

# THE FAITHFUL READER

## Just Say No to the “Break Packet”



Remember when you had Christmas break, and you woke up early to watch cartoons and eat cereal in front of the TV? Or you went to Target to buy extra lights and Christmas cards, and maybe a Slurpee and a hot pretzel? Our students may not all get to have these experiences depending on their parents' work schedules. But that doesn't mean we should lay the homework packet on thick for them.



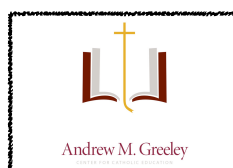
### Authentic Break Tasks

Every holiday, I can predict a few things that will happen at our family's gathering. My youngest nephew, Ryan, will say something silly to get a laugh. My niece, Samantha Grace, will have a dance and song to perform for us, and my nephew Jack will silently sneak over to the piano, and he might just play for us. Why not have students create a **BINGO** card for the events they predict might happen? This is a great thing to work on Friday morning before break when you are trying to keep everyone from losing their minds from excitement! Then they can complete their BINGO cards when they return to school on that fateful Monday in January :-). Now they also have a BINGO card full of writing ideas that they can glue into their writing notebook or scan and add to their digital portfolio.

Kids often get roped into doing tasks that the adults need done while we multitask in the kitchen. Ask students to **make a list** of all of the (likely boring and arduous) tasks they were forced to do. When they return to school in the New Year, you can talk about which adjectives - boring, arduous - they can attach to these tasks, or which verbs and adverbs work. Skills taught in isolation stay in isolation, but if I had to Swiffer the floor three times in one day, I could probably come up with some juicy adjectives like *monotonous*, *unfair*, and *fuzzy*.

Hopefully kids will have some time to play games or watch movies with family. Upon their return to school, students could choose one event and describe it in great detail in a **personal narrative** - Lucy Calkins calls this “telling the story of the moment.”

Notice that **none of these tasks must be completed during break**. It is every parents' (and child's) dread to realize on the Sunday before the first day back that you have a huge, unnecessary packet of busy work that the teacher doesn't want to grade (or doesn't grade - let's be honest). No one needs that kind of stress. Encourage students to put down their devices and enjoy time with family. Merry Christmas!



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## “How Do I Survive the Week Before Christmas Break?”

This is a tough question - it's a tough week! I think the best suggestion is to plan really well.

Make the week's plan so tight that there is no margin for error. My most common mistake was to “wing it” this week because there was so much else going on: Christmas concert, singing carols, All-School Mass, etc. But when I really planned well with really engaging activities that were fun, my sanity was in place and students were too busy having fun while learning to get too much of the wiggles. Having engaging activities also meant that students were moving and talking meaningfully more than usual, so even if they had the wiggles, I didn't notice and it didn't disturb learning.

Anything that we didn't get to I could save for the day we returned, which is also a day and week that should have a very tight plan.

One more thing to survive this week: take care of yourself! Treat yourself to Starbucks one morning, wear comfortable shoes, smile, and enjoy the joy of children (and adults!) anticipating Christmas!

### Greeley Center Mission

**We are Catholic educators who challenge Catholic schools to be excellent because they are essential in preparing students for the future.**

## Book Recommendations

### ***XO, Ox: A Love Story*** written by Adam Rex and illustrated by Scott Campbell

Ox loves Gazelle: she is graceful and beautiful. So Ox writes her letters. Gazelle's feelings about Ox? Let's just say that she signs her form letter to him, “Au revoir.” This clever story shows how you can love someone despite his/her faults, and how to handle it with kindness when someone wants to be your friend but you aren't so sure.

**Read Aloud** for ages 4 and up

**Independent Reading Level** grade 3

**Genre** fantasy

### ***As Brave as You*** by Jason Reynolds

Jason Reynolds is a master storyteller, and this book really showcases his amazing craft. Gene, 10, and his brother Ernie, 13, are leaving Brooklyn for the first time to visit their grandparents in Virginia - in the country! The brothers' parents are taking a vacation just the two of them save their marriage. Gene, the younger brother, asks a lot of questions, and Grandpop is all ears to answer. Gene is fascinated by Grandpop's ability to “see” even though he is blind from diabetes. The two spend a lot of time together, and get themselves in trouble with Grandma. This sweet and funny book will help you reminisce about your own grandparents, but it also deals with some heavy issues like depression, grieving for a lost relative (the boys' uncle was killed in action in Vietnam), and gun use.

**Reading Level** grade 6 (F & P Level X)

**Appropriate** for grade 5 and up

**Awards** 2017 Schneider Family Book Award, 2017 The Kirkus Prize Winner, 2017 Coretta Scott King Honor

**Genre** realistic fiction

