

2010

SUMMER REJUVENATION GUIDE

**10 TIPS
TO HELP YOU
RELAX, REFLECT,
AND RECHARGE
for the
COMING
SCHOOL YEAR**



10 Tips to Help You Relax, Reflect, and Recharge for the Coming School Year

DURING THE RUSH OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, free time is an all-too-scarce commodity for busy teachers. Summer's another story. More relaxed schedules allow a little breathing room to reflect, collaborate, plan ahead—or just unwind. The time off is all important for helping teachers get reinvigorated and ready for the new school year.

Whether your summer plans call for getting fit, heading off on an adventure, or just watching the stars under the nighttime sky, you'll find ideas in this resource-packed guide to help you make the most of your break from the bell schedule.

The off-season offers a perfect opportunity to test-drive some technology tools, too. Learn about digital storytelling by documenting a family trip. Get familiar with social networking by joining a site for bookworms. Find out what's happening at educational conferences by tracking the buzz on Twitter. Do a good deed with a smart-phone app. Grow your personal network by joining *Edutopia's* popular groups. Later, you can think about how these tools might serve your classroom goals.

But before you dive in, don't forget to take a slow day (or several) to unplug and unwind.

Happy summer!

—**Suzie Boss**

Edutopia.org blogger and author of *Reinventing Project-Based Learning*

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Grow Your Network

WHERE DO YOU FIND TIME

for brainstorming with colleagues? Whether collaboration takes place in well-organized professional learning communities or on the fly in hallway chats, chances are it doesn't happen often enough during the regular school year.



Yet research shows that networking with fellow teachers is time well spent. In a recent survey, Teachers Network (<http://teachersnetwork.org>) found that 80 percent of teachers said network participation encouraged them to remain in the classroom, while 90 percent said that networking improved their teaching practice. A personal network doesn't eliminate the need for high-quality professional development, but it does offer a powerful antidote for classroom isolation.

Neil Stephenson, who blogs at Thinking in Mind (www.thinkinginmind.com), offers this quick illustration to show the power of networks: "One day, I see kids in our school doing a really cool looking art project. I ask the teacher what they're doing, and it turns into a great blog post. Some teachers in another school read the blog post and would love to know how the project is put together. Through Skype, we're able to have the three teachers have a 15-minute chat, and everyone goes away amazed by the possibilities of these new tools."

By taking advantage of opportunities to connect with colleagues, both face-to-face and virtually, you can grow and nourish your personal learning network. Then, when school resumes in the fall, you'll have an expanded brain trust to draw on when you need help finding resources, want access to experts, or desire feedback from trusted colleagues.

Online tools allow you to build a far-flung network. Heard of Twitter but haven't tried it yet? Sign up for a free account (www.twitter.com) and join the legions of micro-blogging educators. With Skype (www.skype.com), you can use your Internet connection to call, chat, or videoconference with any other user who's online, anywhere in the world. Don't be surprised if summer Skype chats with colleagues get you thinking about connecting your students with faraway classrooms or remote experts.

Edutopia Groups offer another place to expand your network. Jump into an existing discussion or start a new one. If you're new to this community, get started at the welcome lounge: www.edutopia.org/groups/edutopia-welcome-lounge.

Related Resources:

- Listen to a podcast about personal learning networks, "Building a PLN with Web 2.0 Tools," by three Apple Distinguished Educators: <http://edcommunity.apple.com/ali/item.php?itemID=18692>
- Join the Educator's PLN, a social-networking site for educators that offers teacher-created tutorials, discussions, and other resources to spark conversation: <http://edupln.ning.com/>
- See Shelly Terrell's blog post "16 Resources About Personal Learning Networks": <http://teacherbootcamp.edublogs.org/2010/05/09/16-resources-about-personal-learning-networks-plns/>
- Read the *Edutopia* article "How to Create a Professional Learning Community": www.edutopia.org/professional-learning-communities-collaboration-how-to
- Use social-bookmarking tools such as Delicious (<http://delicious.com>) to share resources with your PLN. Diigo has a group for sharing project-based-learning resources (<http://groups.diigo.com/group/projectbasedlearning>).

