

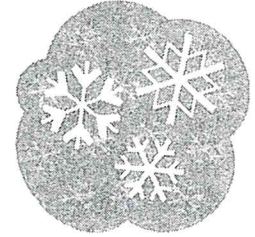
Snow Days Mini-Unit: Free time or School day?

Objective: I can evaluate multiple perspectives on an issue in an argument

Essential Question: Should students have homework or virtual school on snow days?

There’s nothing better than seeing your school’s name appear in that scrolling bar on the morning news. We get to go back to bed, sleep in, and do whatever we want all day. ...Right?

Wrong. Many state governments and local districts are requiring teachers to post homework online just for snow days. For example, schools in Ohio call this online homework a “blizzard bag”; the posted homework assignment is either due the next day, or some districts allow students a full week or two to get the work turned in. In other schools, the online homework is actual real-time learning, like a live video with the teacher or an online group chat.



Some believe that it is unacceptable for students to lose a day of learning and for teachers to essentially get paid for a day that they didn’t work. Others say that schools should NOT give extra homework or online classes because kids can still learn at home (or they deserve the rest).

This week, you’re going to explore multiple perspectives on the snow day issue to take a stand on how the day should be spent.

Below is an overview of what should be completed on each of our snow days.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Complete one of the writing prompts from the Inform column of the “Ice It” Menu.	Read the non-fiction articles about snow days and answer the questions on pages 3 and 4 of the packet. Begin the Research Activity: Is It Possible to Predict Snow Days?	Complete one of the writing prompts from the Create column of the “Ice It” Menu. Continue working on the Research Activity: Is it Possible to Predict Snow Days?	Complete the Research Activity: Is It Possible to Predict Snow Days?	Complete one of the writing prompts from the Explain column of the “Ice It” Menu.

Step 1: Read About It

The New York Times has a collection of four articles on this topic. **Read those articles and answer the questions in this packet.** (Don’t whine. They’re short and interesting.)

- Virtual Schools on Snow Days: New York Times Room for Debate
 - Article #1: There’s Beauty, and Learning, in Freedom
 - Article #2: Help Parents Work From Home, Too
 - Article #3: Online Programs are Important Schools
 - Article #4: A Great Idea, but Not Just for the Rich

Step 2: "ICE" it

Using the "ICE" menu on the next page, choose at least ONE writing task from EACH column. For extra credit, do additional tasks. (Plus, if you do more than one from each column, I am willing to grade whichever one is better!)

I HIGHLY recommend that you carefully read the rubric to see how each column will be graded. (For example, the informative column requires neutral writing, the creative writing expects detail, etc.)

Step 3: Share

You will need to choose ONE piece of writing from your "Ice it" menu to share out loud when we return to school. When you do...

- I will be grading you with SPEAKING STANDARDS, so be ready to speak clearly with good volume, posture, etc.! (See the RUBRIC to view exactly how you will be graded.)
- **This ENTIRE packet is due on sharing day**, including the non-fiction reading questions and the final drafts of your narrative, informative, and argumentative writing from the "Ice it" menu.

“ICE it” Writing Menu

Remember to follow the directions fully and check out the rubric to see how each genre is graded!

