

Read Across Arizona Teacher Packet

What Is the Read Across Arizona Event?

Read Across Arizona uses interactive videoconferencing to connect classrooms with other classrooms “across Arizona” to read to each other. The activity is sponsored by the Pinal County Interactive Television Consortium and Enhancing Education Through Technology, the Pinal County ITv Partnership.

The Pinal County ITv Partnership provides the **registration tool, matches classrooms** with partners, and supplies **support documents**. Participating classrooms are responsible for their own videoconference connections and developing their own reading activities for the event.

Getting Started

Do you have the right equipment?

This activity is open to all K-8 classrooms in Arizona schools who have access to two-way interactive video equipment (IP). If you are unsure whether or not you have access to this type of equipment, or don't understand these terms, you should be working with your school's technology coordinator. This project does not work with a web cam hooked up to a computer. Your equipment should be able to do H.323 (IP) videoconference connections.

Talk to your videoconferencing coordinator and technical people.

Read Across Arizona videoconference sessions can be very time intensive. Planning ahead for support is essential. If necessary, arrange for your local technology coordinator or technician to assist you with your videoconference. Also, it is of utmost importance that you communicate with your local technology coordinator to make sure that no changes are made to the network or equipment setup after successful test calls and before the actual connection.

Do you check your email?

Email is the main form of communication for this event. Please don't sign up unless you can **answer email within 36 hours**. Because of the complexity of matching, it is essential that you be available via email to work out any scheduling issues.

Commitment

When you register, you are committing to a **day and time**. Your match is based on that commitment. If you give incorrect information, the class you are matched with will be left without a partner after weeks of preparation. **Please double check everything before you register!!** Make sure you, your coordinator, and your technician are all available for the connection. When a class backs out of this event, it is almost impossible to find someone for the partner class to connect to.

Scheduling

Your class will be matched with a class from a different school in Arizona, and each class will exchange reading activities via videoconferencing technology. Each connection is scheduled for an hour: 15 minutes for testing cameras and microphones and introductions; 30 minutes for the reading activities (15 minutes per class); 15 minutes for exchanging information about respective schools and communities.

Before you register, it is imperative that you double check that:

1. There are no conflicts with your school's event calendar.
2. Other teachers in the building aren't signing up for the same time you are.
3. You have technical support available for the times you are signing up.
4. The equipment is reserved for the days of the Read Across Arizona event.

Registration Tasks: November 10-30, 2009

After registration opens, sign up! As soon as you receive an email confirming your registration, check the date, time, and connection information to make sure it is correct. Checking beforehand will make the event smoother for everyone.

If you have to cancel for some reason, please cancel as soon as possible. Matches are done the first two weeks in December. Once you are matched, your cancellation means disappointed students for your partner school. Please do everything possible to make sure you don't let your partner school down.

Online registration does not guarantee you a match at the time and date you requested. We will make every effort to satisfy one of your top three choices.

Communicating With Your Assigned Partner: Mid December

Early in December, you will receive an email with your partner school. Immediately begin communicating with your partner teacher to confirm the date and time, and discuss the content of your respective presentations. Your technician or coordinator should contact your partner school to arrange a test call.

It is the responsibility of the partners to make their connection a successful educational event. The Pinal County ITv Consortium provides the registration, matching, and support materials for this event; after that it is up to you and your partner teacher to make this event amazing!

Scheduling conflicts with partner

If for some unforeseen reason (i.e. equipment failure or unexpected illness), your connection cannot work on the date and time assigned to you, **please call your partner teacher as soon as possible to alert them**. Remember that some students take buses to participate in the Read Across Arizona videoconference. Don't forget to contact your respective tech people to let them know if a videoconference has been cancelled.

Planning Your Presentations

You and your partner teacher can make this event a successful experience for your students. **Early on, you should discuss the agenda with your partner teacher**. Plan an activity for the entire time and decide who will do each part of the agenda.

