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EPISODE 8

END OF THE YEAR IDEAS

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ASHLEY MARQUEZ: Hey teachers. Welcome back to the Teach Create Motivate podcast. This is episode eight and today's episode is going to cover all things end of the year. Oh my goodness. I'm so excited to say that out loud: end of the year. It's always bittersweet when we get to April and May. I know that April and May can be such a struggle to get through. We have testing, field trips, end of the year stuff, field day, lots and lots of things that creep up on us and it can be hard to stay positive and engaged with our students, but today I just want to talk a little bit about some fun things that you guys can be doing to end your year on a positive and strong note.

So on today's episode about end of the year, I want to kind of touch on five different subjects or categories for end of year exciting things and fun in your classroom. I want to talk about some activities that can help you keep going strong, keep your students engaged, some gift ideas for your students, countdown ideas, ways to celebrate your students. And a little bonus idea that I love doing in my classroom at the end of the year. So without further ado, let's get started.

All right, you guys, we made it. We really made it. We are here. The end of the year is upon us whether have a couple of weeks left or about a month left. I know all of our schedules differ from start to end dates of school years. But overall we're here, it's crazy, it's fun, it's exciting.



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But I know that as teachers we're always looking for stuff to make our classrooms fun and exciting, especially towards the end of the year. I hear a lot sometimes about countdowns and if they should be happening in the classroom or things that are promoting summer break. And I just really feel like we have worked so hard all year together as a class and as a family and let's celebrate that. I don't think that countdowns or activities necessarily mean we're going to stop learning. And so I do think that you should preface that with your students when you are introducing anything that is counting down or getting ready for summer. That this is just a way to celebrate your year together and have fun while you're doing it.

The Countdown is On

Plus, it's just really fun to make the end of the year time with your class a fun time because it is the last couple of weeks that you will be together and you know, we form that bond with our students and even though we are probably honestly counting down the days until we can sleep in, drink our coffee hot, go out to eat in the middle of the day, use the bathroom when we want to. Yes, we love summer, but we also know that we're going to miss our students and we're going to miss that class that we formed a bond with. So I just wanted to come on today and talk a little bit about some activities and ideas to make this time fun but also meaningful. I think everything should be intentional in our classrooms. Even though we do fun things. What's the reason behind it? Why are we doing it? How does it benefit our kids?

Keep Them Writing

So some activities I think that will help us keep going strong as far as keeping our kids engaged, continuing writing and applying, all of that stuff. There's a few different things that I do with my students.



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The first thing that I'm sure you either do or you've seen as a memory book, and I think that this is so fun for the students. I personally with the memory books I use in my classroom. I print out the pages for each student and I don't have them unnecessarily complete that memory book in one day or complete that memory book in one sitting. That's a lot. And there's still obviously learning and other things going on in our day. So what I do is I kind of incorporate each page at different times of different days. So it might be morning work, one day it might be in a station and other day. They might have some free time one day to work on a couple different pages, but I use a week or two to kind of sprinkle in the pages of the memory book so that it gives me some time to get them all bound for them.

But then it also isn't just necessarily a sitting there and working on in memory book for a full day. So memory books are a great idea to have your kids reflect on their year and talk about the summer and what they're excited about. It's another way to keep them writing. They don't realize it, but they're writing. A lot of the pages in our memory books they have to write different things like a letter or paragraphs about different things. They have to describe different things. So they are still writing, which is great. And then what I do is I print the cover page of our memory book on a color Astrobrights cardstock paper. And then I take that same color and I just take a blank piece of the cardstock as the back. And then I use a binding machine at school to bind the memory books.

So this is part of what I give them on the last day. They obviously know it's coming, they filled it out themselves, but I like to bind it up for them. But you could definitely staple it or put binder rings is also an option to like hole punch it and then put three binder rings. It's a cheap and easy option if you don't have a binding machine. So, memory books are super fun and I also have the same pages a little bit different, but I give them out digitally too.



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So if you have Chromebooks or iPads or devices in your classroom, you can create digital memory books and you can print them out or just give them to them with a link or QR code at the end of the year. So I still like to give my kids like an actual physical memory book. So I either print the digital ones or I just assign specific pages digitally and then I don't include those in the memory book or I will print those pages to put in their memory book.

So for example, if there's a writing page, I might let them type that digitally through Google classroom and then I'll print it and stick it into memory book that I'm binding. It kind of breaks up the activities that we're doing and makes it a little bit more engaging. We're not just doing the same thing over and over and over. And one of our favorite things that we do at the end of every year is more selfie writing. If you follow me or you have seen my Instagram page or my Teachers Pay Teachers store, you know that we love to do selfie writing. So I have prompts specific for the [end of the year](#) where they get to insert their picture into their writing. So prompts about summer, prompts about their favorite field trip from the year, prompts about what they loved most about third grade. Obviously any grade level, there's different grade levels there, but I teach third grade and then a letter to their teacher.

So, this leads me to talk about what I do with that [selfie writing](#) because we've been doing that all year and if you've been using selfie writing in your classroom, I want to give you this idea because it is super, super fun to do this. It's a little bit tedious, takes a little bit of time and some work, but it's really meaningful. So I take their selfie writing, they've had prompts from all year along, and the holidays and for different types of things they've done selfie writings. And so then I print them out and I make a selfie writing book.



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And on the front cover I take a selfie with my students individually and I put that on the cover. And so that's really cool because we get to see how their writing has changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. But then they have a year's worth in order of different selfie writings and get to see their pictures from each one of those and then it's all nicely tied together in a book. And then the cover is them and I together. So that's super fun and meaningful. You don't have to print the books, but selfie writing is really fun for some engaging end of the year writing. It's kind of a sneaky way to keep us writing and working but in a really fun way. They love the prompts but they really love the end of the year ones. It gets them real excited for summer, gets them reflecting on their year and they get to do some selfies with some friends and then me as their teacher. So that is another really fun idea for activities to continue to do.

Countdown Fun

Let's talk a little bit about countdowns. There are so many different countdown ideas they do want to share with you guys. What's worked for us in my classroom and I do have a [freebie](#) for you. Anything that I talk about today and this episode is also linked in the show notes. So you can find any activity or resource or freebie that I mention linked in today's show notes. So just keep that in mind. But countdowns are really fun. I do a [10 day countdown](#). So what we do is we start 10 days before our last day of school and we do a balloon countdown. So I like to mix this in with classroom management. I mean, hello, have you met me? So I like to incorporate it in a way where the balloon is earned. Now I've never had a class not earn a balloon. It's just another kind of push to say like, let's make sure we're doing this, this and this in order to be able to pop our balloon and see what's inside each morning. So we pop the balloons each morning and there are 10 balloons.



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I staple them to my above my whiteboard and I put a little label on the balloon and I have these labels and the activities for free in the show notes below. But I put the labels on the balloons and number 10 down to one. And in the balloons, there are fun activities we get to do as a class. So it's a countdown, but it's also a celebration of us as a class. Each day we do something or they earn something to do or to have to just celebrate our year together and make it kind of fun. So some things that are in the balloons are like a popsicle party or extra recess, switched desks. They love this activity. Bubblegum day, they get to chew a piece of gum. Snowball fights is crumpled up paper and throwing paper at each other like snowballs. No shoes. Pen all day.

So there's different things that are in the balloons and they don't know what's in them and that's just fine to come in and pop our balloon and see what we get to do with that day. So that is a fun countdown activity if you're not into balloons. My friend Ashley from Texas Lone Star Teacher, we were just texting the other day about some end of the year fun with our kids and she said she's into envelopes. So I really liked that idea too. You could easily tape or staple envelopes at the top of your whiteboard or on a bulletin board and label them with the same labels and put the activities in envelopes and then open the envelope. If you don't want to do balloons or you have some students in your classroom that you know, it just wouldn't work for. So that is a fun countdown.

Celebrating Your Students

And then, okay, on the topic of countdowns, I want to talk about celebrating students because I do kind of another countdown in a way that also celebrate students. There's so many ideas about celebrating our students on Instagram. I've seen a few different things.



