



BEGINNING OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

By Stephanie Benson, IRC President

Once upon a time, at the beginning of the school year, teachers would get tired. Getting back in the school swing of things would physically, emotionally, and mentally drain them. This year teachers are longing for that kind of tiredness, as our exhaustion level is, and I apologize for this overused word, unprecedented. Many of us are working two jobs, teaching both in person and remote. We have become tech support, counselor, curriculum designer, filmmaker, editor, script writer ... oh, and educator.

In our current IRC Book Club, we are reading *The Distance Learning Playbook*. The entire first module is all about self-care for yourself. I love that our educational gurus Fisher, Frey, and Hattie made that the priority. As one of three moderators of the book club, I enjoy reading the responses from participants and the discussions that follow. I have taken so many ideas to use in my classroom. And, through those same discussions, I also discovered that we are all feeling the same – which reminded me that we are all in this together. Yet we will survive.

I'm thankful for the plethora of ideas, websites, and programs my colleagues and IRC friends have suggested. I'm surviving by following the KISS method, *Keep It Simple Stupid*. My goal is not to overwhelm myself, students, or their "grown-ups" on both ends of the connections. I'm not always successful, but it seems to be working for me. When our educational world settles into a new normal, we will have an expanded number of tricks in our back pocket to pull out and use with our students. We as educators will be stronger.

TIPS FOR REMOTE LEARNING

By Sheila Ruh and Sherry Sejnost

The beginning of school this fall does not look like it has in the past. Many students are learning remotely, other students are participating in a hybrid model, and still others are learning in school while wearing masks and social distancing. Teaching and learning in all of these scenarios is stressful for both teachers and students. While trying to navigate these changes, we can use technology to make these challenges easier for both teachers and students.

Research shows that strong teacher-student relationships are associated in both the short and long-term with improvements in higher student academic engagement, attendance, grades, fewer disruptive behaviors and suspensions, and lower school dropout rates. So how do we build relationships remotely? Provide opportunities to get to know the students and for the students to get to know the teacher as well as each other. Having a show and tell session virtually is a good way for the students and teachers to build relationships. Some ideas include sharing their pets, showing favorite things, sharing photos, etc. Another idea is to have lunch together virtually once a week to share more about families and life in general. Also, it is important to check-in with students through virtual meetings and provide meaningful feedback to both students and parents. There are many resources available online with more ideas. [Here are some you should check-out!](#)

Academically, how can teachers be sure all students are learning remotely? Provide many opportunities for formative assessments, such as Google forms, videos and even cartoons for students to show you what they know. Here is a list of [75 digital tools for formative assessments](#) Having short conferences with students during office hours is another suggestion to check-in with students and work with them individually or in small groups.

Using a learning management system, such as [Google Classroom](#), is an effective tool to organize

student lessons and assessments. With everything in one place, it is much easier for students to find announcements, lessons, resources and assessments. It is also helpful if students need to go back and review a previous lesson or video; it is all in one place.

Feedback is an important part of academic success. Being able to provide specific feedback in a timely manner is so helpful. Some quick and easy ways to provide feedback is to insert comments in Google Apps, record a quick video to share your ideas with students in a personal way, and even audio clips serve as a valuable tool when it comes to feedback. Something as quick and easy as an emoji is a fun form of feedback as well.

Lastly, try to keep the lessons fun and engaging. Make activities interactive, include many of the instructional strategies used in the classroom during virtual classes, such as having students work in small groups in breakout rooms, play learning games, have class meetings, talk about highs/lowes, and mostly have patience and be flexible. Remote learning is challenging for everyone, and we all need to do the best we can to have it be a fun and successful learning experience for all.

TEACHERS IN THE TRENCHES: KEEPING IT REAL

By Laura St. John

Keep it Real. These are the words that I find myself repeating as I plan my company's remote learning sessions. After interviewing a number of teachers who participated in last spring's remote learning, observing my eleven-year-old's struggles with remote learning at home, and in speaking recently with a developer of Learning Management Systems, these are the three simple words I am keeping in mind. Keep it real.