Introductions

The event begins with 15 minutes for connecting and introductions. Please plan to arrive in your videoconference room early enough to set up and orient your students to the technology. Part of the fun of this event is the diversity of the students at each site. Plan to highlight what is unique and interesting about your location in an introduction. Involve students. Show a map with your location. Share a few pictures of your area or your school.

Presentations

The event continues with 15-minute presentations from each class (30 min. combined). You'll find presentation tips in this packet. Consider what you will present. Will you involve the partner class? What visuals will you use to enhance your presentation? Will students dress up in school colors or costumes? It looks nice having everyone in the same color shirt or the same shirts. Here are some presentation ideas:

- 🎭 Skits
- 🎨 Illustrations (Check your document camera setup first!)
- 🎭 Plays

- ↳ Dramatizations
- ↳ Raps
- ↳ Student created books
- ↳ Songs
- ↳ Game shows
- ↳ Book talks

Be creative! The other class is looking forward to your presentation! Plan a variety of activities; the more action, music, and visuals the better. If you are struggling with your presentation, ask your media specialist or videoconference coordinator for help. Time your presentation to make sure it is 15 minutes long. Involve as many of your students as possible. Parents could be invited to the distance learning room to observe, interact, help, perform, etc. Remind your students to be a good audience and respect the hard work of the other class as if they are in the same room as your class.

Question and Answer

The last 15 minutes of the connection are for questions and answers between the schools. Prepare your students to ask good questions. Learn about the different ways people live in the area of your partner school. Consider what kinds of questions could be asked based on their presentations. Practice asking a few questions. Depending on the age of your students, you may wish to have students prepare questions beforehand and write them on a note card to ask during the videoconference. This is your opportunity to help students understand how people live in different areas.

Other great ideas

Some teachers have students share special items from their community with the other classroom. For example, a classroom of students living in the forest could collect leaves or other natural native objects and send them to their partner class in a desert region. Other classes have sent special surprises such as candy or gifts to their partner class to be opened during the videoconference. Be sure to plan this with your partner teacher in advance.

Some teachers use this activity as a prelude to email pen pals. Many teachers continue to communicate with their connecting classroom through letter writing or further videoconference connections.

Tips to Make Your Presentation Better

You have made the commitment to have your students make a presentation to students at a distant site. Now comes the question, what can I do to make this a success for my students? You may want to consider the following tips:

Know your facility

Distance Learning Classrooms and Videoconferencing Centers vary in their presentation capabilities. Many provide document cameras, scan converters for computer based presentations, multiple microphones, and student and instructor cameras. Others don't. It is important to find out what presentation capabilities you have available to you, before you begin preparing materials for your presentation. To eliminate many potential problems on the day of your presentation, plan to visit the facility and talk with the person from your district responsible for the facility.

Prepare your materials with your facility on mind

Or another way to put it is to maximize your facility's presentation capability. Power Point presentations work well in videoconferencing. And if you stay within the normal defaults of the Power Point software as to font size and background color selections, the students at the far site will have not problem seeing your presentation visuals. If you are using a document camera or preparing artwork to be shown in some other manner, there are some rules you need to follow for maximum effect.

Aspect ratio

Television is a horizontal medium. As such, vertical visuals do not work as well. Currently the aspect ratio for television is 4 units by 3 units of measurement. This ratio can be 4 inches by 3 inches, or 4 feet by 3 feet, but it is always horizontal. If you are developing artwork on poster boards or construction paper, design these materials with the aspect ratio in mind.

Color choices

Television doesn't like the color red. It tends to make the signal bloom. Avoid using red as a background color choice when developing artwork. Television likes contrast. Black lettering on a royal blue background or royal blue lettering on a yellow background works well for television. Whatever you decide, make sure you have wide contrast between foreground and background colors.

Document Camera Tips

If you are using a document camera to present artwork for your presentation, use 8 ½ by 11 paper or construction paper. Follow the aspect ratio and color choices guidelines discussed earlier.