Party with the Stars

CLEAR SKIES AND WARM NIGHTS make summer a prime time for stargazing. What better way to unwind after a hectic school year than by unrolling a picnic blanket and gazing toward the heavens?

Across the United States, amateur astronomers offer up their wisdom—and telescopes—at organized star parties. These events typically take place at remote locations, far from city lights. Some are scheduled to coincide with summer meteor showers. Check out the Night Sky Network (<http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/>) to find events near you.

Most observatories offer public events such as the star parties at Griffith Observatory, (www.griffithobs.org) in the Los Angeles area, or at Kitt Peak National Observatory (www.noao.edu/outreach/nop/), located on the Tohono O’Odham Reservation in Arizona. Some observatories also offer professional development for teachers. Plan ahead to take advantage of these high-interest events, such as the inquiry-based teacher workshops at McDonald Observatory (<http://mcdonaldobservatory.org/teachers/profdev/>) in West Texas.

Unlike most scientific fields, astronomy is one in which citizen scientists can make real contributions. Citizen Sky (www.citizensky.org) offers tools and training to enlist volunteers in solving the mystery of epsilon Aurigae, a star that has been perplexing scientists for centuries.

If summer stargazing has you contemplating school projects, consider getting your school community involved in Globe at Night (www.globeatnight.org/). This citizen-science project enlists volunteers from around the world to report on the brightness of their night sky during a specific two-week period each year.

Related Resources:

- If an observatory trip isn’t in your summer plans, turn your desktop into a portal for space exploration. Check out the WorldWide Telescope from Microsoft Research: www.worldwidetelescope.org
- Or explore Google Sky: www.google.com/sky/
- And watch astronaut Sally Ride narrate a demo tour: <http://earth.google.com/sky/index.html>
- Read about Globe at Night and other astronomy resources in this *Edutopia* story, “Young Astronomers Study the Night Sky—and Collaborate with Peers Online”: www.edutopia.org/astronomy-globe-night-sky
- Astronomers Without Borders offers more resources: www.astronomerswithoutborders.org

Do-It-Yourself Professional Development

SUMMER IS HIGH SEASON for education conferences. If you can't make it to the big national events this year, create your own professional learning experience by following attendees on Twitter, watching presentations and joining back-channel chats on Ustream, or reading conference blogs to see what you missed.

ISTE 2010, the annual ed tech showcase event hosted by the International Society for Technology in Education, is certain to generate lively conversation in the blogosphere and Twitterverse. It takes place this year in Denver, June 27-30. If you can't get there, check out these virtual-workshop choices (<http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/2010/>). There's also an ISTE 2010 social-networking site where you can connect with attendees, watch videos, and explore other conference content (www.iste2010.org/).

EduBloggerCon is a free, all-day “unconference” that takes place in Denver on June 26, the day before ISTE 2010 kicks off. Expect active live blogging and back-channel discussions during this informal event (www.edubloggercon.com).

More do-it-yourself professional-development opportunities come along regularly. Explore different options to find the best match for your learning style, or mix and match to keep things interesting.

For instance, #Edchat is a fast-moving, global, weekly collaborative discussion on a specific education topic. It takes place each Tuesday via Twitter. To stay current on weekly topics and start times, follow event cofounders Shelly Terrell (@shellterrell), Steve Anderson (@web2oclassroom), or Tom Whitby (@tomwhitby) on Twitter (www.twitter.com). And check *Edutopia's* Spiral Notebook blog for a recap of the conversation.

Teachers Teaching Teachers (<http://teachersteachingteachers.org>) is a weekly webcast, organized by teachers, for teachers. Classroom 2.0 Live is a free Saturday series for educators. Events are interactive and include audio, chat, desktop sharing, and sometimes video. Check updates (<http://live.classroom20.com>) for the topic of the week, along with recordings of past events.



