

TEACH

EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW



**VIRTUAL
WINTER
FIELD TRIPS**



**KIDS FIRST,
CONTENT SECOND:
TEACHING THROUGH
COVID-19**



Supporting Early Readers at Home and Online.

Now that children are back to school whether in-person or online, navigating the new school learning environment can be challenging for students, teachers and caregivers. For beginning and emergent readers, learning to read in a virtual space can be a daunting task. Teachers are faced with the ongoing limitations that online instruction in reading presents, such as the inability to effectively present visual cues of word formation and sounds to reinforce comprehension. This is especially difficult in the classroom as wearing a mask, while necessary, can be a barrier to presenting those visual cues. Monitoring the success of each student presents its own challenges in the absence of one-to-one instruction that is normally part of the in-person classroom experience. Caregivers find themselves tasked at home to provide further support for their young readers often without the instructional tools needed to be successful.

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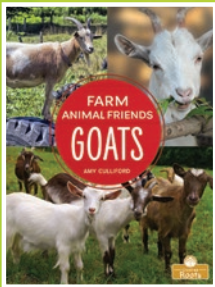
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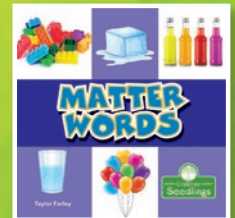
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NOTES

Who would have thought that the word “pandemic” ended up being among the most commonly uttered and discussed terms over the previous year, and with no end in sight since its presence is still being felt? Unfortunately, its impact ripples through society and around the world while schools, too, have been sucked into the COVID-19 vortex.

On a normal day, in more benign times, the logistics of running a school and shepherding students through daily routines is challenging. In these times, the challenges escalate exponentially when attempting to ensure all parties are kept as safe as possible. Schools work with learners who fall into a broad spectrum—pre-school to senior high school, those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, etc.—while dealing with other factors such as poverty, addiction and sometimes, violence in the home.

To manage all of this in pre-COVID-19 times is a tall order. To manage all of this during the pandemic is unprecedented. Yet it is being done. Our correspondent, Adam Stone, explores strategies and programs educators are using to ensure that all remain safe in a school environment while making sure the maximum amount of learning can take place.

As educators go about their daily tasks, whether that is teaching in-school classes or virtually, there is a toll to be paid. Like many professionals, such as those who work in health care, the physical, mental, and

emotional health of educators is often compromised as they put students first. In Meagan Gillmore’s cogent article, we are given a snapshot of how educators are coping in these excessively stressful times, along with some strategies for more health-conscious coping techniques.

In our Classroom Perspectives column, teacher Elana Moscovitch writes about her personal journey to bring awareness of and introduce students to issues related to Pride. Elana is also a mother and wanted her daughter’s classmates to have a better understanding of LGBTQ+ families, the history of the LGBTQ+ movement, and the struggles it took to achieve recognition, in society, as well as in the law itself.

In keeping with a healing theme, Webstuff details useful and easy-to-use Mental Health apps available online. While the Field Trips column explores virtual winter trips to beautiful places while avoiding the cold.

The CURRICULA section of the magazine celebrates Canada’s most famous art collective, the Group of Seven. Just over 100 years ago, these artists, who celebrated and exulted in Canadian themes and landscapes, held their very first public exhibition. Also, be sure to check out our collection of digital resources: [Dystopia 2153](#), [The Life and Times of Sir Wilfrid Laurier](#) and others.

Until next time.

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CURRICULA

Group of Seven:
Exploring Identities Through Landscape

Kids First, Content Second: Teaching Through COVID-19

By Adam Stone

When kids came back to school in the fall of 2020, Mark Benigni had his concerns. Would K-12 students be able to maintain physical distance? Could they keep their mouths and noses covered? COVID-19 looked as if it might present an insurmountable classroom-management challenge.

“We all worried about it, but it hasn’t been an issue at all,” says Benigni, Superintendent of Meriden Public Schools in Connecticut. Kids keep their distance, and when it comes to masks, “our students understand, because there is consistency. You will wear a mask, and you will wear it all day long.”