It's easy to be swept away with all the possibilities technology may present. It's also easy to be intimidated by it. However, it's possible what our students *most* need right now is what's most missing from remote learning — a human connection, just like what takes place in our classrooms. With so much chaos around us, the establishment of a simple and consistent routine can't be emphasized enough. For remote learning, I expect my students to find one place where we may meet — whether it's from their own desk, a spot at the kitchen table, or a place on the couch or even the floor. I want to meet with them from the same spot with the same supplies every day. I will do the same for them. We'll always have the same background and will keep our devices stationary unless otherwise directed. We'll start each day with attendance and a personal greeting, followed by a brief meditation and a physical warm up. Then we'll engage our voices. My younger students will sing a song and my older students will recite a poem. I won't worry about "mixing it up" to keep interest high.

Let's keep in mind, that in terms of "mixing it up," there are a million things which can be found online that are far more exciting than I will ever be, even if I pull out all the stops with graphics and video clips. But that is not my goal. My goal is to *keep it real*. There is enough in the world that is mixed up right now, and so I will bring consistency, routine, and rhythm. It will make things so much better for them, and easier for me.

Once we've gone through our opening routine, our sessions begin with an SEL based activity. On some days it involves writing or drawing, and on other days it takes the form of an online talking circle in which each participating student has the opportunity to share and connect. Topics vary with each session and may include questions like "What are you missing most about being with your classmates today?" or "What is something that you like about this new way of working together?"

The lessons are brief and to the point, and once a concept is taught, multiple opportunities to respond are provided. We never sit for more than 15 minutes at a stretch, getting up often to stretch together or play a quick game. I am grateful for making a connection with my students and look at this time together as an opportunity to get to know them in a different way. Maybe a student, when granted permission and as a reward for having an excellent class, can take our group to his room and show us his favorite doll or introduce us to his pet.

While I am excited to continue to experiment with the many resources available for remote learning, my main goal each day is to make our online experience feel as much like the in-person experience as possible. My goal is to *Keep It Real*.

Bio: *Laura St John is the owner and founder of Play In A Book, a drama based reading program serving Chicago Public Schools. She currently serves as the Past President of the Chicago Area Reading Association.*

NO-PRESSURE TEXT PARKING LOT

By Andrea Mear

Think about how you learned to drive. Chances are, it was not on a four lane highway. Flash-forward to present day, and most likely, you are able to drive without analyzing every step you take to operate your car. You were able to master the skill of driving over time with scaffolded support until you reached automaticity. Right now our students are “new drivers” on this road of virtual instruction, and they need all the practice to build their confidence and set them up for success. We need to allow students some time in the “parking lot” to practice before we ask them to “merge into incoming traffic.” Reading a grade level text can already feel like navigating a four lane highway, let alone reading and interacting with it digitally. We can provide our students a “parking lot” to practice their new skill by introducing these skills in a mini lesson that uses a no-pressure text.

No-pressure texts can be any text that allows you to teach or review the skill without adding the extra pressure of being able to read and comprehend the text. We want students to focus on learning the skill and not the challenges that come with reading a complex text. Just like a parking lot is void of obstacles that might be challenging for a new driver, the “no-pressure” text for reading needs to remove the obstacles that might impede a learner’s ability to practice the skill without “crashing into” barriers like challenging vocabulary, sophisticated syntax, or background knowledge that is required to comprehend the text.

With that being said, a no-pressure text does not have to be a piece of text; in fact, the best examples of no-pressure texts do not include any words. For example, when teaching a challenging skill like inferring, you might consider designing a mini lesson that uses the same rigorous resources that you would use with a grade level text, but introduces the skill with a picture, infographic, or a video as the “text” for students to analyze. Students will be able to practice inferring, focusing solely on how well they understand the skill and not on how well they comprehend the text. Another excellent no-pressure text option is a picture book. Picture books can be used with any grade level; I frequently used them with my high school students to introduce new skills.

Once students have had adequate practice with using the no-pressure text to demonstrate their understanding of the skill, they can use the same resources they utilized in the mini lesson with a complex text. If students struggle with the complex text, the teacher needs only to redirect the students back to the work they did with the no-pressure text to help them understand the skill. We would never throw a new driver behind the wheel on a four lane highway before allowing time to practice and build confidence, so why would we throw students into a grade level text without the same support?

FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

Summer has faded into autumn. The leaves are starting to change colors, the air has become a bit crisper, and the farmers are busy harvesting their crops. October has arrived. This month’s calendar is devoted to Bullying Prevention, school safety, and fire prevention, as well as Family History Month, Columbus Day and Halloween, plus the last remaining days of the national campaign to the election of our country’s president and other government leaders.

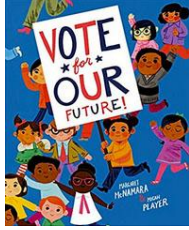


Each autumn Mother Nature displays her beauty as the leaves change from green to crimson, golden yellow, orange, and brown. Another aspect is the harvest moon. **Hello, Harvest Moon** by Ralph Fletcher follows the moon as it “climbs the night stairs” while rising and shining its light on all the things that come alive during the night, including the little girl who doesn’t want to miss this yearly event. This story is told in poetic verse and vivid descriptive language including several science terms/vocabulary. The story is also enhanced by beautiful nocturnal illustrations. *Hello, Harvest Moon* makes for a nice read aloud or can be a mentor book for writing autumn poetry.

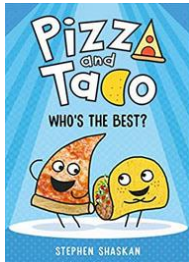


History Comics: The Great Chicago Fire: Rising from the Ashes by Kate Hannigan is a graphic novel that tells the story of the terrible blaze that engulfed Chicago on October 8, 1871. The story follows Frannie and J. P. (a brother and sister) as they run to stay ahead of the fire and to eventually meet up with their parents. As the story progresses many factual events, details, and maps about the fire are included in the sidebars. The story concludes with Frannie and J. P. grownup and attending the Chicago World’s Fair – a tribute to Chicago’s rebirth into a modern world class city. The back of the book contains a timeline, additional resources, websites, and Chicago Fire sites that you can still visit today. *The Great Chicago Fire: Rising from the Ashes* is part of a new graphic novel *History Comics* series.

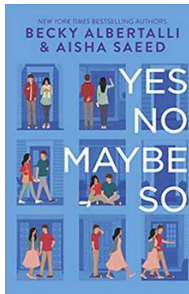
Vote for Our Future! by Margaret McNamara is a delightful and engaging book that introduces the election process and the importance of voting, the right of every American citizen. This book tells the story of an elementary school that’s closed so it can become a polling place for the community. The students are curious about the



election and begin to do research on what's involved in the election process. Through colorful and engaging characters, the students encourage the grownups to vote by creating pamphlets, making posters, knocking on their neighbor's door, and spreading the word about the importance of voting.



A cute book to team with *Vote for Our Future!* is *Pizza and Taco: Who's the Best?* by Stephen Shaskan. Although this book is basically about friendship, it does introduce your preschoolers and kindergarten students to the election process. During the reading of this humorous story, the reader is introduced to debate, ballot, vote, etc. Will their friendship survive? How will their friends vote? You'll have to read this delightful book and have your early learners cast their vote for who's the best.



Yes No Maybe So by Becky Albertalli and Aisha Saeed is not just a teen love story but also a story that involves the political process. The story follows Jamie Goldberg, a Jewish white boy who has difficulty speaking to people, and Maya Rehman, a Pakistani American Muslim girl who is experiencing some difficult times within her family and friends. With the political season gearing up for the election Jamie and Maya's mothers volunteer them to work for the Senate candidate as a canvas worker. *Yes No Maybe So* is told in alternating chapters as Jamie and Maya deal with teen activism, cultural misunderstandings, friendship, and the trials and tribulations of an upcoming election. *Yes No Maybe So* is a good addition to any Jr High/high school library.

October Reminders

- October 5 – World Teacher Day
- October 12 – Columbus Day
- October 16 – National Dictionary Day
- October 20 – National Day of Writing
- October 23-31 – Red Ribbon Week
- October 31 – Halloween

LITERACY LINKS

By the IRC Educational Media Committee

Take a moment to review some of the Literacy Links provided by the IRC Educational Media Committee to help Illinois educators in today's classrooms.