Related Resources:

- Use *Edutopia's* Schools That Work series as the springboard for professional discussions about effective practices: www.edutopia.org/schools-that-work
- High Tech High Online is a new professional-development offering from this San Diego network of project-based schools: www.hightechhigh.org/online
- Voxopop lets users post messages by using recordings of their voice instead of text. Start a “talkgroup” on a specific topic and exchange thoughts with colleagues: www.voxopop.com

Tell the Story of Your Life

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS to encourage your student writers is to write along with them. The same holds true for digital storytelling. If you can't find time to create your own content during the school year, use the summer months to polish your storytelling skills, or try your hand at technology tools that support digital publishing.

StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects ever attempted. So far, more than 50,000 people have recorded life stories for posterity. These moving stories typically play out as conversations between two people who have a personal connection. You might choose to record the life story of a teacher who inspired you, a student who amazed you, or a family member who has a tale worth telling. Once you have a story line in mind, visit the StoryCorps website (<http://storycorps.org>) to make a reservation for your recording. (You'll get a broadcast-quality CD to keep, and your recording also will be archived at the American Folklife Center.) You can listen to podcasts to get inspired or download a guide to bring StoryCorps into your classroom (<http://storycorps.org/diy/participate/>).

If you want to remember how you spent your summer, turn your travels or close-to-home adventures into a short video or digital story that combines still photography with your own narration. Want some expert help? The Center for Digital Storytelling offers three-day workshops for educators at several locations (www.storycenter.org). Ready to publish your digital stories? Join the online community at Stories for Change (<http://storiesforchange.net>), upload your videos to YouTube (www.youtube.com), or join the growing ranks of citizen journalists by posting your digital content on CNN iReport (www.ireport.com).

National Writing Project sites across the country host summer institutes that give teachers the opportunity to immerse themselves in writing and to reflect with colleagues about effective writing instruction. To find a site near you, visit the NWP website (www.nwp.org).

Related Resources:

- Microsoft Photo Story 3 is free software for making a digital story with images and audio: www.microsoft.com/photostory
- ZooBurst is a new tool for making digital, 3-D pop-up books. Sign up for a free trial: <http://alpha.zooburst.com>
- Watch this *Edutopia* video, Digital Media Empower Youth, which is about doing digital storytelling with Chicago students: www.edutopia.org/digital-generation-youth-network-video



Try Something New

EXPLORE A NEW HOBBY OR INTEREST this summer. Whether you dabble in ballroom dancing or public speaking, rockhounding or yoga, trying something new will remind you what it feels like to be a learner yourself. And you'll have fresh experiences to share with your students.

Want to practice your Spanish with a native speaker but can't afford to travel? If you have a webcam and Internet connection, you can schedule sessions with your own personal tutor at Speak Shop (www.speakshop.com). This microenterprise also creates fair-trade job opportunities in Nicaragua and Guatemala.

Feeling bold enough to test your public speaking chops before a raucous audience? PechaKucha (Japanese for chitchat) is a fast-paced presentation format in which you narrate 20 images for 20 seconds each. The idea started in the design world but has gone viral. PechaKucha events now take place around the globe, and topics are all over the map, too. If you can't find an event near you, the website explains how to start one (www.pecha-kucha.org). Ignite events are similar, but often add a competitive twist. (Ignite's motto is: "Enlighten us, but make it quick.") Visit the Ignite website to find locations and see videos from past events (<http://igniteshow.com>).

Yearning to play the slack-key guitar, knit a baby blanket, or brush up on your calculus? The School of Everything is an online marketplace that connects people who know stuff with people who want to learn stuff. Launched in the United Kingdom a couple years ago, the idea has quickly spread across the U.S. Check out locations and topics on the School of Everything website (<http://schoolofeverything.com/explore/us>).