He is not alone. Educators and administrators by and large say that with sound classroom management practices, students will rise to the pandemic challenge. It takes a steady hand and clear insight on the part of teachers, but those who’ve managed to navigate successfully say that even with the complications around masking and distancing, they’ve been able to keep on teaching.

OPEN AND HONEST

At Gowanda Middle School, about 30 miles outside of Buffalo, NY, 7th- and 8th-grade technology teacher Ryan



Schwarzott says that clear and respectful communication has helped him manage his kids through the complexities of COVID-19. “You have to set the tone the first day of class: set up the expectations, explain why the procedures are there,” he says.

When kids eventually returned to school, he talked to them about the need for the masking and distancing rules, explaining the medical necessity. He knew that some families were not supportive of the mask requirements, and he needed to get the kids on board in order to position the classroom for success.

“I basically explained that we are doing everything possible to create a healthy environment for all,” he says. “I explained to them that in public schools we have all types of kids—kids come here with medical issues and compromised immune systems and things like that. I explained that it is protecting the families of the people coming to school.”

Schwarzott made the conversation personal, telling them about his own son who has a platelet condition and is thus susceptible to COVID-19. “I just leveled with my students on a personal basis, and I feel they responded very positively from that open conversation,” he says.

While candid conversation can help at the classroom level, he says, it’s important that teachers have support from higher up. “Your administration has to uphold the policies,” he continues. “There can be no compromise in allowing people to not follow the guidelines of the district.”

THE YOUNGEST LEARNERS

As schools reopened, many expressed skepticism around whether the very youngest learners would have the ability to operate within the new parameters. For Brian Smith, a kindergarten teacher at Oxford Elementary School in Hickory, NC, strong classroom management techniques have helped to ensure the kids can learn safely.

Smith has made a number of classroom adjustments to support the new normal. Instead of having multiple activity areas—a kitchen zone, a castle zone, etc.—he now has Rubbermaid boxes filled with activities that kids can work on independently. “One box has the kitchen things in it, one box has a medieval castle set. There’s a box with airplanes and taxis. Mr. Potato Head has his own box, the Legos have their own box,” he says.



As the kids play independently, they may investigate each other’s activities, but only within certain parameters. “They want to get up and see what the other kids are doing. They have natural curiosity,” Smith says. “So I will let them walk over and say something, with their mask on, and then they have to go back to their seats.”

It can be trying for very little kids to be desk-bound for long hours, so Smith has implemented alternative seating arrangements that allow for some variety, while still supporting social-distancing needs. “I have half of my tables with the legs off, making them lower to the floor. Kids who need to move around can sit on the floor or sit on a mat, or they can sit on a scoop seat [a rocking chair with no legs],” he says. For those who feel too confined in a regular chair, “now they have options, and they can change position whenever they need to, when they get restless.”

When it’s time to go mobile—an outing to recess or to the lunchroom—Smith has a strategy. “I put calendar numbers on the floor and I put black electrical tape to connect the numbers, so it is a straight line that literally goes around the room,” he said. “When you have 19 kids lining up six feet apart, it can take an eternity.... Now they all know their numbers and they know where to go.”

The kids have generally risen to the new expectations. “For the most part, they have masks on,” he says. “It all seems strange to us as adults because we know what school was like for us. But our kindergartners have never known anything different. For the kindergartners, this is what school has looked like since day one.”

For those who occasionally miss the mark, Smith is careful not to embarrass or shame them—a key classroom management concern for those trying to get kids to comply with COVID-19 requirements. Instead of calling

out an individual, he'll lead the class in a song to the tune of "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes."

"Mask, it covers nose and mouth—and then all the kids go 'nose and mouth!' Then everybody's checking their mask and I am not calling them out individually," he says. "I can be reading and I just stop and sing a line and everybody joins in, in the deepest little voice that a five-year-old can have! It cracks me up every time."

SOCIAL-EMOTION EMPHASIS

For PJ Caposey, Superintendent of schools at Meridian CUSD 223 in Illinois, masking and distancing haven't been a big issue. The larger classroom concern, he says, is just the lack of normalcy and the consequences that come with that.

