

Fairs with a Flair

Everyone had fun at this K-5 school's festive fairs. Even more important – everyone ended up with good feelings about math and geography

“Remember, the basic format can be used for any subject area you might want to boost, feature or emphasize at your school that particular year.”

BY DIANE McCARTY

When is a school fair not a typical school fair? When it becomes “Math: A Fair” or a “Geography Fun Fair.” Both are based on the premise that a school fair doesn’t have to be a solo project. Instead, it can become an interactive game situation where *everyone is a winner!* Both fairs had the same format, so follow along as I tell you about them.

A colleague, Kathi Latta, and I designed Math: A Fair as an opportunity for our intermediate students to develop leadership skills in a fair atmosphere. (Kathi is currently a fourth grade teacher at Grant Bridgeway School in Waterloo, Iowa.)

Students are often criticized for not displaying leadership qualities. Well, here was their chance! They could learn and demonstrate responsibility by organizing, planning and implementing a math fair.

Total involvement. We felt it was important for our students to be totally involved in running the fair. We accomplished this by introducing them to each of the games and allowing them time to experience the games as participants.

Then job descriptions were passed out for the following: host or hostess, ticket puncher, answer per-

son and greeter. The first three jobs were needed at each booth or center. Only two greeters were used for each fair. All of these jobs could be rotated, if appropriate. The host/hostess job description read:

1. Find out each child’s name. Be sure to call them by name while they’re at your booth.
2. Make sure each child has his or her ticket and token cup.
3. Keep your booth neat and orderly. There should be no shoving or put-downs. Remember the maximum number of people that can be at your booth.
4. Provide moral support. Use phrases with the child’s name such as, “Great job, Tina!” or “Good try, Ben!”

Children at the intermediate level like to know exactly what their responsibilities are for anything they do, so the job descriptions were just the ticket!

Words of wisdom. Kathi and I were often overwhelmed when we tried to construct our first fair five years ago. We laugh now when we remember what a fourth grader told us: “Relax. I’m the answer person at the Money Toss game. I know exactly what I’m doing!”

Kathi and I had fun creating the games. We analyzed the main themes emphasized each year in our K-5 math program and designed games to reflect these themes. “Time-O,” “Fishing 4 Facts,” “Calculator City,” “Money Mart” and “You Can Be a Star” were some of our games.

We visited with primary teachers to be sure our games could serve as a positive end-of-the-year review for their students. The primary students were “inserviced” briefly before the fair.

Since our math fair was conducted dur-



A parent volunteer and a University of Northern Iowa preservice teacher create a fair atmosphere with balloon bouquets.

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Participants in Round and Round walked in time to music, and when it stopped, they told the place value of the numeral highlighted on the card on which they were standing.



The bathing suit-clad host students at Fishing for Facts made sure the fisherpeople "hooked the big one" in the portable pool.



Time-O, hosted by three fourth graders, required youngsters to throw bean bags onto huge clock faces and then read the time.



When the call rang out, "Let the games begin," students flooded the room where "Math: A Fair" was set up.

ing the last week of school, it was a great way for every child (there are 350 students in our K-5 building) to finish the year with a positive feeling towards math, but you can conduct fairs at any time during the year.

Festive centers. Another way we involved the intermediate students and teachers was through the creation of festive centers to house the games. When my class designed the "Time-O" booth, they decided that crawling through a time tunnel would be fun, so we made a tunnel out of an old tepee frame. "Calculator City" was a big, free-standing tent. Christmas tree lights blazed at some centers and play money decorated "Money Mart."

When the primary students arrived at
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Second graders carefully consider their purchases at Money Mart. Students used real coins to make purchases here, and returned the money to the center at the end of their shopping time.

Flair-full fairs *continued from page 57*

“Each student walked out of the door that night with a balloon, a special pencil and a good feeling about geography.”

Kathi Latta and Diane McCarty have written a book on “Math: A Fair.” For more information on how you can obtain a copy, write to Diane McCarty, Price Lab School, 19th and Campus, Cedar Falls, IA 50613.

the fair they were greeted by a fourth or fifth grader who said, “Welcome to Math: A Fair.” Each student was handed a punch card and a token cup and was whisked off by a host or hostess.

Then it was, “Let the math games begin!” Flashing lights, the smell of fresh popcorn, colorful displays, numbers dancing through the air, and laughter filled the gymnasium. What a great sight! What a wonderful way to celebrate math!

Rotating cycle. The fair has changed over the years. We now have nine games for our math fair, which allows us to present them on a two-year rotating cycle, repeating only one of the favorites.

If you're thinking of staging your own fair, I suggest that you do so every other year. That way, each new crop of fourth and fifth graders will have the opportunity to host the fair with games that would be new, compared to what they had seen when they attended the fair as primary students.

If you also initiate a geography fair, you can alternate – a math fair one year and a geography fair the next. Remember, the basic format can be used for *any* subject you might want to boost, feature or emphasize at your school that particular year.

Last year, which was the first year we held the Geography Fun Fair, I felt that I could allow my fourth graders to create the games. As a result, the students' ownership became even greater.

We created a list of titles of possible geography games and the production “happened” from there. Here are some of our titles: “Geographer George,” “Land Feely Boxes,” “Geography Wheel of Fortune,” “State Walk,” “Continent Toss,” “Fishing for Worldly Animals,” “Geo Bingo,” “Geography Match” and “Where's Waldo?” The last six of these ended up as games. Since this fair was on a smaller scale than our math fairs, the games were designed for second and third graders only.

There's nothing really complicated about the games. Here, for example, are the directions for one enjoyable game called “Continent Toss”:

A beanbag is thrown on laminated

shapes of the continents placed in proper order on the floor. The primary students name (or read) the continent on which the beanbag lands. A token is given each time they answer. They are allowed to play the game three times.

If the primary student didn't know the continent, it was the intermediate student's job to help them figure it out. Every child was successful at every booth because the intermediate students were taught cuing, modeling and other strategies to enable the primary student to find the answer.

Everyone's a winner. Each class visited the fair for 30 minutes. When the fair was over, the fourth grade greeter went with the primary graders to their classroom, where the second or third graders counted the tokens in their cups. If they had 10 tokens, they earned a special geography pencil that read, “Geography Awareness Week – Without Geography You'd Be Nowhere.”

More than 10 tokens earned a bag of popcorn as well as a pencil. Typically, students earned more than 20 tokens, so everyone received both rewards. What if a child fell short of 10? Well, the intermediate student was prepared to rectify the situation with a few tokens in his or her pocket to supplement a low supply as necessary.

At the end of the day, a balloon bouquet that had been used to decorate the room during the fair was delivered to the primary students by the greeters.

Did the intermediate students enjoy hosting the fair? Did the primary students enjoy attending it? Just look at the photographs on these pages and make up your own mind.

I'll leave you with a letter from Dina, a third grader, who wrote a fan letter to the fourth graders after last year's geography fair:

Dear fourth graders,

I really enjoyed the geography fun fair you had for us. The ones I liked best were state walk and continent toss. I liked the ideas of getting tokens and that you would win prizes. The popcorn was good to eat also. Thank you.

P.S. It was fun.

P.P.S. I learned geography more then ever! ↓