Related Resources:

- *Edutopia* writers offer first-person accounts of what it's like to learn something new—from salsa dancing to dirt biking: www.edutopia.org/continuing-education-summer-programs
- WatchKnow, an educational nonprofit started by Wikipedia cofounder Larry Sanger, is cataloging thousands of videos with classroom potential: www.watchknow.org
- Here are 100 YouTube videos that promise to inform and inspire: www.accreditedonlinecolleges.com/blog/2010/100-informative-inspiring-youtube-videos-for-educators/

Curate Classroom Artifacts

AT THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, it can be tempting to sweep the piles of left-behind student work into the nearest recycling barrel. Instead, take a look at these artifacts as if you were a museum curator. What stories do student work samples tell? What's worth saving or preserving online? How could you use student projects to inspire or challenge next year's students?

At the nine schools in the High Tech High network, in San Diego County, there's a deliberate effort to showcase projects to build accountability and encourage teacher collaboration. A typical project archive might include a narrative, a short video, and reflections by both teacher and students. Explore High Tech High projects: www.hightechhigh.org/projects.

George Mayo, a Maryland middle school teacher, uses his class blog as a virtual bulletin board to showcase student projects (www.mrmayo.org). He started the blog in 2004, before his first year of teaching, and he hopes students will return to it a decade from now to reflect on where their learning has taken them.

The International Education and Resource Network facilitates collaborative, global projects. Visit iEARN's Collaboration Centre (<http://media.iearn.org/projects>) to see a sampling of recent projects, including galleries of student work and project discussion forums.

Related Resources:

- *Edutopia* blogger Elena Aguilar offers practical suggestions for summer planning in this post, "How to Make Planning for Next Year Fun": www.edutopia.org/lesson-planning-fun
- George Mayo and other educators discuss the power of reflection in this *Edutopia* article, "High-Tech Reflection Strategies Make Learning Stick": www.edutopia.org/student-reflection-blogs-journals-technology
- The Buck Institute for Education maintains a list of project libraries: www.bie.org/tools/links/pbl_in_practice



Give a Little, Get a Lot

COMMUNITY SERVICE isn't just for students. Whether you're fresh out of college or approaching retirement, you'll find a wide range of volunteer opportunities to choose from. In exchange for your service, you're likely to learn something new, expand your social circle, develop leadership skills, and maybe even boost your mental and physical well-being.

Idealist.org (<http://idealist.org>) is a good place to explore volunteer opportunities. This online marketplace for the nonprofit world lets you search by location or area of focus. If you're interested in combining travel with service, the site's International Volunteerism Resource Center will help you connect with volunteer opportunities far from home (<http://idealist.org/en/ivrc/index.html>).

If your interests run to the outdoors, you can get some fresh air and satisfaction while helping maintain a public park, trail, or beach. This post by a longtime volunteer on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail describes the appeal (www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2010/03/joys-maintaining-appalachian-national-scenic-trail5564). The Continental Divide Trail, running for some 3,000 backcountry miles from Canada to Mexico, relies on volunteers for trail building and preservation. Check the Continental Divide Trail Alliance's Web site for information about summer volunteering (www.cdtrail.org). Most national park websites offer information about volunteer opportunities as well.

What if volunteering could be as fun—and as convenient—as playing an online game? That's the idea behind the Extraordinaries (<http://beextra.org>). This new micro-volunteering platform turns little bits of spare time into good deeds. With a web connection or smart phone and a few extra minutes, you can tag photos for the Smithsonian, map neighborhood playgrounds, send a study tip to a student in India, or share your creative ideas about reducing global warming.

Do you have expertise to share with the world? Become a contributor to Wikipedia and keep expanding the world's largest encyclopedia. This crowd-sourced wiki resource relies on its community of contributors to improve and expand existing content, start new articles, and perform myriad other tasks. Visit the community portal to see what needs attention (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Community_portal).