"Student performance is way down in terms of their academic progress. Our kids tell us 'it doesn't feel like school.' When you enforce strict distancing at lunch, one-way traffic in the hallways, it just doesn't feel normal, and they miss that," he says. "As a result, we see increased social-emotional needs and decreased academic performance."

To close the gap, Caposey asks his team to focus not just on the academics, but also on the interpersonal aspects of learning. "We are having kids engage with each other and with the instructor, rather than with content," he says. In a more normal school year, "kids engage with the content first, and then with the instructor. In this environment, we want to invert that, to force kids to engage more with their

peers and their teachers, using the content as the vehicle rather than as the centerpiece." The aim here is "to create engagement at a human level," he says. Whether that's done in person or via a Zoom screen, "the point is to drive engagement in whatever form."

Caposey also explains that adjusting the classroom style to focus on personal experience is part of a longer-term approach to coping with the impacts of COVID-19. "We have taken away all the fun parts of school: we've taken away lunch as we know it, we've taken away PE as we know it, we've taken away the conversations

in the hallway," he says. "That means we need to foster a different level of engagement, and we need to do that intentionally. Human interactions are what make this more than just a boring and exhausting process."

In terms of practical classroom management, this may mean dialing back on academic expectations. Caposey encourages teachers to think about covering less content, and instead drill down more deeply into the material they do cover. "If we only get through 70 percent of the curriculum but the kids enjoy it more, no one is going to be any worse off," he says.

"We need to talk about social-emotional health in the classroom all the time. We need to be asking the kids: are your needs being met? Are you feeling connected to other people?" he says. "We need to give the kids the tools to process through all this. The Ottoman Empire right now is less important than our responsibility as adults to help the kids through this very difficult situation."

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

Unique to COVID-19 is the prospect of long-term absences: how to manage the classroom when one or more kids are forced to quarantine for up to two weeks at a time? "How do you engage those students and get them back? If a whole group of four or five students has to quarantine, that presents challenges," Benigni says.


Technology can be a key classroom management support for teachers who find themselves in such a situation. In Benigni's districts, kids all have school-issued Chromebooks and collaboration via Google Classroom, "and the teachers are maximizing those tools in order to keep those students engaged," he says.

"When a third of your class is in quarantine and you need to give them a seamless and comfortable transition back to class, technology is extremely important to making that work," he says. "It's not just the device, it's about having staff and students who are comfortable using the device. We are fortunate in that these tools have already been embedded into our core curriculum, so the student comfort level is already there."

A seasoned journalist with 20+ years' experience, ADAM STONE covers education, technology, government and the military, along with diverse other topics.



READ LEARN CODE



Refreshing your classroom's approach to cybersecurity in 2021

By Fred King. Business solutions architect on Cisco's Global Education Team.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the conversation around security in schools was focused on physical safety. Virtual security was often an invisible afterthought for educators, and dealt with by IT administrators focused on protecting the school's network and the devices that connect to it.

With the transition to remote learning, all that has shifted. The school is also no longer the central hub and devices are spread across students and teachers' homes -- meaning less control over these personal networks, and less in-person oversight into websites and applications being accessed.

As we enter the second half of a challenging school year, here are three security practices educators should consider adopting (or revisiting) in the new year.

Contain your app sprawl

The transition to remote learning has naturally led to experimentation in the classroom with many educators embracing collaboration tools and online applications to keep students connected and engaged. This has also led to an unfortunate side effect: app sprawl.

Getting the number of separate logins under control is one step you can take to streamline classroom security and reduce the risk of a breach.

Start by checking if your preferred apps have integrations within the school's chosen learning management system. If not, is there a close equivalent? Over the past few months, LMS companies have expanded partnerships to embed apps and collaboration platforms, like **Cisco Webex Education Connector**, directly into platforms like Canvas, Moodle, Schoology and many others.

Know what security threats exist

As students and educators are spending even more time online -- and on networks that lack security protections -- it's tempting for attackers to target and exploit their devices. In the US, the FBI **issued a warning** that school boards are increasingly being targeted by hackers. This was spurred by a ransomware attack in a Baltimore school network, which led to lost data, network downtime and ultimately the cancellation of online classes.

