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Teachers Corner

Tricks, Treats and Lessons

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I am often found jotting down interdisciplinary connections to random topics and so I figured I would share my thoughts for classroom connections during this month of October, where the topic of conversation seems to revolve around the question “What will you be for Halloween?” The fall climate, in combination with the highly anticipated Giant Pumpkin weigh-off this weekend, has led me to reflect upon the season from multiple educational perspectives. I hope you find some great content to use with your curious and/or advanced students, who will certainly benefit from looking at Halloween as more than just a night to go out and trick (hopefully not too tricky) or treat.

Generating the following list was possible due to skills acquired while developing Interest Centers for my classroom. These strategies, whose origins lie in the origins of gifted education, allow the educator to offer multiple learning experiences in response to student interests. Exploratory activities can be written on note cards, organized by subject area, and filed in a box for student use.

I have tried to include a few ideas and resources for each of the main discipline areas (Science, Math, History/Business, Language/Writing/Reading, Arts/Music.) These “mini-lessons” may serve as enrichment activities for students who show interest and have some spare time during a particular class period or gifted coordinators and teachers could use them during weekly enrichment time, as part of before- and after-school programs, or inserted into the regular curriculum. Below is just a short sampling of what is possible. I hope it stirs up a cauldron of ideas.

Science Connections

☐ Have your students visit the online database, The Encyclopedia of Life (EOL), and read about the many different pumpkin and bat species. They can create a virtual collection and more advanced students can learn about the genetic connections.

☐ Involve students in the dissection of a pumpkin, identifying the parts and using their observational skills to sketch and describe what is seen. Or, bring a variety of pumpkins in for comparative studies.

- ☒ Prepare a procedure for growing a pumpkin. If time and conditions are right, carry it out.
- ☒ Introduce students to a great Virtual Skeletal System website developed by the University of Wyoming. There is so much for the student to learn.

Math Connections

- ☒ Instruct the students to take size and growth measurements of pumpkins. A great discussion and classroom lesson can be found here.
- ☒ Introduce the topics of correlation and/or forensics using a bone measurement activity on PBS.
- ☒ Start a discussion about estimations with bags of candy corn or statistics relating to costumes or candy.

History/Business Connections

- ☒ Explore the History of Halloween. The History Channel, along with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress have great historical information.
- ☒ Visit a website site dedicated specifically to world festivities and cultures.
- ☒ Turn a local cemetery into a classroom and conduct historical research or try grave rubbings. An example lesson can be found here.
- ☒ Access or create business plans and complete a cost analysis of growing and selling pumpkins and related seasonal items.

Language/Writing/Reading Connections

- ☒ Visit the library around this time of year and you will most likely find a display of the most popular ghost stories, children's books, poems and plays that could be shared and discussed with your students.
- ☒ View and offer the complete text of Washington Irving's The Legend of Sleepy Hollow from Project Gutenberg. This website also has a host of other great seasonal stories. You'll also find an audio recording of the story.
- ☒ Have the students write a short poem or story with a suggested spooky theme.

Arts and Music Connections

- ☐ Present a variety of painters and illustrators whose creations contain Halloween themes.
- ☐ Have students create masks, props, and costumes with an expert touch. They could also research professional make-up design.
- ☐ Offer musical selections often associated with Halloween. Monster Mash, Thriller, and Werewolves of London are my favorites!

Ready to introduce film appreciation? There is a great free download of Nosferatu, a 1922 silent film.

Nothing could be better than watching some of the classic horror films and their stars Bela Lugosi and Lon Cheney. Frankenstein's Monster, The Mummy, Dracula and The Wolfman. The camera shots and editing are great examples of fine cinema.

View the "Scary Mary" spoof trailer of Mary Poppins. It presents a great example of the impact of a soundtrack.

Have fun, and Happy Halloween!