<u>I</u>nform (Unbiased research)	<u>C</u>reate (Narratives)	<u>E</u>xplain your opinion (Argument)
1. Do online research to find at least 3 types of assignments that other English teachers are assigning to kids on snow days. Then write a paragraph that lists your findings and some of the pros and cons of EACH of those three assignments. (In other words, you are informing us on what other students are being asked to do during a snow day.)	2. Write at least a half-page story describing what it is like to wake up in the morning and discover it is a snow day. It can be real or fictional, but be VERY descriptive, putting me <u>in the moment</u> to know what the experience is like in your world; include sensory details like thoughts, sounds, sights, and actions.	3. Some lawmakers and district officials are debating whether or not salaried teachers are earning their pay on snow days. Some say it’s not fair for teachers to be paid for a day they’re not working. Others argue that teachers DO spend the day grading, creating the materials for online snow day learning, or working from home, so the first argument is invalid. In your opinion, do teachers need to “make up” a snow day to earn their salary? Write a minimum of 8 sentences in a clearly organized paragraph that uses a mix of facts and opinions.
4. Do research on the weather or natural events in our state that most affect school. (Do we lose school days to snow? Floods? Forest fires? Hurricanes?) Then describe how schools in our state deal with the loss of school as a result of these unforeseen events and LIST what some of the reasons might be for the way our state copes.	5. Write at least 12 lines of poetry, using whatever form you want: sonnet, haiku, free verse, acrostic, concrete poems, etc. No matter what form you take, write about something related to snow, winter, ice, or snow days. Make sure you use sensory details to describe your images or events.	6. Parents have a variety of opinions on snow days. Some support the idea of “blizzard bags” or online learning because it keeps kids busy and makes their day easier. Others think students should be given the day off, especially if they can’t provide the tech needed to complete the homework. Others have a different opinion altogether. Discuss this topic with your parents and write a minimum of 8 sentences in a clearly organized paragraph that uses a mix of facts and opinions.
7. Research ways in which students could still learn during a snow day without being assigned extra work by the school. Consider places to go, things to safely do at home, online learning, or experiences that could “count” as learning. List and describe these, pretending that a teacher or parent is your audience.	8. Write a short scene OR story about a dramatic event that happens in the snow. It can be fictional or autobiographical (like a memoir), and can be set in the present or your past (childhood). Regardless of the final length or plot, make sure you use plenty of detail and description to let us feel each moment as if we are there.	9. The trend of online learning is sweeping the nation; whether it’s the “flipped classroom” method, a snow day “blizzard bag”, or a completely online course, some educators clearly think that learning can still happen between an individual student and a computer screen. Argue whether more learning happens online or in the classroom; write a minimum of 8 sentences in a clearly organized paragraph that uses a mix of facts and opinions.

*NOTE: You do NOT need to rewrite the prompts on your piece of paper. Just label each response with the prompt NUMBER.

There's Beauty, and Learning, in the Freedom of a Snow Day

Kate Fridkis, a columnist for Home Education Magazine, is the author of "Growing Eden."
Updated February 5, 2014, 7:44 PM

My friends often describe that feeling of waking up to snow and praying that school would be canceled. That's not something I can relate to; I was home-schooled. If my brothers and I wanted to spend the day sledding or having snowball fights, we just squeezed in some math after dinner.

I was home-schooled. If my brothers and I wanted to spend the day sledding or having snowball fights, we just squeezed in some math after dinner.

I'm conflicted when I read about schools implementing long-distance learning techniques on snow days. Learning happens in the snow. It happens through play and family interactions and goofing off. It's amazing how much children learn outside the classroom or when they're not being formally taught.

At the same time, a system that enables students to complete assignments from their homes, potentially in their pajamas, is more in line with my philosophy about education than the classes themselves. If formalized education is necessary, as so many believe it is, then this seems like a gentler, more flexible complement to the rules of the classroom. Ultimately, the less separation between the acquisition of traditional knowledge and the rest of life, the better!

My husband, who grew up in sunny California without the hope of a snow day, dreams of sledding with our daughter. She's only 6 months old now, so it'll be a while. But I can't help thinking ahead and wondering if I am willing to relegate her sledding days to weekends and days when school is canceled. What a wild sense of freedom I had, growing up. I can't help but want that for her. But I'm intimidated by the thought of undertaking the huge responsibility of her education. I fantasize about some sort of middle ground, aided by technology like Chicago is using on snow days.

As one Chicago area high school student says: "As long as it's not too much like an actual school day, it's a good thing."

I still believe that the snow part is the best part, but maybe throwing a little bit of school in the mix can be a good thing, too.

On Snow Days, Help Parents Work From Home, Too

Emma Johnson is a business journalist and [blogger](#). She is also on [Twitter](#).

Updated February 5, 2014, 7:44 PM

Like other working parents, I'm fixated on the radio each morning because of the recent winter weather. No news merely means more bundling of my kids, ages 3 and 5, before a gusty trek to the bus stop. But a school shutdown means a chaotic struggle to find a sitter and rejigger my work schedule.

I am not alone. Today in the United States, both parents work in the majority of married families with children, and three-quarters of single mothers like myself have jobs outside the home. Meanwhile, the social ties that can help bridge childcare gaps are far weaker than in decades past. For working families who depend on schools as a safe place for their children while they earn a living, snow days can mean lost wages, jeopardizing a position and crippling a family's finances.