Just as media literacy has become important, students of all ages and educators need to understand what potential threats exist online and how to avoid falling into a hacker's trap. Bad actors are using email phishing scams, unpatched software, and even remote desktop applications to gain access to sensitive data.

Go back to security basics

You don't need to be an IT expert, but being aware of what security solutions are in place and responding appropriately when they're activated can be crucial in preventing a breach. Good security is often invisible and will only make itself known when presented with a potential threat -- this could be a pop-up notification or blocking access to a website.

It sounds simple, but taking time to read the security notification on a website, email or installing a security update in a timely manner (we know the "ask me again tomorrow" button is tempting), and encouraging students to do the same builds good habits for the long term.

[See how Cisco is reimagining education here.](#)



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Teaching About Pride

By Elana Moscovitch

I started my teaching career at a public middle school in Toronto about two decades ago. At that time, I was not comfortable being personally out to my students. I recall that several students who noticed my short hair and square shoes called me “battyman” (a word I had to look up), which is derogatory slang for gay or homosexual.

The second school I taught at was a Jewish day school. At that school, I asked the Vice Principal, an Orthodox Rabbi, if I could bring some resources about same-sex families and anti-homophobia lessons into my classroom. The lessons had been created by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). He said he didn’t want me to “confuse the students” by talking about same-sex families. After a student in my grade 4 class, however, was called “gay” several times by his classmates, I received permission to do a lesson on name-calling. In the context of that lesson I also unpacked what it meant to be “gay.”

Towards the end of my seven years at that school, several teachers came to Pride Day and saw me dancing on a TDSB float for teachers. They were supportive and excited about it when they saw me in the staff room the next day.

Outside of the classroom, my partner Jessie and I met when I was thirty-three. We had our daughter when I was thirty-eight. We sent her to a public school in our neighbourhood. Even though it was a fairly large school, she was one of only a handful of children with same-sex parents. By grade 1, children started asking her questions about her family structure: “How can you have two moms?” “What do you mean you don’t have a dad?” She told us that one child even thought it was because her dad had died. She would explain it to them or say it was none of their business. But I could tell it bothered her.

THE LESSON

We wanted our daughter’s classmates to have a better understanding of LGBTQ+ families and support the kids and teachers who might be LGBTQ+ or questioning. So, when our daughter was in grade 2, Jessie and I asked to borrow a lesson our queer friend had created for her son’s class. It was about the history of Stonewall and Pride. The lesson talks about the history of LGBTQ+ rights; telling the story in ways in which kids can understand and relate. It mentions examples such as, LGBTQ+ people not being allowed to dance together and women not being allowed to wear men’s clothes, and goes on to explain how LGBTQ+ people were arrested by police for doing those things.

The lesson was followed by an art activity where all of the students designed their own Pride flags. My partner adapted the lesson by adding pictures of our own family at Pride Day celebrations, as well as photos of the trans activists of colour who led the Stonewall Rebellion. Although I am a teacher, Jessie was so excited about the lesson that we decided she would present it to the class while I supported her.

The presentation was well-received. The teacher gave us a warm reception and, during the presentation, even disclosed that her sister was married to a woman. The





students were very engaged and asked good questions. They all participated in the activity and paraded their flags outside the school.

Interestingly, the second time we tried to share this lesson, we experienced an initial pushback from the school. It was 2018 and the province of Ontario had abruptly repealed the current sex-ed curriculum that was more progressive and only recently updated. Educators were nervous. We had to meet with the teacher and the principal and address their concerns. The word “non-binary” elicited worry. The teacher also asked if it fit with the Health Curriculum for grade 2, even though we were presenting the lesson as just parents, not teachers.

In the end, the lesson was allowed to remain the same. This time, the students strongly identified with the theme of injustice and even made connections between homophobia and racism.

I think it is important that children learn about LGBTQ+ rights and history once they are old enough to understand it. My partner and I knew the teachers might not have the expertise or feel comfortable enough to teach this on their own, but we also knew that kids are ready to talk about these issues at a young age. Our hope is that teachers could increase their comfort level so that they can lean in to these important conversations.

