Using Holidays as Meaningful Teaching Moments

Even though it is our shortest month, this February is packed with festivities. We watch for Groundhogs and their shadows on the 2nd and Super Bowl XLII falls on February 3. The Chinese Lunar Year of the Rat begins on the 7th. This year Mardi gras, the last day of indulgence before the more somber time of Lent, falls on February 5th. We also choose to honor our presidents and our sweethearts in February.

These holidays and celebrations can be a great time for fun and fellowship, but also represent a powerful learning opportunity in the classroom. The trick is finding a meaningful way to incorporate holidays into the curriculum. Sometimes it may seem that finding ways to bring holidays into a secondary math or science classroom might be too far to stretch, but a little creativity can create lessons that really engage our students and enliven our classrooms.

A fun way to incorporate Groundhog Day into math and science classes would be to calculate what time of day a groundhog of a certain height would see his shadow. By incorporating angles of the sun at different latitudes, we can have our students decide where the groundhog would need to be to guarantee an early spring!

One of the important cultural traditions connected with Chinese New Year is the idea of clearing away last year’s bad luck and settling old debts. A math teacher could greet students with Kung Hey Fat Choi! (May prosperity be with you), and teach a lesson on calculating the interest on debt.

For Valentine’s Day, what could be more relevant than a discussion of the human heart in biology class? Going beyond anatomy, why not discuss the physical link between love and physiology. Don’t forget to mention the chemical response that love and chocolate (and salami) produce in our bodies!

Chinese New Year, the Jewish holiday of Purim (in March this year), and Mardi gras are all holidays that float because of their linkages to different calendars or lunar cycles. Why not discuss the different ways we calculate time or have students figure out when the holidays will fall next year.

The possibilities are endless and a little bit of effort helps us to make a real connection between curriculum and our students lives!
Mmmmm, Chili

What better way to warm up in the chilly winter months than with a satisfying bowl of chili. Now even though this year’s Floridian winter may not supply the chilly weather, FEA and the education department are willing to make sure that everyone gets some chili. (And we’ll turn on the A/C if necessary).

The Annual Department Chili Cook-off will be held Saturday, February 9, from noon until 3 (or as long as the fun lasts!). We will set up in the Teaching Lab in the Quad, and will have lots of space outside for fun.

We hope that everyone will enter their favorite chili into the competition. I’ve already heard rumors of award winning (from an official contest) chili, vegetarian chili, and chili with no beans, and maybe even a chili verde. We will have prizes for the crowd favorites and chili for everyone. And for those of us not so fond of chili, there will be some other things to snack on as well.

Everyone is welcome. If you can, bring a pot a chili, crackers, or something sweet to share. Friends and family are definitely invited. In the past, we have had lots of fun—and some really great chili!

We look forward to seeing everyone there.

Love in the Lab!

In honor of Valentine’s Day, and as our way to show our appreciation for all members of the Math and Science Ed Department, FEA will be providing some sweet treats in the Shepherd Lab on Thursday, February 14th. Stop by for some love (and some sugar)!

Entering the Home Stretch

As their final semester begins, our seniors find themselves immersed in the classroom. They are taking on their final student teaching internship. Cory Aripotch, Michael Bruso, David D’Agostino, Michelle Donito, Cassie Gonyer, Kathryn Herron, Kyle Melancon, Carolyn Horst, and Jessica Thomas are all finally putting into practice all of the coursework and experience they have gained as they progressed through their degree program. We are sure that they are finding themselves well prepared and that they are enjoying the actual experience of teaching. Keep up the good work, and we look forward to hearing some of your stories from the field!

Alumni Update

Congratulations to Robyn (Whitton) Meckel (Earth/Space Science Education, ’99) on the newest addition to her family.

Jack Harmon Meckel was born on January 7th at 7:21pm. He was 7lbs 10oz and 19 3/4 inches and arrived 10 days early!

Robin actually taught until 11:00 that same day. That’s real dedication.

Introducing Jack Harmon Meckel, future astronaut?
Peace Corps Week

Most Americans have probably heard of the Peace Corps in some way or another, but a few of us in the department have a special understanding of what it means to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. Florida Tech and our department offer a Peace Corps Fellows program to returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs). Because of this, we have a fairly high concentration of RPCVs in the department.

President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps in 1961 to promote world peace and friendship. To accomplish this mission, Peace Corps has established three main goals: 1) Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women. 2) Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served. 3) Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

One of the interesting things about Peace Corps service is that, while volunteers can find common threads in their experiences, every volunteer has a unique story to tell. In many ways, it is up to each individual volunteer to decide how best to serve the Peace Corps’ goals. The first two goals are the work of a volunteer’s two years of overseas service, but the third goal can continue for a lifetime. As President Kennedy said, “The logic of the Peace Corps is that someday we are going to bring it home to America.”

In honor of Peace Corps Week (and still working on that 3rd goal), we have asked some of our RPCVs to share a snapshot of their service. For anyone who would like to hear more about Peace Corps, I am sure that any of us would be happy to share more about our experiences. For me, my service was an amazing two years, and I hope that Peace Corps continues to promote world peace and friendship for a very long time.

February is Black History Month

When Carter G. Woodson established Negro History week in 1926, he realized the importance of providing a theme to focus the attention of the public. For many years, the second week of February was set aside for this celebration to coincide with the birthdays of abolitionist/editor Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, as part of the nation’s bicentennial, the week was expanded into Black History Month. In 2000, President Clinton proclaimed February as National African American History Month.

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) sets a theme each year for Black History Month. This year’s theme is “Carter G. Woodson and the Origins of Multiculturalism.”

For more information on ways to celebrate this year’s Black History Month, visit the ASALH’s website at: http://www.asalh.org/Ways_to_Celebrate_BHM.html

Elisabeth McCormack
Panama
2002-2005
I spent two years living in a mud hut with no electricity, in a community with no road, and I wouldn’t trade the experience for anything!

Richard Santangelo
China
2004-2006
Serving in Sichuan, China was a true cross-cultural and challenging experience that gave me a greater appreciation of the world and other cultures.

Carole McCauley
Antigua
1998-2001
One of the coolest things I got to do as a Peace Corps volunteer was work to protect the world’s rarest snake and its unique habitat on Antigua’s offshore islands.

Angela Delp
Cameroon
2003-2006
Cameroon is the hottest place I’ve ever known, which gave me a whole new appreciation for water!
**FEA News**

FEA’s officers are really committed to making FEA a strong organization. We are organizing events and activities that bring the department together and help maintain the family atmosphere that we enjoy. However, we really need everyone to join in. FEA is for everyone in the department, undergrads, grad students, faculty, and anyone else interested in education. Which means you!

FEA is now holding bi-monthly meetings on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month at 4:00 pm in the Shephard Lab. This is the time where we plan activities and future events. We welcome ideas from everyone in the department. If you can’t make the Wednesday meeting, send a proxy or an email (emccorma@fit.edu). We hope to see you there.

For our next event, the Chili Cookoff on Saturday, February 9th, we will be offering prizes for best chili, and of course, free food. We should have lots of fun, so mark your calendars and come hungry!

And don’t forget to stop by the Computer Lab on Valentine’s Day for a treat!

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**DEPARTMENT CALENDAR**

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Remember that our nation’s first great leaders were also our first great scholars.

John F. Kennedy