



idea swap

The best ideas come from teachers like you!

⤴ We combine science and art for a great Earth-Day craft.

After learning about the layers of the Earth, we depict them on a picture frame! I purchase a paintable wooden frame for each child (they are very inexpensive at craft-supply stores). Students use sand, glitter, and paint to represent the inner core, outer core, lower mantle, upper mantle, and crust. I then take a picture of each student holding a globe, which students can place inside their frames. It's a great way to remind them that the Earth's future is in their hands!

—Allison Wiesel, fifth grade, Highland Park, NJ



⤴ My kids go wild for our virtual zoo.

To culminate our study of animal adaptations and habitats, I have groups of students create “biome backdrops” for the walls. Then each student dresses up as an animal that might live there (such as a penguin for the polar biome). We invite parents and other classes to tour our zoo, and the “animals” introduce themselves and tell us about their homes. —Ashley Latisha Moser, fourth grade, Raleigh, NC

I found an inexpensive incentive to get my students to bring signed papers back to school.

It was always a struggle to get report cards, permission slips, and signed homework back to the classroom—until I bought a roll of raffle tickets. Now, each time students bring back an item on the assigned day, they sign a ticket and put it in the “raffle bowl.” Each Friday, we draw four names for prizes. I give out cool pens and folders, or coupons for extra computer time. The more often kids enter the raffle, the better their chances are to win. And now that I get all my papers back on time, I win every week! —Shannon Cornelius, seventh/eighth grade, Woodbury, TN

My classroom noise monitor does double duty as a traffic cop.

I purchased a product that alerts students to excess noise with a red “stoplight,” but they often ignored it. To solve the problem, I created “noise violation” tickets. Students who ignore the red light are issued a ticket that must be signed by the student, a parent, and me. Since I began the system, the number of tickets issued has dropped dramatically. —Nicole Selvaggio, fourth grade, South River, NJ

We put the definitions for parts of speech to music.

We create our own lyrics for simple nursery rhyme tunes. One of my favorites is our noun song, sung to the tune of “The Farmer In the Dell”: *A person place or thing, a person place or thing, Hi ho, a noun names a person, place, or thing!* —Andrea Howard, third grade, Conroe, TX



⤴ We plant real grass in our Easter Bunny baskets.

I cut away the tops and sides of recycled gallon milk jugs to make bunny-shaped planters. Students add ears, eyes, whiskers, and a nose by gluing on felt, construction paper, and pom-poms. We then add soil to the planters and plant grass seed. As students chart and measure the growth of the grass over a period of time, they're learning science and math skills, too! When the baskets are done, students can take them home as a treat for families. —Jan Snider, third grade, Albuquerque, NM

To celebrate Read Across America Day, we combine a geography lesson with our independent reading.

Together, we draw a large U.S. map to hang on a bulletin board. When students have finished a book, they place its title on the map to mark where the story took place. (If a story is set outside our country, students can place the title to the right or left of the map.) The activity not only teaches the importance of story setting, but also encourages students to read more books so they can fill up the map! —*Joe Austin, seventh grade, Forest Hills, NY*

Dr. Seuss's birthday is a great time to learn left and right. After reading *The Foot Book*, I set out shallow pans of washable paint and a large white bed sheet. Children remove their shoes and socks, and take turns stepping in a pan of paint. I then read aloud the lines from the book (*left foot, right foot, left foot, right*) and have children walk across the sheet in rhythm to the directions. I use a laundry marker to label each set of prints. When dry, the sheet makes a great tablecloth or window shade! —*Karen Dunson, kindergarten, Blue Island, IL*

I found a great way to make the concept of history more personal.

I bring in Pinky, an old, faded stuffed dog who was my constant companion as a child. Students love hearing my reminiscences, and it inspires them to write their own. I provide prompts, such as: What did your favorite baby toy look like? Why was it an important part of your life? Do you have a specific memory about the toy? When finished, children have a written record of their own personal history to share with the class. —*Gail Hennessey, Harpursville, NY*

No more bickering—now my students love to line up! Each time we need to travel outside the room, I pose a new challenge, such as “Line up in alphabetical order of the first letter in >>

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your mother's name," or "Line up by the third letter in your last name."

I also use numerical order with house numbers, and time order with birthdays and favorite holidays. Anything with a sequence works, and children are happy with their spot in line—no matter where it is! —*Vivian Sirakis, New Hyde Park, NY*

Game pieces never get lost in my classroom. Our district uses *Everyday Mathematics*, which means my students play a lot of math games. At first, it was difficult to keep track of all the pieces, and finding replacements took away from game time. Now I put materials like number cubes, pennies, dimes, and nickels in a pencil box for each child. When it's time to play a math game, children grab their Math Toolkit and they're ready to go! —*Amie V. Powell, first grade, York, SC*

In my class, cursive handwriting is more than just an exercise. Each morning, I write an inspirational quote on the board. After we discuss its meaning and how it applies to our lives, students use cursive to copy it into their "Handwriting Quote Book." It's a great way to build character along with penmanship! My students have even started to bring in their own quotes to inspire the class. —*Kathy McLean, third grade, Diamond Bar, CA*

I found the perfect teaching assistant for my multiage classroom—a tape recorder. The need to state and restate directions for my emergent readers was taking away from class time, so I began recording instructions. Students who need them can play the tape on an old Walkman, and rewind if they missed something. I can also make individualized tapes for students who need slower, more task-oriented steps. They love the independence, and I have far more time to teach! —*Sonya Harris, first-third grade, Woodbury, NJ*

Restaurant menus play a big part in my money unit. I asked local restaurant owners to donate menus, and

we use them along with props to create a food court in the classroom! Each station has a different cuisine, and students take turns playing waitstaff and customers. While they learn how to count money and make change, they're also practicing work routines and good manners—all in a familiar, fun context.

—*Cristin Kiehl, third grade, Marienville, PA*

I combine consumer issues with letter-writing lessons. I choose both well-written and poorly written complaints from a consumer Web site, such as www.planetfeedback.com, and print them out for students. Using the well-written complaint as a model, students can hunt for errors in the poorly written letter. I then give them the choice of rewriting the letter or composing one of their own. My students have become masters of the business letter, as well as savvy consumers!

—*Susan K. Heitzman, Fond du Lac, WI*



⤴ On St. Patrick's Day, a leprechaun visits my classroom! According to Irish legend, the leprechaun is a mischievous being who loves to play tricks on humans. So the night before the holiday, I leave "evidence" of a leprechaun's visit: He mixes up the desks, moves things around on the walls, rearranges supply shelves, and creates a terrific mess! When students arrive the next morning, they are shocked and delighted to discover the disarray. They draw a picture of the room and use descriptive language

to tell exactly what the leprechaun did. Then it's time to pick up after him. The students love it, and I get my spring cleaning done without a single complaint! —*Stacy Bex, third grade, Mission Viejo, CA*

Our classroom store has my students using math all week.

I collect small, inexpensive items such as stickers, superballs, and other dime-store toys. Then I place each item in a self-sealing bag, label it with a real-world price, and attach the bags to an eye-level bulletin board. I give each child a fixed amount of play money every week. The store is only "open" for a half hour on Fridays, but my kids have all week to check out what they want to buy and figure out how much money they'll have left. They may not be aware of it, but this means they're doing math problems all week long! —*Stacy Bex, third grade, Mission Viejo, CA*

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