THE IMPACT

There were numerous positive outcomes of this experience. One was the creation of a Pride Committee at the school, organized by Jessie and other queer parents.

We realized that Pride activities needed to be more central in the school. Both Parent Council and the administration were very welcoming of this initiative and even gave us a respectful budget to plan activities and bring in speakers. We were able to hold one event, bringing in an author from Vancouver, before the COVID-19 pandemic shut the schools down. This year, the principal even advocated at a Parent Council meeting for the Pride Committee to receive additional funding from the school budget, so we could plan virtual events for the students.

The lesson also had a strong impact on our daughter. During the pandemic, she helped organize a neighbourhood Pride celebration and wrote an [article](#) about it afterwards for CBC Kids News.

Last year was the first time I actually came out to students and used the Stonewall lesson myself—I even showed pictures of my own family celebrating Pride together. I was a Guidance and Learning Counsellor at the Linden School, a feminist girls’ school in Toronto. It felt good to finally be fully open about my family and identity and have this information be received so positively by students. I think it is so important for them to see role models that they know who are proudly queer and who have positive life experiences.

ELANA MOSCOVITCH has worked as a teacher and guidance counsellor, and is currently a Child and Family Clinician at Integra. She lives with her partner, Jessie, and nine-year-old daughter, Ma’ayan.



READING RESOURCES

What Makes a Baby by Corey Silverberg: intended for children in preschool to age 8, this book uses gender-neutral and trans-positive language to teach kids about conception and birth

The Zero Dads Club by Flamingo Rampant: it’s about a group of kids who don’t have dads for various reasons who decide to start a club around Father’s Day

This Day in June by Gayle E. Pitman: this children’s book talks about Pride Day, and provides information on how to teach about gender identity and sexual orientation in age-appropriate ways



Mental Health Apps

This past year was a tough one, with COVID-19 presenting many difficult challenges to the education community and beyond. Most notable were the drastic impacts the pandemic had—and continues to have—on mental health. With the start of a new year, however, comes the opportunity for change and new beginnings. Here are some apps to help students and teachers alike take a fresh approach to their mental health in 2021.

WHAT'S UP

Free – iOS, Android



What's Up utilizes Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) methods to aid adults and teenagers in coping with depression, anxiety, stress, and anger. The app includes a diary, a mood and habit tracker, and a “grounding” game with 100+ questions to help users stay in the present moment when anxiety is taking over. A “Coping Strategies” section asks users to identify and challenge their unhelpful thinking patterns, and also offers simple steps that they can take to start moving forward. Links to useful websites and additional resources are provided as well, which are tailored to the user's location.



BOUNCY THE PEOPLE TRAINER

Free – Website, iOS, Android



In this social-emotional training app, children ages 4-6 can play along with Bouncy, a three-legged dog who trains young learners to be strong and resilient when facing challenges. Kids begin by choosing from over 1000+ possible combinations of eye, skin, hair colours and clothes to create their own avatar. They follow Bouncy through five different levels of games, lessons, and exercises designed to teach about perseverance and positive thinking. Educators can also purchase the “Teacher Edition” of the app, which includes a Teacher’s Guide filled with lesson plans and extension activities, a built-in data manager to track student progress, and other additional resources. Check out bouncykids.net for more details.

CALM CHILD

Free – Website, iOS



This app was designed by a child psychologist to help children ages 4+ cope with their fears and anxieties. It features seven stories that are all told by children, to help young listeners connect and emphasize with the emotional journey of the narrator. Each story focuses on a different issue—such as jealousy, excessive anger, social anxiety, or difficulty falling asleep—and uses meditative activities to help address each problem. The stories are also meant to set the stage for follow-up conversations, to encourage children to speak up about their thoughts and worries. Visit calmchildstories.com to learn more.

MINDSHIFT

Free – Website, iOS, Android



Developed by Anxiety Canada, this app was created using proven CBT strategies to help high school students and adults manage their stress and anxiety, as well as reorient their ways of thinking. Users can record their mood and anxiety levels in a Thought Journal, listen to guided mindfulness meditations, and set goals to keep themselves motivated. The app also has a Quick Relief section to ease anxiety fast, with tools that encourage users to take a breath and ground themselves, or get help if they’re in a crisis. Users also have access to a selection of “challenges” designed to help them face their fears, step outside of their comfort zone, and maintain healthy habits. Find out more at anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt.

