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Is your car Winter-Ready?

Driving in the winter means snow, sleet and ice that can lead to slower traffic and hazardous road conditions. The first step to winter driving safety is being prepared. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers these tips for safe winter driving:



Maintain Your Car:

Check battery and tire tread, keep your windows clear, put no-freeze fluid in the washer reservoir, check your antifreeze.

Have On Hand:

Flashlight, jumper cables, abrasive material (sand, kitty litter, even floor mats), shovel, snow brush and ice scraper, warning devices (like flares) and blankets. For long trips, add food and water, medication and cell phone.

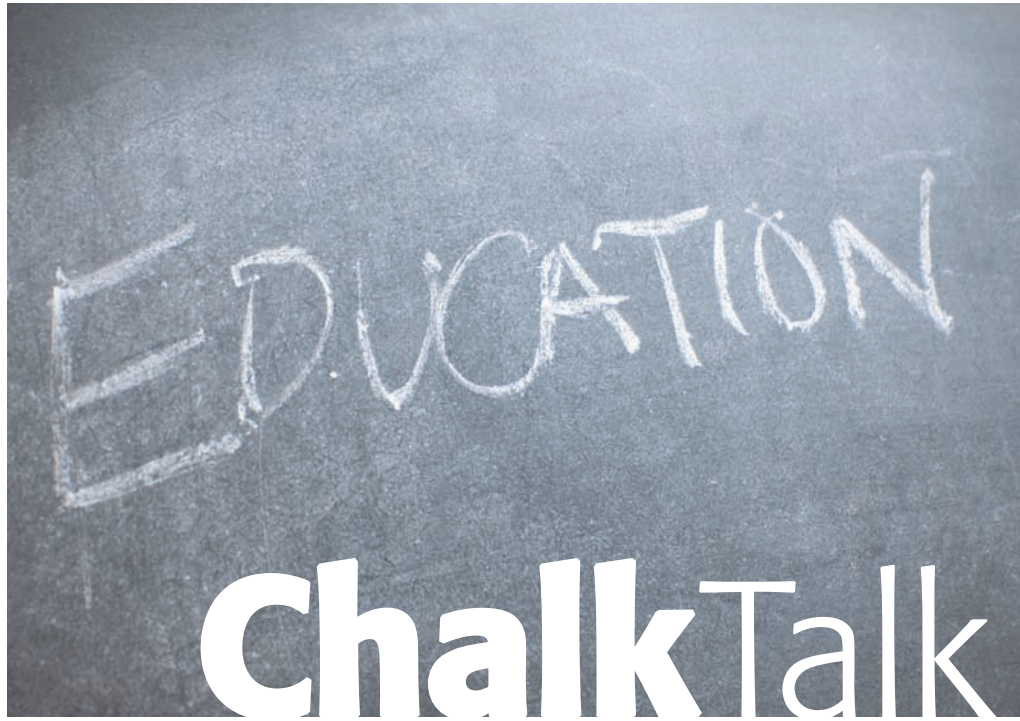
Plan Your Route:

Allow plenty of time (check the weather and leave early if necessary), be familiar with the maps/directions, and let others know your route and arrival time.

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*“Education breeds confidence.
Confidence breeds hope.
Hope breeds peace.”*

—CONFUCIUS

Teaching Kids To Give Back

In the past few years, Service-learning has become an increasingly important part of the educational experience for kids from kindergarten to college. Service-learning allows students to work on projects that address real-life needs in their own communities while growing their academic skills and knowledge. And what better time to get started on a service project than the holidays? Here are some teacher-tested ideas for December projects—and ways teachers and kids can extend the spirit of the season throughout the year.

The New, Improved Food Drive

Instead of automatically setting out those boxes for canned food, invite students to ask local agencies what they're looking for. An agency may be overloaded with cans during Thanksgiving but needs warm socks for the upcoming cold winter. Challenge students to educate their peers about the underlying needs in their community—perhaps asking each class to hold a different drive. For example, the sixth grade could hold a shampoo drive, the seventh grade a school-supply drive, and the eighth grade a hat and mitten drive. Encourage students to graph the progress of their drives and report the results.

All year long: Check in with local agencies periodically to see when supplies are low again. Chances are, they'll welcome springtime contributions.

Recognizing Local Heroes

Who in the community is overdue for a thank you? Hone writing skills by inviting students to collect stories of everyday heroes who work or donate their time on behalf of others, such as government officials, firefighters, nurses, or volunteers. Students can suggest heroes they know, or as a class, they can research and contact people in the community. Encourage students to think of those who might be overlooked—young or old. Gather the stories in a book to share with the “heroes” and with teachers, students, and families. Or post them online for the entire community.

