

Pirates in the classroom

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Talk Like a Pirate Day: September 19

For more information visit our web site: www.talklikeapirate.com <<http://www.talklikeapirate.com>>

Background: Why Talk Like a Pirate?

Talk Like a Pirate Day is the brainchild (if that's the right word) of two friends, John Baur and Mark Summers, who thought, 'wouldn't it be fun to have one day a year when people shake off their serious side and talk like pirates?' Since September 2002, when syndicated columnist, Pulitzer Prize Winner Dave Barry wrote about the idea, John and Mark have been deluged with letters and e-mails about how "Talk Like a Pirate Day" can be applied in various settings.

One of our big surprises has been how educators have embraced the spirit of Talk Like a Pirate Day and some things they are doing with their students to make learning fun. We are happy to share some ideas we have received as well as some we have come up with on our own. While the day was not necessarily developed with children in mind, both Mark and John are very mindful of children's needs. John is the father of six and Mark is a behavior specialist serving several school districts. John's wife, Victoria, founded a local teen theater' program in which both Mark and John have been very active.

In the first year that Talk Like a Pirate Day went national, (in truth, it became International Talk Like a Pirate Day and is being celebrated this year by many in Ireland, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and even on Okinawa) a local teacher sent home a note to parents saying that his sixth grade class was going to be celebrating Talk Like a Pirate Day by learning about some classic books about pirates, "Treasure Island," studying a map of the Caribbean and watching the movie, "The Princess Bride."

But to answer the question in the title of this section, "why?" John and Mark typically say simply, "Because it's fun!" In our experience, fun breeds creativity, creativity breeds curiosity and curiosity is the mother of learning.

Now, it may be important to remind children that while pirates were, in fact, bad people who did bad things, we are celebrating more the spirit of adventure and the human need to engage in the act of discovery. When people ask us how we will dress or what we will do for Talk Like a Pirate Day, we remind them that this is, in fact, 'TALK' Like a Pirate Day. Eye patches, hooks and peg legs are all optional, parrots are actively discouraged and any confusion with Talk Like a PARROT Day should be immediately extinguished, as it is sure to drive any parent or teacher insane after mere minutes.

Here are some ideas that might make Talk Like a Pirate Day a school-friendly activity:

1) Learn your nautical directions:

Starboard = right

Port = left

Stern = back

Bow = front

2) Develop a pirate vocabulary:

- Aarr!: Pirate exclamation. Done with a growl and used to emphasize the pirate's current feelings.
- Ahoy: Hello
- Avast: Stop and pay attention
- Beauty: a lovely woman,
- Belaying Pin: a small wooden pin used to hold rigging in place. Sometimes used as a bludgeoning weapon.
- Cutlass: Popular sword among pirates
- Davy Jones' Locker: The bottom of the sea. The final resting place for many pirates and their ships. As far as anyone knows, there was no real person named Davy Jones. It's just the spirit of the ocean, firmly a part of pirate mythology since at least the middle of the 18th century.
- Disembark: To leave the ship
- Embark: To enter the ship in order to go on a journey
- Foul: Turned bad or done badly, as in 'Foul Weather' or 'Foul Dealings'
- Grog: A drink that pirates enjoyed
- Hornpipe: a single reed instrument, also a dance.
- Keelhaul: Punishment. Usually tying the sailor to a rope and dragging him under the ship from stem to stern.
- Lubber: Land lover. Someone who doesn't want to go to sea.
- Matey: Friend or comrade
- Ne'er-do-well: A scoundrel or rascal
- Pieces of eight: Spanish silver coins that could actually be broken into eight pieces, or bits. Two of these bits were a quarter of the coin, and that's where we get the expression "two bits" for a quarter of a dollar, as in the cheer, "Two bits, four bits, six bits a dollar ...". (Do we feel a math lesson coming on?)
- Plunder: Treasure taken from others
- Rigging: Ropes that hold the sails in place
- Saucy Wench: A wild woman
- Tankard: A large mug, for ale

- Wastrel: A useless man
- Weigh anchor: Prepare to leave
- Yardarm: Extended from the mast and used to hang criminals or mutineers or, more prosaically, to hoist cargo on board ship

3) **Organize a ‘Treasure Hunt’** either in the classroom or on campus. The ‘treasure’ may be little more than an envelope with some classroom currency or a bag of M&Ms, but it is the following of directions and ‘clues’ that make this a fun and educational activity.

4) **Visit a Maritime Museum or view a video** on the history of seafaring. Have the students invent their own pirate name or their own Jolly Roger. (There is a great deal of information on the Internet about the individualized flags pirates flew)

5) Most pirate crews elected their captain. **Talk about the ‘democratic’ process** and see how it applies to their community, school and classroom.

6) **Discuss global positioning** and how seafarers such as pirates used the same navigational system that we use today. (longitude and latitude)

7) **Have the students write and perform** their own pirate play. This activity may involve outlining a story, story boarding, costume design, set design and other theater skills.

8) Depending on the age of the students, there are a host of **pirate crafts**, everything from making pirate hats from newspaper and ‘spyglasses’ from empty paper towel tubes to building actual telescopes, or learning a variety of nautical knots.

But most of all, have fun. Coming at the beginning of the school year, Talk Like a Pirate Day allows the students to see their teacher's playful side. This should not be viewed as a day wasted on silly nonsense, but as a ‘teachable moment.’ The entire western hemisphere of the planet was settled by people with a spirit of adventure and a quest for something new. They came here by sea and have relied on the sea ever since. Be creative, take risks and above all, have fun.