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I'm going to tell you a couple of ones that are my favorites, but I love the chance to celebrate each kid right before we go on summer break. So we're celebrating our class, we're celebrating our year with each other, but to celebrate them individually and make them feel special and really make them understand how important they were to our classroom all year long and how their classmates feel about them. I just love this. So here's what I do and here's some other ideas that are amazing. So I take my students names and I type them out and I cut them in strips of colored paper.

So I just typed them like three or four to a page, cut them out, they're on bright colored paper and I make a chain with the names. So I have 20 students. So this would start on day 20 before summer break. You could also do two a day if you're not wanting to start a countdown that soon or you're already past that mark, you could do two a day. So, and then every day we cut the chain, we cut one of the chains off, one of the links off the chain. And that signifies that we're a day closer to summer. But it's more than that. It's not just, okay, let's cut this off and we're one day closer to summer, it's okay, who's on this link? That's who are celebrating. And then here is what I do. I've got this idea from my friend Jen at Sparkling in Second, and we create a poster.

I take their picture and I quickly print it out and tape or glue it in the middle of a piece of anchor chart paper. And then every student in the class writes something kind, uplifting, nice, what they love about student all around their picture on the anchor chart. I also really like to do this, I put the anchor chart outside my classroom because your students have a lot of friends and teachers in other classes, whether they go to speech, whether the specials teachers, whatever it may be. They have other people in the grade level or the campus that obviously love them too and want to write something kind about them.



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So I put it outside my classroom with a little sign that just talks about what it is. And then that day people are signing their poster, but I also need to take it a step further and I like to make that day fully about them.

So you could do this in so many ways. They could have a special crown to wear, they could sit where they want. That's what I do. They get to sit where they like to sit. They can be first in line, they can be the teacher helper. Um, there's so many ways to make them feel special and that date to be all about them. So I do this, like I said, on a chain and I have like a free printable for you guys that says "countdown to summer break" and you just put it on the chain at the top and then the chain of links each has your kid's name on it. So every time we cut a link off, that person gets celebrated that day.

I've also seen [this](#), you've probably seen it on Instagram from Miss Fifth. She celebrates each student like this, but with balloons again. So every time you pop a balloon instead of like my balloons that have activities, her balloons have a student's name in them. And I think that she does it kind of similarly where she celebrates that student.

Another way that you can celebrate students that I've recently seen and I am so excited to do this, is a free little printable card. And it says at the top "[10 Reasons Why I Love Being Your Teacher.](#)" This idea comes from Christina over on Instagram at Teach Me Mrs Z. It's just a printable card. Like I said, 10 reasons why I love being your teacher numbered 1 through 10, and you make a personalized card for each student. I think it's so cute and sweet and really, really intentional and meaningful. So I'm going to leave that link below too. I'm going to be doing this this year with my students. It's free.



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You can download it and you can give it to your student on the day they're being celebrated, which is going to be my plan. But you could also make it an end of the year gift or include it as their end of the year gift. So very cute idea. Check it out and make sure you download that and use that as well.

Let's Talk Gifts

So speaking of gifts, let's talk about gift ideas. I am not about spending a ton of money on my students at the end of the year. There's a lot of different things that you can use as your gift. So part of my gift, like I mentioned in the episode at the beginning of this episode is selfie books. They don't know that I'm doing this for them. They have no idea that I've been printing them out or I printed them out and I'm binding up. They know that we took a selfie together, but they don't know why.

So one of the main parts of my end of the year gift is our selfie books. Another thing that I do that doesn't cost me anything is I print one of our [Bitmoji bookmarks](#). So I have a resource in my store, you may know about it. It's a Bitmoji bookmark resource where you have a bunch of different templates of Bitmoji bookmarks and you include your own Bitmoji. And then all you do is print and cut them out. They're three to a page, it's so easy, you're ready to go. A lot of people I've seen that have this resource, they write a special note on the back of the bookmark to their students. So even if you're using something different or another kind of bookmark, you could personalize it by including a special note on the back.