Reading Passage Resources

[Reading Vine](#)

This free resource has a collection of reading passages for all levels. The passages are fiction, nonfiction, poetry and much more. It provides personalized learning, skill reinforcement and it allows you to search by skill, vocabulary group, Lexile, or Common Core Standard.

Interactive Resources

[Whiteboard Chat](#)

This free online whiteboard tool can be used in two ways. The first is to create one whiteboard that is shared with all of the students. The second way is to create individual whiteboards for each student to use that you can also observe. This tool also has features to lock the boards, collaborate in small groups, use text, and much more.

Web 2.0 Resources

[Teachermade](#)

This is a free online resource that converts all of your paper activities into digital activities. It includes an auto-grading feature, and it is fast and easy to use. It makes teaching remotely, in person, or in a hybrid model seamless.

UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

Don't forget to take advantage of some upcoming PD opportunities planned throughout Illinois.

- **October 1, 2020: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host Literacy as a Tool for Healing from Trauma from 6:15 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **October 7, 2020: IRC Webinar** on History's Beating Heart: Tools for Making Historical Figures Come to Life with Kate Hannigan.
- **October 7, 2020: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host a Wired Webinar Discussion following the IRC Webinar with Kate Hannigan at 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **October 7, 2020: East Central-EIU Reading Council** will host a special showing of the IRC Webinar featuring Kate Hannigan from 6:30 to 8:00 pm at Eastern Illinois University, Buzzard Auditorium, 1920 9th Street, Charleston, Illinois.
- **October 10, 2020: Illinois Title I Association (ITA)** will host a Round Table Discussion for the 2nd in the Series: Sharing the Burden at 9:00 am via Zoom.
- **October 14, 2020: West Suburban Reading Council** will host a Book Gossip with Kathleen March from 7:00 to 8:30 pm via Zoom.
- **October 15, 2020: IRC** is accepting registrations for the Fall 2020 IRC Book Clubs for *Teaching Writing* by Lucy Calkins and/or *180 Days* by Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle.
- **October 15, 2020: Will County Reading Council** will host a Virtual Meet with Liesl Shurtliff from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **October 26, 2020: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host Equipped for Reading Success with David Kilpatrick from 7:00 to 8:30 pm via a virtual platform.
- **October 27, 2020: National Road Reading Council** will host Interactive Read Aloud Across the Curriculum at 4:30 pm via Zoom.
- **October 29, 2020: Suburban Council of IRA (SCIRA)** will host Radical Teaching: Reading Workshop as a Powerful Space for Transformation and Liberation with Sonja Cherry-Paul from 6:00 to 7:30 via Zoom.
- **November 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020: Macon County Reading Council** will host an Online Book Club on Raising Kids Who Read -- What Parents and Teachers Can Do via Google Classroom.
- **November 7, 2020: Chicago Area Reading Association (CARA)** will host Building a New You: Development to Your Destiny with Allen J. Bryson from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm via Zoom.
- **November 10, 2020: East Central-EIU Reading Council** will host Literacy Strategies in the Content Areas via a virtual platform.
- **November 11, 2020: IRC Webinar** on Using Poetry to Expand Content Knowledge and Structure Informational Text with Clare Landrigan.
- **November 11, 2020: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host a Wired Webinar Discussion following the IRC Webinar with Clare Landrigan at 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **November 12, 2020: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host the Day of Reading with Cornelius Minor from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm via a virtual platform.
- **November 14, 2020: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host An Innovative Approach to Reading and Writing with Maria Walther and Karen Biggs-Tucker from 9:00 to 10:30 am via a virtual platform.
- **November 19, 2020: Family Reading Night** is an annual statewide event sponsored by Jesse White, Secretary of State and State Librarian, and the Illinois Center for the Book at the Illinois State Library that encourages families to spend quality time reading together

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).

QUICK LINKS

Visit the IRC Website

Full IRC Events Calendar

Latest on the IRC Conference

Available IRC Awards and Grants

Bring IRC PD to your School District

Learn more about the Illinois Reads Program

Questions? Please feel free to reach out to the Illinois Reading Council by email at irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org or by phone at 309-454-1341.

See what's also happening on our social media sites:

