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## Literacy Link: Moving Forward– ReadyGEN

### Finishing Strong: Making End-of-Year Engagement Genuine By: Kevin Scott

When it comes to student engagement, there are many strategies and tools you can use to “reach” students. In fact, if you search for just a few minutes, you’ll find literally thousands of resources to encourage and support student engagement. ASCD has plenty of materials for you to use, and my own Google search unearthed an Educational Leadership article from 1995 that is still relevant today. And in our recent Whole Child Symposium, we had a terrific discussion with some experts and practitioners about engagement and what it looks like in schools today. Perhaps one of the most striking comments from the discussion—and the #ASCDL2L chat beforehand—was that you know students are engaged when time flies, when they groan because they don’t want to stop working on a project, or when they come in the next day excited to continue their work.

At my son’s 7th grade band concert last week, I got to see engagement in a genuine environment. In fact, it brought back a flood of memories from when I was in school sitting on a stage in front of an auditorium full of parents. His teacher talked to the audience and gave us a 20-second overview of what we were about to hear. Then he turned around and, right before he raised his hands to call their instruments up, said something. That something wasn’t intended for the audience to hear. Whatever he said—whatever cheesy joke or silly comment that took one second to say—got those kids to smile. It helped them relax. It showed them that they were in this together. And it allowed everyone to perform well.

Not every teacher has the unique ability to engage with students this way. It takes a special teacher to be able to take kids who can barely squeak their way through the beginning lessons with an instrument and have them perform well by the end of the school year. I know that when I taught 7th grade history, it was a challenge to make every lesson engaging. Let’s face it, some periods in history are pretty tough to explain to kids, while other topics just sail off the pages and are fascinating to discuss.

As this school year comes to a close, it’s a huge challenge to keep your students engaged so that the learning continues until the final bell rings. Here are a few ideas to make your closing lessons more engaging.

- Ask your students what interests them and find creative ways to tie it to your curriculum
  - Link the content to music, art, or other creative methods to engage multiple senses
- Consider implementing Genius Hour or 20 percent time
- Have your students “teach” a topic to a younger grade (What would their lesson look like? How would they engage the younger students?)
  - Plug in—find a resource or technology tool that interests your students and give them the latitude to be critical thinkers and create something new

Encourage your students to take time to reflect on this school year (and reflect with them!)

# ReadyGEN

## Engaging & Challenging End-of-Year Ideas

*If you haven't utilized the following components of ReadyGEN, try to play around with them the last quarter of school!!!*

• Independent Reading Activities



Independent Reading Activities

Assign

• Leveled EReaders & Teacher/Student Pages



### Code Breaks: Uncovering German Messages 4.4.4

**SUMMARY** This book describes the cracking of the German code during World War II. It gives a brief history of World War II, as well as other codes used throughout history. It also focuses on the difficult task of the cryptologists who worked to crack the code.

**LEARN VOCABULARY**  
sneak ink  
scholar soldier  
tombe translate  
triumph uncover

#### INTRODUCE THE BOOK

**INTRODUCE THE TITLE AND AUTHOR** Discuss with students the title and the author of Code Breakers: Uncovering German Messages. Ask them what images they see on the cover. What do these images tell them the book will be about?

**ASK A QUESTION** Ask students what they know about World War II. What countries

**STRATEGY SUPPORT** Present and set purpose. Before they read, encourage students make predictions based on the photographs and captions of Code Breakers: Uncovering German Messages. Explain that by forming predictions ahead of time, they can then read for the purpose of confirming their predictions.

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**  
Pages 3-4 What questions did you have about World War II? What did you learn? (Possible responses: When did it begin? Who was involved? What did the German code have to do with it? Begin in 1939. Other powers were Great Britain, Russia, the United States, and their supporters; Axis powers included Germany, Italy, Japan. Germans used secret code to send messages.)

Pages 4-7 Why do you think there is a photo of an early cipher text? (Possible response: It shows graphically that secret codes have been around for thousands of years.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Code Breakers

### Graphic Features

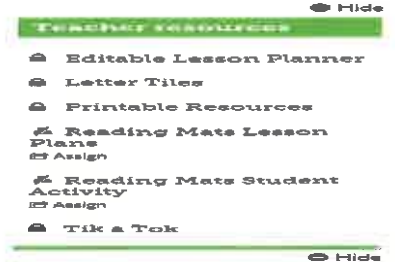
• Graphic features are maps, charts, photographs, drawings, and so on that help strengthen your understanding of the text.

**Directions** Use the chart on pages 10–11 of Code Breakers: Uncovering German Messages to decode the message that is written in Morse code. Then write a message in Morse code.

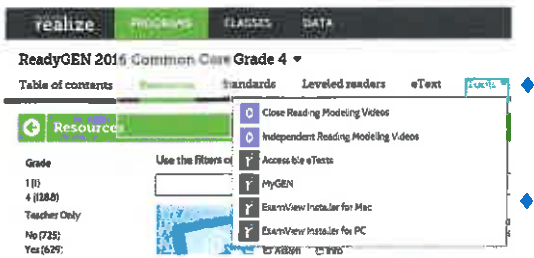


1. What does it say?

• Reading Mats Lesson Plan & Student Activity



• Pearson Modeling Video Clips



Pearson

• Pearson Training Site



# Engaging End of Year Activities

**A Year's Worth of News** – Working in groups students created a one-page class newsletter entitled “The Year In Review.” They devised the ways the page would be set up, the number of mini articles, and assigned responsibility for each task. When the computer room or library was open, they “published” the final product. After all classes reviewed the newsletters, they chose the one to be posted on my school web page – a much better alternative to the usual “See you in the fall!” message posted there.