Related Resources:

- This *Edutopia* story, “Pen Pals: 826’s Volunteer Writing Coaches,” describes how volunteers help student writers at Valencia 826: www.edutopia.org/pen-pals
- Check out the latest research about the benefits of volunteering: www.nationalservice.gov/about/volunteering/benefits.asp
- Read this *Edutopia* blog post to learn how teachers volunteer to help their colleagues around the world through Teachers Without Borders: www.edutopia.org/teachers-assist-global-issues



Get Moving

DID YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION to get into better shape fade before spring break? Restart your health and fitness plans this summer. Not only will you return to the new school year with more energy but you'll also literally walk your talk when it comes to promoting youth fitness.

Online resources can help you jump-start your summer activities. America on the Move (<http://americaonthemove.org>) gives you access to online tools for setting health goals and tracking your progress, along with daily tips and a supportive community. America's Walking (www.pbs.org/americaswalking), a PBS series, includes a companion website with quizzes to help you assess your fitness personality, evaluate your neighborhood for walkability, and find fitness events and clubs in your community. The website 411fit (www.411fit.com) enables you to keep a daily fitness journal, get real-time feedback, and connect with friends.

Couch to 5K is a program that eases beginners into exercise so they won't get sidelined by injuries or discouragement. (The basic plan is outlined on the Cool Running site: www.coolrunning.com/engine/2/2_3/181.shtml.) Couch to 5K has expanded to offer a variety of tech tools that keep workouts interesting, including podcasts, smart-phone apps, forums, Facebook groups, and more (www.c25k.com).

Planning to collaborate with colleagues during your vacation? Meet for summer "walk and talks" to plan together, and you'll bring fresh perspectives (and fresh air) to your conversations. This article from a former school administrator outlines the benefits of walking meetings (<http://planetgreen.discovery.com/work-connect/walking-meetings-betterthan-boardroom.html>).

Related Resources:

- First Lady Michelle Obama has launched a new campaign to reduce childhood obesity. Let's Move (www.letsmove.gov) offers family-friendly suggestions for healthier eating and making physical activity an everyday event.
- PE4life, a national nonprofit, offers professional development to help educators inspire their students to embrace healthy goals: www.pe4life.org
- Read an *Edutopia* special report on the new PE, "Schools Exercise Fresh Methods to Keep Kids Active": www.edutopia.org/new-physical-education-movement

Crack the Books

GOOD BOOKS AND SUMMER DAYS are made for each other. Whether unread titles have been piling on your shelf or in your electronic reader, now's your chance to catch up. And if you enjoy discussing what you're reading with colleagues, check out the variety of tools to keep you connected.

Social networks for book lovers let you create a virtual bookshelf to catalog your collection. You can post reviews or recommendations, see what others are reading, make a reading wish list, or join an online book discussion. Popular sites include Shelfari (www.shelfari.com), LibraryThing (www.librarything.com), and Goodreads (www.goodreads.com).

If you want to get books off your shelf and into the hands of other readers, check out the “read and release” strategy at BookCrossing (www.bookcrossing.com). Here's how it works: You register a book that you are ready to part with and then set it loose on a park bench, at the coffee shop, at the gym, or wherever it might get picked up by an interested reader. You can track the book's journey online as it gets passed from reader to reader.

To motivate young readers, New York City's public libraries have launched a campaign called Summer Reading 2010 (www.summerreading.org). Although the colorful avatars and reading badges are designed to appeal to kids, the site also features book suggestions for adults.

Donalyn Miller, sixth-grader teacher from Texas, is known as the Book Whisperer for her ability to inspire reluctant readers. Follow her blog by that name (http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/book_whisperer) for insights about building literacy. In her article “Bring on the Books,” in Teacher Professional Development Sourcebook, Miller shares suggestions for using book study as an affordable, effective form of professional development (www.edweek.org/tsb/articles/2009/03/16/02miller.hoz.html).

