

# FingerPoints



The E-Newsletter for "Teaching Is Too Important to Take Seriously" and  
"The Five Fingers of Laughter - How to Get a Handle on Your Happiness"  
December 2005 Edition

## In the News

Thanks once again to all the wonderful people I have met in my travels promoting Teaching Is Too Important to Take Seriously. I would especially like to thank everyone who attended the Book Opening and Fundraiser for the Boys and Girls Clubs on November 12th. I wish everyone could have been at the clubs the day before Thanksgiving when we handed them the checks and the books you donated. It was truly a great example of what Thanksgiving is all about. Also I would like to thank Denton Randall at WHAS 840 AM for having me on the air the Sunday after Thanksgiving for a half an hour in the middle of the prime afternoon spot. This allowed me to get the word about the Five Fingers of Laughter out to a broader audience and the feedback has been tremendous. If you know of a radio station in your area which you think would be interested in having me on to talk about laughter and humor in teaching and in life, please let me know. The more we put out the word of the power of laughter, the more it will help all of us.

I am starting a new feature this month with the inclusion of a listing of off the wall daily, weekly, and monthly celebrations. I have become interested in these days as a way to bring laughter into schools ever since several teachers in my school celebrated "Talk Like a Pirate Day" this last September. It was a great way to break the tension in a very difficult week. Most of the listings come from the website [www.brownielocks.com](http://www.brownielocks.com) a very positive website with more information than any one site should have. I hope you enjoy the new feature, because if you don't I'll have to yell out "ARRRR!"

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a very happy holiday season. We all know that this time of year can be very stressful, so that is why this edition of FingerPoints will focus on ways to excel through the season. However, if there is one tip I would give to everyone, it is to make sure to see the season through a child's eyes. And most importantly, make sure you are that child.

Keep Laughing and Keep Teaching,

**Scott Endres**

## December Laughter Calendar (National Tie Month)

1st - 7th	Cookie Cutter Week	21st	Humbug Day
4th	National Dice Day	26th	National Candy Cane Day
5th	Bathtub Party Day	28th - 29th	National Chocolate Day
7th	National Cotton Candy Day	29th	Tick Tock Day
9th	Day of the Horse	29th	No Interruptions Day
9th	Weary Willie Day	31st	Leap Second Time Adjustment Day
15th	Cat Hearers Day		
15th	Underdog Day		
16th	Barbie and Barney Backlash Day		
16th	National Chocolate-covered Anything Day		



## Laughter is Good

With the stresses of this month both at school and in our lives, the idea that Laughter is Good could not be more important. That is why I want to stress the impact laughter can have on helping deal with this stress. Just recently the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) has changed their position on the power of humor and stress relief. The AATH is a group which is very serious about humor (I know that makes no sense, but there was no other way to write it.) They strongly believe in the power of humor, but also strongly believe in knowing the truth and until recently members of the AATH would not agree to say that humor definitively reduces stress. While they have not come out and said that there is absolute proof of this benefit, they have officially stopped refuting the statement as unproven. Bottom line is, a lot of people who are probably smarter than most of us and have studied humor a lot more than me say laughter could be proven to reduce stress. Considering how difficult the month of December can be for all of us, that is good enough for me. Therefore I plan on my annual viewing of *A Christmas Story* (the movie with the kid and the Red Ryder BB gun). Or my family favorite, getting a copy of *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* and turning down the sound so we can all yell new dialog at the screen. (By the way, this can be turned into a very interesting creative writing activity for students.)



## Practice PHWH

As we try to get to winter break and all the work that comes with that, don't forget to play. I was reminded about this recently while I was working on this newsletter. It was the weekend after Thanksgiving and I was trying to get ahead of some work, when my 6 year old son asked if I wanted to play The Polar Express board game. We had seen the movie over the weekend and he was excited to play the game based on it. Initially, I said I would after I got some work done. However, it didn't take me long to remember that I didn't have anything I HAD to get done and that I wasn't doing the exact thing I was writing about, mainly practicing PHWH. So I stopped working and played with my son. If you haven't played the Polar Express game, it is very much like the movie and the winner of the game gets to play Santa Claus and give the other players a card with a Christmas wish on it. We played the game and my son won. He was very excited to give me the wish, which blindly picked at random. When I looked at the card, I knew I had made the right choice in playing the game. It said, "Laughter is the music of a happy heart". I couldn't have said it any better and I now had my story for this section. this season remember to balance your life between the work and the play and you may find out that the play will become your work. (By the way, I beat him the next two games.)



