and inserted their written material. The books were displayed for all to read.

Managing the center

Establishing a center requires planning. Decide what is important for your students to learn, and implement

activities geared to the independent working abilities of your students.

As a tool for managing students' work, I used paper frogs stapled to the bulletin board. There was a frog for each child with the numbers 1 through 9 printed on it. The numbers corresponded to the numbers of the center activities. As students completed an activity, they would cross off that number on their frog.

The use of science centers was successful in my first-grade classroom. My students were motivated, and I was impressed by the quality of work and their ability to work independently.

Piech is a first-grade teacher at Valley View School in McHenry, Illinois.

Checkered Word Fun

Lane Roy Gauthier

Vocabulary development is an essential component in comprehension instruction. The more words students know, the better the chances they will comprehend what they read. The following strategy utilizes the game of checkers to develop vocabulary with upper-elementary students.

Step 1: Since there are 24 board pieces used in the game of checkers, introduce on Monday this many new vocabulary words. To familiarize the students with the words, a variety of activities may be used, such as teacher modeling of each word meaning by writing a sentence on the board (the student must infer each meaning by the context of the sentence), asking the class if anyone knows the meaning of any of the words, or having the students who do know the meanings of the words use the words in sentences for the benefit of the other students.

Step 2: After introducing the vocabulary words on Monday, clarify the word concepts in the students' minds on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. One way to do this is to break up the class into small groups and then present each group with a choice of tasks to complete. For example, one fifth-grade teacher devised the following:

Vocabulary words: fusion, vibrate, security, present.

Choose one of the following activities:

1. One of the four words listed above can be pronounced in two different ways. Each of these pronunciations has its own meaning. Find this word and discuss its different pronunciations and meanings. A dictionary would be an excellent aid in this task.
2. Which of the four words listed above indicates what a person feels when his/her surroundings are safe and there is no danger? A thesaurus would be an excellent aid in this task.
3. Two of the four words listed above are seen often in the study of science. Find these two words and create a sentence with each one.

The goal of Step 2 is for each student to understand and be able to explain the meanings of as many words as possible.

Step 3: The teacher should familiarize all of the students with the game of checkers.

Step 4: The students will play Checkered Word Fun on Friday. To prepare for this activity, tape each new vocabulary word on a set of checkers. Play Checkered Word Fun the same as regular checkers, with one exception. When one player is in position to make a jump, he or she must give the meaning of the word attached to the opponent's checker. If the player is successful, the opponent's checker may be jumped and taken. If an incorrect response is made, the opponent is allowed to remove the checker of the player making the incorrect response. The competing players are responsible for reaching agreement regarding the acceptability of responses.

In addition to general vocabulary development, Checkered Word Fun may be employed in specific subject areas such as social studies, science, and math.

Gauthier directs the internship and reading practicum program at the University of Houston in Houston, Texas.

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