Related Resources:

- In *Edutopia* Groups, start a book chat or join an ongoing discussion about a title of professional interest: www.edutopia.org/groups
- The NEA's Read Across America (www.nea.org/readacross), a program to build a nation of readers, organizes an annual read-in to honor the birthday of Dr. Seuss. There are resources to promote literacy year-round, including a Read Across America channel on SchoolTube: www.schooltube.com/user/NEAreadacrossamerica
- Don't feel like reading? Explore TED Talks to hear captivating speakers discuss a wide range of fascinating topics: www.ted.com
- If you're imagining classroom connections for this engaging content, see how teacher Christian Long has turned the TED Talks into the TEDxClassroomProject: <http://tedxproject.wordpress.com>

Plan Ahead for Next Summer

SOME TEACHERS WILL SPEND this summer on far-flung cultural explorations, science expeditions, or paid internships. But these exciting opportunities, many of which come with funding, require advanced planning. To set yourself up for a grand adventure next summer, start planning now with an armchair tour of the possibilities. Here are just a few:

Fund for Teachers: Five elementary teachers from Wisconsin are spending this summer as “biome detectives” in Costa Rica, exploring cloud forests, ocean life, and volcanoes, looking for connections to bring back to their students. They are among the educators whose wishes have been granted by Fund for Teachers, a national nonprofit that underwrites self-designed fellowships for educators. Since 2001, 4,000 teachers have been awarded more than \$14 million in grants. To learn about applying or to find out where this year’s fellows are heading, visit www.fundforteachers.org.

Heifer International: This nonprofit organization, which helps families in developing countries become more self-reliant with the gift of livestock, is well-known for its educational and service-learning programs. Heifer also leads international study tours for educators. Learn more at www.heifereducation.org.

Supreme Court Summer Institute: Thirty high school social studies teachers gather in Washington, D.C., each summer for six days of sessions led by Supreme Court experts, journalists, authors, and attorneys. A court visit and private reception wrap up the week. Learn more from Street Law: www.streetlaw.org.

NOAA’s Teacher at Sea: Since 1990, teachers have been heading off to sea, working under the supervision of research scientists and crews from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. They bring new understanding about their ocean planet—as well as firsthand adventure stories—back to their classrooms. To learn more about NOAA’s Teacher at Sea program, visit <http://teacheratsea.noaa.gov>.

Travel for Good: “Voluntourism” combines travel with volunteering. Through Travel for Good, volunteers help refurbish World Heritage sites, assist medical professionals on Mt. Kilimanjaro, and conserve habitat along the Amazon. Travelocity, a project sponsor, offers \$5,000 Voluntourism grants to help offset costs. Learn more at www.travelocity.com/TravelForGood.

Summer Seminars in the Humanities: The National Endowment for the Humanities offers a full slate of summer institutes for teachers. This year’s participants will be studying Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* in London, investigating the Underground Railroad in upstate New York, and traveling to Germany to celebrate the 325th anniversary of Bach’s birth. Selected teachers receive a stipend to cover travel and living expenses. Learn more at www.neh.gov/projects/si-school.html.



Related Resources:

- Read the *Edutopia* story “Teacher-Tested Travel Grants” for an overview of several grants for teachers: www.edutopia.org/travel-grants
- “On the Road, on the Cheap: Get Around Without Going Under,” also from *Edutopia*, highlights travel discounts for educators: www.edutopia.org/on-road-cheap-get-around-without-going-under
- Use the satellite imagery of Google Earth to investigate where future summer travels might take you: <http://earth.google.com>

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ABOUT EDUTOPIA

Edutopia is where The George Lucas Educational Foundation's vision to highlight what works in education comes to life. We are a nonprofit operating foundation providing real-world examples from districts, schools, and programs that are successfully changing how our children learn.

Through our award-winning website, videos, and growing online community, *Edutopia's* mission is to support and empower education transformation by shining a spotlight on innovative and successful learning environments and providing proven strategies, tools, and resources for adaptation and replication.

To find and share solutions, visit Edutopia.org.

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