

Read Around the Planet

Packet for Teachers



What is the TWICE “Read Around the Planet” Event?

Read Around the Planet is a celebration of NEA’s Read Across America. Classrooms use interactive video to connect with other classrooms “around the planet” and read to each other. The activity is sponsored by [TWICE](#) and Polycom, in cooperation with NEA.

TWICE provides the **registration tool**, **matches classrooms** with partners, and supplies **support documents**. Participating classrooms are responsible for their own video connections and developing their own reading activities for the event.

**Disclaimer. While we are using this name to be inclusive to our international friends, this name does NOT guarantee U.S. schools an international connection. They will be matched randomly in this project with usually over 90% of the participating classes from the United States.*

Getting Started

Do you have the right equipment?

This activity is open to all K-12 students in public and private schools who have access to two-way interactive video equipment (ISDN or 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) or H.320 (ISDN) videoconference connections.

Talk to your videoconference coordinator and technical people.

Read Around the Planet (RAP) video conference 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 video conference. 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.

Please ask your technology coordinator to whitelist the TWICE email addresses: admin@twice.cc and verify@twice.cc and sue@twice.cc so that you will receive important announcements and information about this event.

Equipment verification

Your building or district videoconference equipment must be **verified** with one of the TWICE Verification Partners **before** you or your teachers can register for this activity.

Equipment verification will help prevent classes from being mismatched due to technical incompatibilities. **Verification does not eliminate the need for a test call to the partner school.**

By the end of November, your building or district tech coordinator should complete the Verification process in CAPspace. Step-by-step instructions for verification can be found at www.twice.cc/verify. After successful verification, videoconference coordinators and teachers will be able to request matches beginning the first Monday in December.

Commitment

When you register, you and your colleagues are committing to videoconference with your partner class. 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, the teacher(s), and the technician are all available for the days your school is participating in Read Around the Planet. When a class backs out of this event, it is almost impossible to find someone for the partner class to connect to. This means disappointed kids, and we don't want that!

Scheduling

TWICE provides a matching service for point-to-point videoconferences between schools. Teacher matching is done based on your registration information. Each teacher's class will be matched with a class to exchange reading activities. 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 standardized testing, vacation, and event calendars.
2. You have technical support available for the times you are signing up.
3. The equipment is reserved for the days of the Read Around the Planet event.

Plan to trust the matching system not to schedule videoconferences at the same time. Please **enter ALL the times that you can do** even if the times overlap with other requests. The matching system will make sure your videoconference system is used for only one connection at a time.

Special requests

We are unable to accommodate special requests for specific types of partners due to the size of this project and the necessity of using software to match partners. If you are not comfortable with working with a random partner for this project, please use the idea to do your own similar videoconference instead of registering with us.



Registration Tasks: December through January

After registration opens, sign up with all the times you can possibly do! (You may need to check with your videoconference coordinator on local procedures for registration.) Make sure you enter **all the times** that you can do.

If you have to cancel for some reason, please cancel as soon as possible. Matches are done the last week in January. 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. Helpful teachers try to find a replacement class if they have to cancel.

While we do our utmost to find everyone a partner, online registration does not guarantee you a match. We expect over 2000 classes to participate in this event and it is difficult to find a matching class for every request. We make every effort to match you; however, we can only work with those that signed up for the event and the times that you enter.



Communicating With Your Assigned Partner: February & March

Late in January or early in February you will receive an email notifying you of your partner information. If you do not receive the partner email and you registered yourself online, you can find the partner information in CAPspace at <http://projects.twice.cc>. Otherwise, ask your videoconference coordinator the status of your partner. As soon as you know your partner, immediately begin communicating with your partner teacher to confirm the date and time, and discuss the content of your respective presentations. You may want to exchange home or cell phone numbers in case a snow day or other event causes cancellation. Also, 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. TWICE 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!



Winter breaks

If your school will be on winter break in February, let your partner school know immediately when you will be unavailable. Try to do test calls before your winter break, if possible.

Scheduling conflicts with partner

If for some unforeseen reason (i.e. snow day or unexpected illness), your connection cannot work on the date and time assigned to you, please work with your partner teacher to reschedule in March. Remember, March is Reading Month! Your connection will be just as successful and fun on another date!

In addition, if there are weather related reasons you can't connect on the day of the videoconference, please call your partner teacher as soon possible to alert them. Remember that some students take buses a long distance to participate in the RAP

videoconference. Don't forget to contact your respective tech people to let them know if a videoconference has been cancelled.