All year long: Invite students to stay in touch with their heroes, whether they're city council members, zoo workers, or museum docents. Volunteer opportunities may arise, and students can step in to lend a hand.

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Praising the Right Way

You want to bring out the best in each student, but praising can be tricky. As expert Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer tells us, there's good praise, and there's bad praise. "Praising well is a subtle art," says the author of *Talking to Tweens*. "How you phrase it can make a huge difference in whether a child feels freed and encouraged by your comments or, despite your good intentions, becomes anxious or even angry." Here, Hartley-Brewer shares some tips on the best—and worst—ways to praise students, keeping in mind that what works for some doesn't always work for others. Use this handy list of do's and don'ts to rate your own praising skills in the classroom, and get a few pointers for mastering the fine art of praise while you're at it.

DO increase your vocabulary. "Good is such a bad word," Hartley-Brewer says, "when it comes to ensuring that praise is effective. It is bad because it is inadequate; it says so little." Consider banishing the words "good" and "bad" from your classroom vocabulary. After all, what clues do the words give about what was done correctly, or poorly? Instead, try using description—a "well-argued" paper, an "insightful" poem, or a "beautifully drawn" map. If you stick to this rule in your class, you'll start to notice that your students pick up on it, too, and become better at handing out their own compliments and criticisms. Raise the bar.

DON'T just praise what they do. Approve of who they are. Praise shouldn't be limited to compliments on a job well done. One of the purposes of praise is to make children feel noticed and accepted unconditionally. Sometimes a simple "You have a great imagination," or even, "I notice that you really like tennis," can do wonders toward making students feel appreciated. "We do not have to wait for any particular event or achievement to speak out," reminds Hartley-Brewer.

DO custom fit praise to your students' grade level. As a teacher, you know that first grade praise doesn't work on sixth graders. Keep in mind that until about second grade children see the world in black and white terms, says Hartley-Brewer, "which also means that they see themselves in the same simple terms, as either a good kid or a bad kid." Consider instituting a balance sheet rule: three pieces of praise for every criticism. With older children, Hartley-Brewer advises us to "lie low, save your celebrations for the notable successes, and in the meantime, focus on affirmation."

DO give high fives. Some of the best praise is non-verbal. Add some high-fives and handshakes to your repertoire, says Hartley-Brewer. Plus "stickers, kind comments written on homework pages, and simply a warm tone of voice" convey approval and support. "If you stand close while you look over work," she writes, "you can show young students you care about them and feel comfortable in their presence."

DON'T wait for them to cross the finish line. Success is a process, as all teachers know. A good science project, for instance, is the result of many separate right choices and hard work. Instead of waiting until the final grading, use praise during the process to keep your students on track, help them pick up the pace if necessary, and gain confidence in their work, not just their product.

DO get specific. If one of the primary goals of praise is to encourage good work, then praise should include information about what exactly good work is. Only when they know what they did well can students make sure to repeat their success. In a way, specific praise fulfills the exact function of constructive criticism, only it's more fun to receive!

DON'T be wowed by neatness. Often teachers get a special thrill from super-neat homework. Neatness shows diligence and care (and is easier to read!). Don't overpraise neatness, Hartley-Brewer warns, "Neatness can be contrived as a diversion from content, with a child believing the words alone to be not quite good enough; it can be used as...the makeup and lipstick applied lovingly to the assignment." Remember that when you praise and encourage neatness, it's not the same thing as praising and encouraging good thinking.

DO mean what you say. The number one most surprising thing Hartley-Brewer learned from the children she studied? Their ability to see through false praise. "Both girls and boys," she says, "shared how they see through praise so easily. And they don't like it, and they react to it." So next time you're about to tell a little white lie, consider keeping quiet until you can think of a compliment or observation you really, truly mean. "The children I've interviewed say they particularly value teachers' approval and praise," says Hartley-Brewer, "because the teachers knew better than their parents what really was expected of them at school, and, therefore, what really was good work."

DON'T gush. "Of course," Hartley-Brewer writes, "it is better to sound pleased than to describe pleasure with a deadpan expression and a flat voice." However, she warns, "too much fervor can not only sound fake but also create too much tension around the requirement to continue to deserve the accolades. "If praise is about appreciation," she reminds us, "and appreciation involves estimating the worth of something, we need to match the applause to the achievement." Save your "wows" and "amazings" for the really impressive work. Sometimes, a simple "Nice, you finished it on time," will do.