While we explore ways to keep kids studying during inclement weather, we must also create legislation that protects parents who must work from home -- or miss work entirely.

The possibility for kids to continue their schoolwork remotely via electronics is promising, especially for older students for whom academic pressure is so high. But for families with young or special-needs children who require constant supervision, these programs leave most working parents shrugging while they frantically scroll through their contacts in search of a babysitter, coordinate with other parents and desperately try to reschedule meetings in the event that no childcare can be found.

School closings are not just a quaint childhood rite-of-passage (though I fondly remember watching "The Price Is Right" and munching on grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup). Instead, they highlight corporate and government policies that lag far behind the changing realities of most U.S. families -- the majority of whom depend on jobs and schools that do not always support working parents.

While we continue to find ways to keep students studying even while snowed in, we must also put muscle into legislation that forces businesses to grant parents the option to work from home when weather shuts down schools, and prohibit the penalizing of caregivers who must miss work when their kids are home on those days.

This is also a call of action to parents. The onus is on you and me to stitch together networks in our communities, coordinate emergency child care systems and otherwise support one another in times of crises -- crises like record snowfalls that shut down schools.

Online Programs Are Important Tools on Snow Days

Maureen Suhendra works with classrooms across the country as part of the Education Partnerships team at [Khan Academy](#).

Updated February 5, 2014, 7:44 PM

It was snowing hard outside the KIPP middle school in northern Manhattan, as Silvestre Arcos' class of 10- and 11-year-olds worked hard practicing math, eager to earn coveted badges and the bragging rights that go with them.

"We might have a snow day tomorrow!" Arcos said. But he was unfazed by the potential disruption to his lesson plans.

Teachers can watch their students' progress in real time with online programs, even when they're stuck at home on a snow day.

If there was a snow day the students could continue working, using the Khan Academy software aligned to the fifth grade Common Core standards. Arcos could also send specific assignments to his students through Khan Academy. While the students are in the warmth of their homes, across town, Arcos could watch their progress in real time. He could see which students were struggling with particular concepts, which students needed to be challenged more and how much time students were spending on the site. Then he could take all of this information into account when planning for the next day, carefully considering how he can tailor his instruction to meet each student's unique needs.

Khan is one of many online tools that let teachers provide instruction and guidance and allow students to continue their studies at home. Snow days make these online tools particularly handy.

Virtual School on Snow Days Is Not Just for the Rich

Marilyn Anderson Rhames is a middle school teacher in a Chicago charter school. She also writes "[Charting My Own Course](#)," a blog published by Education Week Teacher.

Updated February 5, 2014, 7:44 PM

I think “[teleschooling](#)” on snow days is the biggest advancement in education since the Reagan administration reneged on calling [ketchup a vegetable](#) in the federal school lunch program. It just makes sense.

The success of teleschooling boils down to equity in funding, proper management of resources and thinking outside the box.

I applaud the efforts of the school districts that are embracing this new strategy. I’m jealous, actually.

As exciting and inspiring as this news is, it's yet another story about the great work the white, affluent suburban schools are doing to educate their youth. I kept reading the article, hoping to see mention of one nonselective enrollment Chicago public school that also used remote learning tools during the storm. I saw none, and I’m not surprised.

The success of teleschooling, just like brick-and-mortar schooling, boils down to equity in funding, proper management of the resources a school district has and the willingness of administrators to think outside the box. None of which, I’m pained to say, is in great abundance within the Chicago Public Schools system. When you throw poverty in the mix, advancements like teleschooling seem near impossible.

Consider this: Chicago Public Schools includes 658 schools and 400,000 students, with 87 percent considered low income. Technology within the district is notoriously outdated and [plagued with theft and corruption](#). So before teleschooling can take hold, an infrastructure of checks and balances to prevent abuse or loss of equipment would have to be firmly in place.

Additionally, in my 10 years experience teaching in Chicago, about 25 to 30 percent of my students did not have Internet access in their homes, which further challenges the notion of teleschooling.

Interestingly, Chicago's solution to make up for this year’s four snow days is to turn the three remaining teacher development days into student attendance days and require students to come to school one day during their summer break. Teachers will make up their professional days by starting their summer break three days later.