If, after every effort, you cannot work it out with your partner, then try the following in order:

1. Try a connection with a local school.
2. Contact your regional educational service agency for assistance in finding another partner.



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. 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.

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, costumes, or "Cat in the Hat" hats? It looks nice having everyone in the same color shirt or the same shirts. Here are some presentation ideas from teachers who have participated in this project:

- Skits
- Plays
- Raps
- Songs
- Original poetry
- Original songs
- Video clips of snow activities
- Persuasive essays
- Sign language
- Illustrations (check your document camera setup first!)
- Dramatizations
- Student-created books
- Game shows or quiz shows
- Recitation of poetry
- Student projects in your current curriculum
- Create biography dolls
- Paint a mural
- A news show about your community

Be creative! The other class is looking forward to your presentation! Plan a variety of activities. 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 or less. 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.

Increasing Interaction

Some classes prefer to do more than just a presentation. These interaction ideas are from teachers and coordinators who have participated in Read Around the Planet in the past. If you plan to do any of these ideas, be sure to communicate with your partner teacher so everyone is prepared.

- Ask your partner class questions related to your presentation as you go through. I.e. presenting state symbols: “What are your state symbols?”
- Ask your partner class to guess something (i.e. who do the biography dolls represent).
- Make statements about your class and have your partner class decide if they are true (touch nose) or false (touch shoulders).
- Share riddles for your partner class to solve.
- Give the other class something to print and fill out (i.e. lyrics to a song and fill in the blanks).
- Have your students dress up as a book characters and have the other class guess whom you represent.
- For middle or high school students, have your students perform with the other class acting as judges.

Interaction Ideas from Roxanne Glaser’s Blog

- Create a Mad-Lib for your partner class to complete.
- Teach the other class something – a local saying, a local dance, how to make some local food, how to draw a book character, etc.
- Research your partner class’ town and create a presentation about similarities and differences that you learn. Prepare questions about facts or news items that you find interesting or are curious about.
- Play Wheel of Fortune with phrases, nouns, or sayings from your town or school. (This one should be 3rd grade or higher and watch the time!)
- For older students – middle or high school - write a story about characters who journey between your town and you partner class’ town. Share it during the RAP connection. (If you really want to get creative, use a wiki to write collaboratively and then meet in the videoconference to present it.)
- Play twenty questions. Be sure to review the rules of the game before you begin and give a clear idea of what they will be guessing. Example: You will be able to ask us 20 “yes” or “no” questions in order to figure out our mystery Dr. Seuss’ character.

The VC 7: Brain Based Videoconferencing Tips from James Tapankov <http://thevc7.wikispaces.com/>

1. Make it meaningful. Get everyone involved right away. Have everyone do something in the first 5 minutes instead of listening.
2. Get them active. Have your partner class move, talk, draw, play, sing, dance, share.
3. Keep it fresh. Don’t do 15 minutes of the same thing. Chunk it. Change it up. Take a break. Do something unexpected.

4. Engage the senses. Use music, smell, taste, touch. Plan for visuals, props and backgrounds.
5. Make it personal. Give things to do off camera. Change perspectives. Have a student in charge of the camera and zoom in so you can see each others' reactions.
6. Engage their emotions. Use music. Create opportunities for empathy.
7. Celebrate the experience. Encourage/reward risk. Enjoy your time together. Be silly when you can. Provide opportunity to connect again afterwards.

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.

Here are some suggestions for preparing questions:

- Show examples. As the teacher, you should also write some questions and show them to the students so that they can see how it should be done.
- Place the students in pairs and encourage them to select their best questions.
- Conduct a round robin elimination process. When your students have selected their best questions, ask each group to read their questions to the class. Eliminate duplicate questions among the groups.
- Revise the questions. When the elimination process is completed, each student should have at least one unique question to ask in the interview. It is okay if the question has been rewritten to include aspects of duplicates that were eliminated.
- For additional information on preparing questions, please visit <http://www.remc11.k12.mi.us/dl/QsLessonPlan.htm>

If you don't prepare questions ahead of time, plan to mute both classes for 1 or 2 minutes and brainstorm questions to ask each other. You'll find this short pause in the videoconference will increase the quality of the students' questions. Consider also what feedback might you want to give your partner class? What constructive comments could you share?

Other great ideas

Some teachers have students share special items from their community with the other classroom. For example, a Michigan classroom could collect leaves or other natural native objects and send them to their partner class in Texas. 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.