DO praise en masse. You are probably reaching more children than you know! Hartley-Brewer tells a story from her own childhood: "I was working very hard—huffing and puffing—in a keep-fit class, and the teacher at the front said, 'That's really good,' to everybody. But I took it personally!" Your comments to the class at large are often as encouraging as one-on-one praise. Plus, praise of your entire class can engender esprit de corps among the children and make everyone feel good.

DON'T forget boys and girls appreciate praise differently. Although she admits there are plenty of exceptions to the rule, Hartley-Brewer asserts that while girls tend to thrive on more outright praise, boys tend to be easily embarrassed. Boys, she says, "are more inclined to feel potentially manipulated by praise and to accept it less willingly because they detect an ulterior motive." When praising boys, consider keeping it short and sweet. Slip in some praise privately, in the hallways, or as your class is filing out of the room.

DON'T ignore failure. When teachers talk up students' achievements, but become silent in the face of failure, the message is: Failure is too shameful to talk about. Pointing out where work is not up to par, Hartley-Brewer says, "provides factual and neutral information on what went wrong, what has not been understood fully, and on what needs to be changed."

DO remember to accept praise for yourself, too. People who don't receive or give themselves pats on the back are much less likely to give praise to others. So get used to getting praise, even if you have to ask for it—it will make you a more supportive teacher! Learning to praise ourselves, says Hartley-Brewer, "will act as a boost and help us to be positive and encouraging."

SOURCES:
Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer
http://www.amheath.com/authors/author.html?_a=author.show&id=157



Is your car Winter-Ready?

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Practice Cold Weather Driving!

During daylight, rehearse maneuvers slowly on the ice or snow in an empty lot. Steer into a skid. Know what your brakes will do: stomp on antilock brakes or pump non-antilock brakes.

Stopped or Stalled?

Stay with your car, don't overexert, put bright markers on antenna or windows and shine dome light. If you run your car, clear exhaust pipe and run it just enough to stay warm.

Did You Know?

The most common problems in the winter are frozen gas lines, frozen wiper blades and frozen door locks and windows.

SOURCES: Get Ready for Winter
<http://www.carcare.org/Winter/winter.shtml>

Essential Winter Emergency Items
<http://www.roadandtravel.com/automotive/carcaremaintenance/winterkit.aspx>

Safe Winter Driving
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/outreach/SafeSobr/20qp/planner/page7.html>

PopQuiz *Q: Which is more dangerous while driving, reaching in the back seat or talking on a cell phone?*

Teaching Kids To Give Back

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Holiday Recycling Campaign

Environmental causes are often overlooked during the holidays. What can students do to raise peoples' awareness and help the planet at this time of year? Hold a brainstorming session to decide. Kids might choose to encourage recycling Christmas trees and wrapping paper, or offer safety precautions for holiday lights. Get the word out by preparing informative flyers to distribute at school and around the neighborhood. Appoint student "PR managers" to research whether a local radio station would be willing to give you PSA time to share your message. Start a Web site with local resources and facts (it's free at teacher.scholastic.com).



All year long: Invite students to create a calendar of ways to recycle and use resources wisely at school and at home. Include natural resources such as water and electricity.

Visiting with Elders

The iPod generation may not think they have much in common with the residents of a senior citizen center, but that's likely to change when students interview seniors about what it was like to celebrate the holidays when they were young. As students hone their listening and interviewing skills, you might augment the

experience with other subjects: Use geometry to make inventive holiday decorations, make picture frames for digital photos you can leave behind, or prepare songs from the era of the folks you will visit.

All year long: In English or computer class, have students write a monthly newsletter for the senior center or retirement facility. A social studies class can hold monthly discussions in current events, and a P.E. class might choose to design and lead armchair exercises.

SOURCES: Service Learning Clearinghouse www.servicelarning.org

Everybody's Talking About... podcasts



What! A podcast? I know what you're thinking. Sounds complicated. Sounds expensive. Sounds, well, technical. A podcast is an audio or video file distributed over the internet for playback on a computer or mp3 player.

And the truth is, listening to podcasts or watching videocasts in your classroom couldn't be easier—or cheaper. Most are free. If you have a computer and an Internet connection, you already have all the equipment you need.

Here are 5 podcasts for teachers and kids you don't want to miss:

1. Wild Animal Chronicles

Best for: Introducing your curious students to the orangutans of Borneo or the penguins of Antarctica.

Why It's Worth It: Six-minute, jaw-dropping, well-narrated videos perfect for grades 3–8, produced by National Geographic, available for free over the Internet. Topics range in size from honeybees to whales, so it's easy to find just what you need to enrich your unit.