Postponing summer break certainly won't inspire quality teaching and learning, so teleschooling really is a good idea, not just for snow days but for any time of year.

If done right, this type of instruction could provide students with the technology and independent learning skills that are necessary for a quality 21st-century education. But all students -- not just the privileged few -- should have this rich and creative opportunity to learn.

8. Short answer: Why does Johnson feel that school closings are outdated?

9. Why isn't Johnson more worried about virtual school?
 - a. She's so concerned with finding supervision for her kids that she's less worried about how the kids spend their time
 - b. She's worried about being able to get her work done at home
 - c. She's more concerned with losing her job
 - d. She's more concerned with the weather

10. Why is Maureen Suhendra possibly the most biased writer of the four?
 - a. She is a teacher, a parent, and a student
 - b. She is promoting online learning products made by her company
 - c. She is promoting the school she teaches in
 - d. She is the founder of Khan academy

11. Short answer: What are the major assumptions behind Arcos' snow day plans? (In other words, what are the flaws in his plan that could go wrong?)

12. Two-part short answer question:
 - a. What is the author's attitude about virtual learning on snow days?

 - b. What specific word choices impact tone and reveal her opinion? Give at least 2-3 examples.

13. Opinion short answer:
 - a. Have any of these articles influenced your opinion on this topic? Explain why.

 - b. Which article do YOU feel has the strongest, most well-written argument (regardless of what that opinion actually was?)

Research : Is it Possible to Predict Snow Days?

(W.7) Objective: I can complete credible, accurate research to answer a multifaceted question.

4	3	2	1
Student significantly contributes to fully accurate, credible research that is correctly cited; findings use evidence and analysis to draw a logical, persuasive conclusion.	Student contributes mostly accurate, credible research to draw a logical conclusion; sources are cited appropriately.	Student does not meet one criterion for the task at grade level.	Student does not meet two or more criteria at grade level.

Many of us have our own little superstitions about snow days, or a trick that will make one happen. But do any of them work? If they don't, is there any way to accurately predict whether or not we will get one? Does it only depend on the strength and timing of the storm front, or are there other factors too?

Some apps think so; there are snow day calculators in the App stores that claim they can accurately predict the probability that you'll get a snow day tomorrow. But how do they do it? Are they any good?

Step 1: Prompt & Background Research

Your task is to answer the following question below in one well-developed 5 paragraph essay (minimum of 4 sentences per paragraph). You should cite evidence from your research in your paragraph.

Question: Is there any way to accurately predict the probability of a snow day in OUR district?

Just like snow days themselves, these two prompts have a lot of factors and variables that you'll want to consider while you research. You may need to look up facts such as:

- Types of storm fronts and their effects
- The efficacy of local street teams
- Past patterns of what did (not) turn into a snow day
- Official statements or policies of the district
- Basics of probability
- Scientific ideas about superstitions
- Origins of superstitions

Step 2: Present Your Findings

On one typed document, you will need to turn in...

- Your name
- An interesting title that clearly reveals which prompt you answered and your thesis
- A multi-paragraph report of your research findings
- In-text citations OR footnotes to show source attribution for facts
- A short, correctly-formatted MLA bibliography (works cited page); this can be at the bottom of the same piece of paper (no need to put in a page break – save some trees!)

You need to be ready to share your findings in an informal way to the class.

World Wide Web

1. Author's last name, (comma) first name. (period)
2. "Title of Article." (in quotation marks) (period)
3. Source title—online book, journal/magazine, newspaper, or website. (underlined or italicized) (period)
4. Date of electronic publication or latest update. (period)
5. Name of sponsoring organization. (period) [e.g., Cable News Network, SIRS Knowledge Base]
6. Date when accessed
7. <Website address>. (in angle brackets) (period)

Example with author

Landsburg, Steven. "Who Shall Inherit the Earth?" Slate. 2 May 1999. EPA. 6 June 2001 <http://www.e.com>.

Your Website Information

Author's last name, (comma) first name. (period)

"Title of Article." (in quotation marks) (period)

Source title--online book, journal/magazine, newspaper or website. (underlined or italicized) (period)

Date of electronic publication or latest update. (period)

Name of sponsoring organization. (period) [e.g. Cable News Network, SIRS Knowledge Base, American Heart Association, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta]

Date when accessed

<Website address>. (in angle brackets) (period)

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