Dollar spot stuff at Target is the perfect place. I have given so many different things before. I've done chalk. I've done silly string, I've done bubbles, sunglasses. So put a cute [little tag](#) on it. This year was a ball. We had such a silly year. Take note that would be like a pool ball or it's silly string can or notebook, thanks for making this chock full of fun.



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I mean, there's so many different things that you can do that don't cost you a bunch of money. Find things that come in packs of more than one and just print a cute little tag out and slap it on there and you're good to go. But you can find different things that make them feel special, that don't cost you a ton of money. So those are my go-to this year. I'm definitely doing the selfie books, the Bitmoji bookmarks and the 10 reasons why I love being your teacher will kind of be in there as well.

The Last Day

Okay. I want to talk a little bit about the last day of school or for me it's kind of a day before the last day and last day depending on what's going on because sometimes our last day is a half of a day and it's not necessarily enough time to do some fun things. I love using our last day together to have a little bit of an award and photo booth fashion awards ceremony and photo session. So what we do is we give out the awards and their gift kind of all in one. And I have a piece of red fabric from Hobby Lobby, super cheap. I lay out like a red carpet and then I have a fun slide that I project that says congrats future fourth graders or congrats third graders or whatever you want it to say. And then I call them up individually and I hand them their [Bitmoji award](#).

So I have awards that are Bitmoji themed. It's really fun. So I include my own Bitmoji into the award that represents that award. So, you know, funniest or most improved or whatever kind of awards you give. It makes it really fun and silly. So I give them their award and I give them their gift and we clap for each other and again we're celebrating each other and celebrating the year that we have and they get to kind of walk that red carpet, which is just a piece of fabric that I get to use every single year. So it doesn't cost much. And the other thing that is so fun if you haven't started this yet in your classroom is a photo booth.



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So this photo booth is super easy to make. I actually have a do-it-yourself tutorial. I've been using this photo booth for three or four years in my classrooms, so I made sure to make [a tutorial](#) for you guys on my blog.

I will link it for you guys. It's super easy. You just need a couple of different things and you cut it out and then I hang it up from the ceiling and we use some fun photo with props and take pictures together. I let them take pictures with each other, with me, with other kids from other classes. I just love to make the last day a fun celebration. We're obviously so excited for summer break, but it can be kind of a bittersweet day because it's our last day with our students. It's our last day as a class, you know, they're not necessarily going to be in a class with all the same students ever again. So it's just a great time to be in the moment with your students and have a fun time and do some of those extra fun things.

So you obviously don't have to do all of these things with your students, but if you're doing fun activities, you do a quick and easy gift for them. You have a fun town down that doesn't really cost you anything at all. You're celebrating each other, celebrating your students, and then have an award ceremony and a photo booth or something fun on that last day to just really end the year with a bang. It really does make your time together right before we're about to go on our summer break meaningful and really end your year on such a positive and fun note. But even if you don't do any of this, my biggest tip for you guys and it's so hard and I tell myself this too, is to just make sure that we're, we're in the moment with our students and I know that we have worked so hard all year and we're tired. Teachers are tired and we are ready for summer and we have earned summer. But let's remember that these students, um, we don't know necessarily if they're excited to go home for a summer break for multiple, multiple days at home.



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School's very structural for a lot of our students and a very positive place. So let's really make each moment count with every student. And it's really hard to get up and keep going at six o'clock in the morning when we're so exhausted. But just remind yourself that you have however many kids in your class who are so excited to see you and end the year with you and do the fun things and keep learning from you and make moment matter and make it count. And don't sweat the small stuff. Don't sweat the small behaviors. Just be excited with them and cherish every moment because once summer is here we all know, you know, we have a new class and when you start over and we start fresh. So that is my biggest tip for you guys. I hope you guys got some good ideas for your end of the year celebrations and activities. Let's all end the year strong and make it fun for us and our students.

And if you want to access any of these freebies or resources or links you can head to teachcreatemotivate.com/end-of-the-year-activities and they will all be linked there for you. Thank you guys so much again for listening. I appreciate you guys listening to every episode that you've listened to. It means so much to me and I will talk to you guys next time. Happy Teaching.



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