Where To Find It: On iTunes, or at www.nationalgeographic.com/podcasts

2. Poem of the Day

Best for: Poetry month, of course. Perfect for a quick poetry break, or an ongoing writers' workshop.

Why It's Worth It: Here are audio recordings of poems by many of the heavy-hitters—Emily Dickinson, Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes—so it's easy to find a poem appropriate for your class.

Where To Find It: On iTunes, or at www.sonibyte.com

3. Sixty-Second Science

Best for: Daily blasts of entertaining, thought-provoking science news.

Why It's Worth It: New theories on how some dinosaurs knew how to fly, how the sun sets our internal clocks, whether groundhogs can really predict the weather, and much more, all presented in a zippy radio-news format by the editors of Scientific American.

Where To Find It: On iTunes, or at www.sciam.com

4. My German Class

Best for: Creating your own language lab—no funding required.

Why It's Worth It: No one teaches German (or Chinese, or Italian) at your school? There are so many podcasts for foreign-language learners. You can find lessons on iTunes. My German Class is a weekly video podcast created by Clark Shah-Nelson, a former elementary school teacher from Denver, Colorado. Kids can watch Shah-Nelson make toast as he teaches them the German words for "toaster," "butter," and "plate." It's all in German, but kids will catch on.

Where To Find It: On iTunes, or at www.mygermanclass.com

5. Do Your Own Podcast

Best for: Learning how to integrate podcasting into your teaching.

Why It's Worth It: Educator Dan Schmit covers the do's and don'ts and the how's and why's in his long-running "Kids Cast: Podcasting in the Classroom."

Where To Find It: On iTunes, or at www.intelligent.com

Driving While Parenting

TEACHING CHILDREN GOOD CAR MANNERS IS KEY TO FAMILY SAFETY ON THE ROAD

What distracts you when you are at the wheel? For daily commuters, the answer may be the cell phone, the radio, or even drinking a hot cup of coffee.



For parents, that distraction is likely kids—big kids fighting, laughing, yelling, or a baby or toddler crying and fussing. And since driver inattention is the leading factor in most crashes and

near-crashes, it is important to think carefully about how to minimize driver distraction when transporting children for the safety of the whole family.

The High Cost of Low Attention

According to a landmark 2006 research report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involved some form of driver inattention within three seconds before the event. Primary causes of inattention are distracting activities inside the car and driver drowsiness.

What are the most dangerous distracting activities? Cell phone use ranks high, of course. But you may be surprised to learn that reaching for an object in the back seat—for example, when a parent retrieves a child's book or pacifier—raises the risk of accident by 9 times, whereas talking or listening on a hand-held device raises the risk of accident by a much lower factor of 1.3 times.

Pop Quiz

A: According to a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), reaching for an object in the car is nearly 9 times more likely to lead to an accident than talking on a hand-held device.

Reducing the Risk

Distractions are all around us. Lights, pedestrians, even your own thoughts can distract you behind the wheel. Add to that a child looking to you for your full attention from the back seat—yelling, throwing toys, or even just talking—and even a routine drive home from school can be a disaster waiting to happen. The trick to reducing the risk is to set strict rules for car behavior not only for the children, but also for you, the driver. Here are three tips for keeping the ride home safe.

1. Avoid Multitasking

As parents, we all want our children to be happy. So it can be tempting to concentrate more on what is going on in the backseat than on the road—to pass out goldfish crackers, retrieve matchbox cars, and adjudicate sibling arguments. Resolve to limit your parenting in the car. If you must give them your full attention, pull the car over.

2. Come Prepared

One of the best things you can do is consider your child's potential needs before you get in the car. Is he hungry or tired? Does she need to go to the bathroom? How does she behave when she becomes bored in the car? Age-appropriate games, books or music can help keep children happy and distracted, so they don't distract you.

3. Make Expectations Clear

Talk to your children in an age-appropriate way about car safety. Explain how important it is that drivers pay attention to the road. If you can, enlist them to help you come up with solutions to car chaos. Invite them to choose small appropriate toys or books for the car. At the same time, make your expectations for their behavior and the possible consequences clear. Never take driving with children lightly. In just two distracted seconds, a car going 35 miles per hour can travel over one hundred feet. There's no question that it's worth the extra few seconds it takes to pull over when the kids are capturing a little too much of your attention.

SOURCES:

Study on Distracted Drivers, NHTSA 2006.

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/>

Kids are Drivers' Biggest Distraction, May, 2007.

<http://www.whatcar.com/news-article.aspx?NA=225807>

Driving with Kids.

<http://gorp.away.com/gorp/eclectic/family/expert/drive.htm>

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