Special Notes for Language Classes

While English is the predominant language for Read Around the Planet, many immersion, bilingual classes, world language and sign language classes participate in the target language. When signing up, be sure to indicate your language and level. However, there are still few language classes participating for you to get a partner with native speakers, or at the same level as your students.

Teachers have found that cross grade level connections between students learning a language can be very powerful learning experiences. For example, your high school Spanish students may be matched with a bilingual Spanish class. Use the ideas above to make a creative interaction using the target language.



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 Video Conferencing 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 in mind

Or another way to put it is to maximize your facility's presentation capability. Power point presentations work well in video conferencing. 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 distant site will have no 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 (portrait) 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 within the aspect ratio.

- **Color choices**

Television doesn't like the color red. It tends to make the signal bleed. Avoid using red as a background color choice when developing artwork. Television likes contrast. Black lettering on a royal blue background is a prescription for failure. Black lettering on a light 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 1/2 by 11 paper or construction paper. Follow the aspect ratio and color choices guidelines discussed earlier. Then number your artwork pages in the order that they will be presented. Place the stack of artwork under the document camera. During the presentation, remove the top piece of artwork and so on until the stack is depleted.

Posters

If you decide to use posters for your presentation, try the following tips.

- **Simple Short Text:** Don't write too much on the poster. Write the key words.
- **Big Bold Text:** Any text that the other class needs to see or write down should be big & bold and written with dark colors. Use large text, strong contrast with no light colors for lettering, and very large pictures or drawings. Huge thick lines for drawing and writing are best. Test your poster by holding it up across the room to see if you can still read it.
- **Hold Still & Zoom In:** If the poster is moving around, the camera never focuses on it, and so the other class can never see it clearly. Hold the poster still and zoom in (or set a preset for zooming in.) Some classes even tape the poster to a chalkboard or set it on an easel to hold it still.
- **Read off the back:** If you read any notes from the back of the poster, it's easier to keep the posters still and therefore readable for the camera.

Following these tips should make for a much more pleasant experience for the class listening to your presentation.

Organize your students

Many times teachers choose to have their students present in small groups of three or four students. If this is your choice it is important to have them organized. Your first consideration is seating within the facility. If your students are presenting in small groups have them sit together in that group on the day of the presentation. This eliminates much time spent gathering the students from all over the room. Make certain that the students know the order of presentation so that they are ready when their turn arises. If each group is using artwork, have one student responsible for it.

Discuss with your students appropriate behavior for being an attentive audience, such as posture and listening skills. Remind your students that the other students have worked hard on their presentation and to show interest and respect for the other students' work.

Involve Your Students

Include as many students during a videoconference as possible. Here is a suggested list of jobs to assign students by Kim Pearce, Gatesville ISD, TX. Used by permission.

1. Art Crew - Design backdrop and paint.
2. Directors - Usually one girl and one boy.
3. Stage Hands - Move props.
4. Lighting and Sound Crew - Turn on and off lights/adjust microphone.
5. Narrators - Usually good readers who are not shy speak well in front of the camera.
6. Actors - And presenters.
7. Costume and Make-up - Help put together costumes and help with make-up.
8. Writers - Help write and edit script. Help with timing and what scenes can be deleted or added.
9. Cue Card Holders - Hold up cards with lines on them for anyone who might get stuck - hold up scene or act cards during a transition.
10. Question and Answer Team - These students will answer and ask questions to the other class at the end of the conference.
11. Judges - These students watch the performance by both schools and write down any changes that might improve the conference for the next time - we must always learn from our mistakes.
12. Take Down Crew - Cleans up after conference.

Testing, testing, one, two, three

Audio is the biggest problem we face in video conferencing especially with younger elementary students. Following some common sense procedures can minimize many of these problems.

The first consideration is microphone placement. If you are using a facility with only one microphone get your students as close to that microphone as is practical for your presentation. If you are using a Distance Learning Classroom that has ceiling mounted microphones place your students under one of them and have them speak in a loud voice.

If you are using a system that has microphones that are at the student tables that zoom the student camera to that position, have one student hold the microphone button while the other talks. Be careful about having the students too close to the microphone as their audio may be distorted at the receive site.

Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse

Do some test runs in your classroom. Make certain each student knows his or her role in the presentation and when they are on. Time the presentation to see if it fits within the timeframe allotted. If it doesn't, think of ways you can edit the presentation.

Finally, take pride in your students

You may want to have a camera ready during your videoconference. Inviting administrators or the press can be advantageous. Your students are well prepared. Now go nail your presentation. And have fun!