▶ **A Book Review Grab Bag** – I gave students a printout of all the literary titles we had read, both stories and novels, for that school year. Working in groups, they would create a five to ten minute “review session.” These could be creative like charades or game shows or more traditional review questions or quizzes. They would then be “the teachers” as they conducted their review sessions. All content area teachers have units of study, important vocabulary, and major concepts that would lend themselves to these types of review sessions.

▶ **Advice for Next Year's Rookies** – Middle school students love to give advice so I had them write letters to next year's incoming students. The title of the assignment was “How To Survive Mrs. Scott's English Class.” The letters could be serious or funny, but they had to be informative. Students shared their letters and then voted on the best one. The winning letter was abridged and included on my Course Outline for the following school year. All teachers can do this, and the results are fun for everybody!

▶ **Make Your Own Test** – For my final exam in English, I had students create test questions as well as comprehensive essay questions for possible use on the exam. I did use some of the questions on the actual exam, but as a learning community we used them for practice and review.

▶ **The Best of Me** – Each student in my class had a cumulative writing folder. Before they took these home, I had them carefully review their work with certain criteria: noting growth, making a list of areas in need of improvement as they moved to the next grade, and selecting a piece they were particularly proud of. Those who wanted to (and so many did) shared with the class. Reviewing lab folders in science or assessing artistic expression or rereading health journals compels students to “think” about their own learning and gain wisdom about themselves.

▶ **The “Room 808” Awards** – Though students can be tapped out when it comes to writing (“Do we have to?!”) they rarely mind opinion pieces when they can be subjective and speak with their own voices (which is so often discouraged across all content areas). Frequently, I would have them nominate their favorite story or novel or writer – with rationale – for a classroom Oscar. The discussions that ensued were most enlightening. This lends itself beautifully across all content areas: favorite units, favorite projects, best lesson – the possibilities are endless.

▶ **The Good, the Bad, and the Re-Do's** – I often had students join me in what I always did as part of my own teaching practice: self-reflection. We would all sit and respond to the following questions, then share: What have you enjoyed? What were the biggest challenges? What has surprised you the most? What has brought you the most joy? What would you have done differently?”

## LET THE KIDS TEACH THE CLASS.

Split the class into groups and assign each a specific topic you studied this year. Give them time to go over their topic and invent a good review activity, which they have to grade. You assess them on whether they get their facts straight and how effective their review activity is.

## HAVE STUDENTS WRITE A CHILDREN'S BOOK.

When writing for younger children, your students will have to really simplify and emphasize the key elements of your course. This can serve as a great review and a fun way to integrate art into the curriculum. Students might write the children's version of a Shakespeare play, a young readers' version of the history of Ancient Egypt, or a picture book that illustrates the cycle of life.

# Have Kids Write Every Day

**During the last quarter of school, have students start or end the day writing in a journal or online journal. Free writing time or utilizing deep writing prompts will increase writing stamina and enjoyment!**

- I wish my teachers knew that . . . Or I wish my friends.....
- What's the most beautiful person, place, or thing you've ever seen? Share what makes that person, place, or thing so special.
- What is your most difficult subject in school? Why is it difficult? What can you do to get better at that subject?
- Rewrite "Hansel and Gretel" from the witch's perspective.
- You wake up tomorrow with a silly superpower that makes you famous. What is that silly power? How does it lead to your becoming an international superstar?
- What are examples of things you want versus things you need?
- Last Friday, you were given one wish by a magical panda. You tried so hard to make the wish positive, but after the whacked-out events that unfolded over the weekend, you regret ever meeting that tricky panda. What did you ask for, and what happened?
- What things do all kids know that adults do not?
- ♦ What TV or movie characters do you wish were real? Why?
- ♦ Which classmate would be the best to lead us through a zombie apocalypse? Why?
- If the internet were to crash forever, what would the benefits be for you? The drawbacks?
- Write a scene that features a) a classmate, b) \$100 million, and c) magical shoes.
- What three features should your future house have? Why?
- In the future, what extreme sports will people be talking about?
- You get to take one book, one food item, and one famous person (living or dead) to a deserted island. What and who do you take? Why?
- ♦ Write a powerfully supportive email to yourself 10 years from now. Send that email to yourself using [FutureMe.org](https://FutureMe.org).

# Get Kids Reading

- \***Bookopolis:** <https://bookopolis.com/#/>
- \***Wonderopolis:** <https://wonderopolis.org/>
- \***Scholastic Book Trailers:** <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books-and-authors/>

## Best Books for 4th/5th Graders

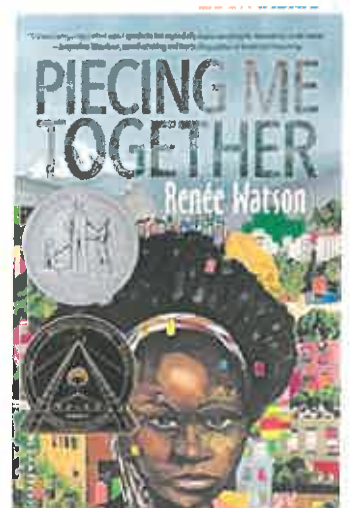
### \***Common Sense Media Lists:**

- \* <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/best-books-for-fifth-graders>
- \* <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/best-books-for-fourth-graders>

\***Best Books for Young Readers 2018:** <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/kids/best-books-young-readers-january-2018/>

\***Award Winning Book:** <http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/john-newbery-medal-2>

\***Book Series:** <https://www.weareteachers.com/books-series-kids-in-grades-3-6-will-love/>



# School Year Reflections

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I feel I improved the most in \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .

Something important that I learned this year was . . .

What I enjoyed studying the most was \_\_\_\_\_ because ...

Something I'm proud of accomplishing is . . .

Something I learned about myself this year was . . .

Next year I hope to . . .

I will never forget this year because . . .