## Smile, Damn It! Smile!

If you have read the book *Teaching Is Too Important to Take Seriously* you know that one of the early comments I make is that teaching is like poker. It is because even though we have no control what cards or students we get, we can still win if we play like we have the best hand. I realized this by watching the World Series of Poker (WSOP) a few years ago on ESPN. Well, the most recent WSOP just concluded and I learned something once again. I learned that a happy, *Smile Damn it, Smile* attitude can win you a lot of money. (Well maybe a little skill helps too.) I learned this from Steve Dannenmann, a 38 year old accountant, who came in second in the tournament and therefore instantly became a millionaire. In an interview after the tournament Dannenmann said that his top priority was to have a good time. He even carried around a small sheet of paper with a list of things he should remember. That list included two things: "have fun" and "nothing to lose." With all the pressures we have on us now, it is getting to the point that we sometimes teach to not make a mistake. What would our teaching be like if we remembered two things, "Have fun" and "Nothing to Lose". Yes, we have a lot to lose, but it because of those things that we must play to win by laughing.



## Allow Yourself to Laugh

How do I survive the holidays? Whether we admit it or not, in the back of our mind, this is what most of us are thinking. From the stress of teaching wild students (aren't all students wild from Thanksgiving break to the winter break?) to dealing with the stress of getting everything ready for the holidays to the normal family stress, this can be a very difficult time, even though we love it. What can we do about it? Here are a few ideas.

**In the Classroom** This is a great time to play games. I don't mean playing games to pass the time, but as I talk about in the book, playing games to review can be a great way to bring laughter into your classroom. Recent research has shown that game playing is a great way to help students learn content and problem-solving skills. The key is to make sure that the games being played have a content basis. Whether it is the old Jeopardy game, with questions based on subject content, or making your own version of a favorite TV game show, the holiday season can be a great opportunity to let students review the semester's material and not really realize they are working.

**In Our Lives** Along with swallowing a lot of really good food, the holiday season is a great time to swallow a little pride. As I mention in the book, Frank Tyger said, "Swallow your pride occasionally, it's not fattening" and the holiday season is a great time to do it. Does it really matter that your sister's husband's uncle's niece's brother says the rudest things known to man? In the realm of things, no. For the one time a year that a lot of us actually get to see each other, it is not worth the pain to start an argument. 'Tis the season to say, "You know that is an interesting opinion" and then say ^%\$#&^# and ^\$#\*^%#&# on the way home. In addition, it's probably not a bad idea to swallow some pride at school, too. We do have the entire second semester to finish.

**Everywhere** There is probably not a better time in the year to have an Emergency Laughter List available. If you don't know, the Emergency Laughter List is a written list of ten words or phrases that when you read them are guaranteed to make you smile. They could be lines from a movie, a punch line from a joke or a note about a pleasant memory, but the idea is to give you something that will get you to smile and get through the bad times. You need to make this list and then post in places where you can readily see it in times of stress. It might be in your purse or wallet or maybe inside your planbook. Actually, considering the difficulty with the weeks between Thanksgiving and winter break, you might want to tape it on the head of every student you have, because at some point you know each of them is going to drive you crazy. However, I do suggest you don't tape it to the head of your spouse or your children.



## Laugh at the World Around You

This isn't particularly holiday related, but if ever want to see the perfect example of Laugh at the World Around You, check out [www.barneysmotel.com](http://www.barneysmotel.com). This motel, in Manitoba, Canada, when purchased was a run-down, drug-infested money-sucking motel. However, when the owners started making fun of the motel in its marketing and especially on its website, not only did they have a lot of fun, but they started making lots of money. Today, Barney's Motel has become a vacation destination and actually makes a profit. If you ever wanted a perfect example of what laughing at the world around you can do, Barney's Motel is it. (By the way, you get a 10-cent bounty on every fly you kill while staying at Barney's. That means 590 flies and your room's free. Boy that math degree turned out handy.)

**Have a Happy Christmahanukkwanza**  
and everything else you celebrate this season!