

 SCHOLASTIC

Instructor

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books for summer
reading P. 24

If I read four books this
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**Common Core
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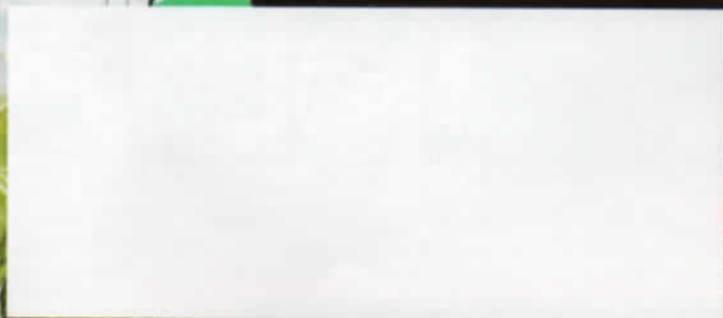
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GRADES 6-8

End on a High Note

Keep middle schoolers engaged with these collaborative year-end projects.

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

1 **IS FOR END OF THE YEAR.** The close of the school year means having students reflect on what they've learned, whether it's through journaling, scrapbooking, drawing pictures, or making videos. Michelle Lundy, who teaches middle school social studies in Thomaston, Georgia, took a cue from the younger grades and asked her students to create alphabet books recounting the topics

they'd studied that year. For each letter, students came up with one word or name from their studies (e.g., *Abraham Lincoln* for A). They then wrote a few sentences about what they'd learned about each topic, illustrated each page with a photo or drawing, and created a cover for their booklets. Lundy says her students really enjoyed the project, and they thoroughly reviewed the year's social studies curriculum.

2 **STAGE A TV CONTEST.** Engage your students by letting them participate in a TV-like competition, similar to *American Idol*. Together, brainstorm a list of concepts or ideas your class has learned during the year. Write each idea on a slip of paper and put all the slips in a hat. Divide students into groups of three or four and have each group draw a slip of paper. Then, instruct them to create a skit or





song based on their topic. After two or three days' practice, ask each group to perform in front of the class. To make it more fun, see if you can get two other teachers or parents to serve on the panel of "judges," minus the TV-host snarkiness.

3 SURVIVE AND THRIVE. Ask students to think about the things they wish they'd known or that they loved experiencing in their current grade. Individually or in groups, have them create a "middle school survival guide" for rising middle schoolers. The end product could be a top 10 list of advice for middle school, a guidebook of do's and don'ts, or a video newscast that offers advice. For example, the students in Paula Jessee's eighth-grade English class in Suffolk, Virginia, wrote letters to incoming eighth graders, including such information as the schedule of a regular day, advice on behavior, and descriptions of their favorite class activities. Jessee says the exercise was also great for current students' practice in written expression.

4 STAGE A SERVICE PROJECT. Enlist your students in supporting a local cause that is important to them, whether it's collecting canned goods for a food pantry, pet food for an animal shelter, or books for a library or school in need. Make contact with the charity recipient of choice, and then let students do the work—they can publicize the service project, make presentations to other classes, count and organize donations, and present the results to the recipient and the rest of the school.

5 CREATE A TIME CAPSULE. Students love the idea of leaving a part of themselves behind for posterity. Caroline LaMagna, a middle school English teacher in Suffolk, Virginia, recommends having your current students prepare a time capsule for your future students. Students can leave examples of completed projects that show off their brilliant minds

by writing stories of "a day in the life" of students in your class, drawing a comic strip, shooting a video, or creating a presentation. The time capsule can include a class picture and students' writings about what they expect to be doing five or 10 years from now. If you do wait five or 10 years before opening the capsule, try to track down your former students so they can see how much they've changed.

6 GO ON THE HUNT. For a modern twist on the traditional scavenger hunt, send your students on an Internet scavenger hunt. This is a quick and easy project for your students to work on individually or in pairs or groups. LaMagna recommends choosing a topic you want your students to research, then creating questions for them to answer. Give the scavenger hunt a test-run first so that you can recommend sites when students are stumped. Establish guidelines for the types of sites that are authoritative and appropriate. If you want to add a little excitement, have the students compete to be the first to find all the necessary information.

7 BUILD A BOARD GAME. In groups, have students create a board game based on a unit covered during the year. As an example, LaMagna created her own game—Literary Pursuit, modeled after Trivial Pursuit—and used it as a test review tool. She had students use poster board or cover dollar-store checkerboards with paper to design game boards. They then typed questions and answers and printed them on card stock to create game cards. While many of LaMagna's students followed her lead and designed Trivial Pursuit-type games, drawing questions from novels they'd read over the year, some created boards with a Candy Land-like path where players had to answer questions to reach the end. Each group was encouraged to make up their own rules, and some students even found online templates to fashion a large die or a spinner. □

TAKE A (VIRTUAL) FIELD TRIP

Your schedule or budget may not allow for a class field trip at year's end, but with technology, you can organize amazing virtual field trips for your students. Conduct online trips as a class, or allow students to take their own trips individually or in groups. The Internet has a wide array of e-field trip options. Here are a few places where you can start your journey.

Each month, Ball State University offers free access to a few of its archived virtual field trips at bsu.edu/eft/home2/00front.htm. Among the trips: visits to the Grand Canyon and the Grand Tetons, and a walk into history with the U.S. Buffalo Soldiers.

Janna Laughon, a fifth-grade teacher and technology instructor in El Cajon, California, hosts a list of electronic field trips on her personal website, jannalaughon.com/eFieldTrips.html. Destinations include Pearl Harbor and national parks such as the Everglades and Death Valley.

Scholastic has a variety of virtual field trips for young explorers at scholastic.com/livewebcasts/webcast_tips.htm. Venture to Ellis Island, the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and other locations that are sure to educate and entertain.