SUPERBETTER

Free – Website, iOS, Android



Intended for anyone over 13 years of age, SuperBetter is an app to help manage anxiety, depression, chronic pain, PTSD, and more. Users adopt a secret identity and select a challenge that they want to overcome (aside from tackling the issues already mentioned, the list also includes options such as: eating healthier, lowering stress, increasing energy, sleeping better, etc.). The app then presents a variety of “quests” that users complete to build resilience and achieve their goals. Users can invite their friends to join the app, and even meet new ones through the app’s community group. Visit superbetter.com to learn more.

Group of Seven: Exploring Identities Through Landscape

GRADES:

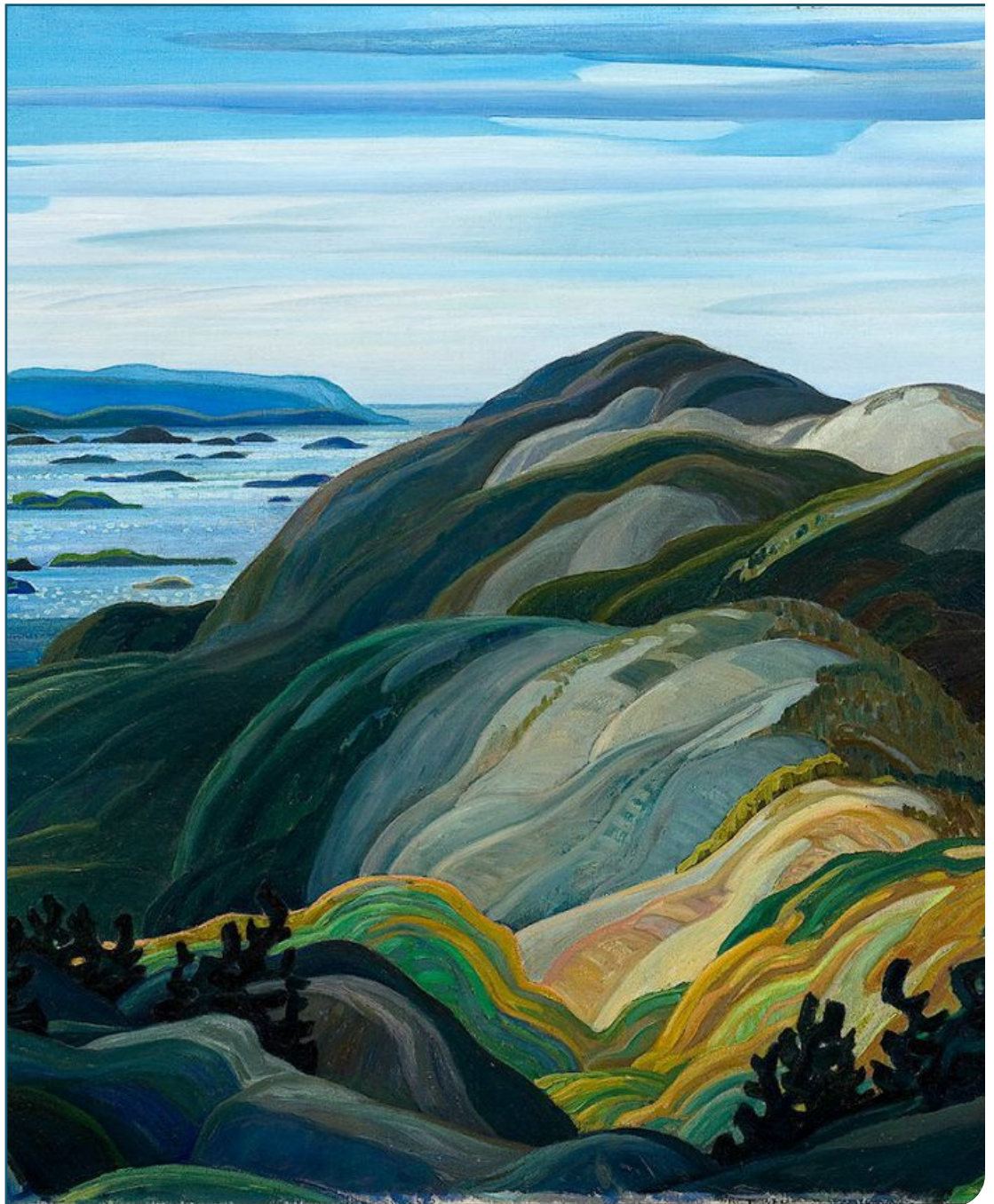
9 TO 10

SUBJECTS:

VISUAL ARTS,
HISTORY

DURATION:

4 TO 6 CLASSES



Franklin Carmichael.
Detail of *Bay of Islands*
from *Mt. Burke* (1931)



KEY CONCEPTS & ISSUES

The landscape art of the Group of Seven functioned as a powerful political unifier that helped consolidate the drive toward national sovereignty. Students will examine how the Group of Seven became entrenched in Canadian society and how they are associated with Canadian nationalism and Canadian identity. Students will learn about the concepts of personal and Canadian identity and be asked to paint a place of personal significance using colour theory and basic acrylic paint techniques.

- Cultural Identity
- Concept of Canadian Identity
- Concept of Personal Identity
- Personal Identity & Place
- Places of Personal Significance



PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

- History of the Group of Seven
- Analysis of the Group of Seven's work and significance
- Colour Wheel and Colour Theory
- Colour Mixing
- Basic Acrylic Paint Techniques



MATERIALS REQUIRED

- *Mystic Learnings: The Group of Seven* graphic novel
- Sketchbook
- Access to device with basic photo editing software
- Printer
- Acrylic paints
- Palettes
- Palette knives
- Paint brushes
- Individual prepared canvases (sizes may vary)
- **Optional:** 10 small covered containers for each student to mix their own colours



EXPECTATIONS/OUTCOMES

The overall expectations listed below serve as an entry point for teachers.

Students will:

- Increase their knowledge of the Group of Seven and their importance to Canadian history;

- Analyze the social and political importance of forging a Canadian art movement that represented Canada's national identity;
- Demonstrate an understanding of Canadian identity through the creation of their own painting;
- Be able to document the process of developing ideas to create their own artwork;
- Describe their relationship with Canadian identity in a critical reflection.



SKILLS ACQUIRED

- Application of Colour Theory
- Basic Photo Editing
- Grid Technique
- Colour Matching & Paint Mixing



BACKGROUND

The Group of Seven believed that the European-oriented view of the painter's profession was doing little to foster cultural awareness of Canadian society. When the Group of Seven first formed, Canada was still associated with its Imperial history. Canada and its art scene was in need of signs and symbols with which to assert its own distinctive national identity. With the support of the National Gallery of Canada and some private patrons, the Group of Seven focused on making landscape paintings for the purpose of forming a national art. They focused on creating art free of foreign influence that used nature as a form of Canadian identity.

This Canadian movement was clearly established by 1913 with the stated intention by the group to focus on exploring the landscapes of Canada's North. The group mainly focused on landscapes in Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park, and the Laurentians. All of



Frederick Varley, A.Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, Barker Fairley (not a member), Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, and J.E.H. MacDonald

the members of the Group of Seven except for Lawren Harris, had formal training in the business of commercial art. This background knowledge of design can be seen in the stressing of large, bold forms and movements with an emphasis on colour and contrasting tones.

Tom Thomson's tragic drowning in July 1917, occurred at the moment when his art was in full blossom and resulted in a state of despondency for the other members of the group. His death also occurred at the same time as the tragedies of the war were very much present in everyday life. During the First World War, two members of the group, Jackson and Varley, became official war artists. After the end of the war, the group reunited and travelled throughout Ontario, Muskoka, and the Algoma regions. They also ventured to other areas of Canada including British Columbia, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and the Arctic. In the fall of 1918 the group took a box-car trip to Algoma and focused on creating plein air sketching that stressed the use of colour and light to capture the essence of a scene. These sketches and paintings created during this trip were showcased in an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in April 1919.

In 1926, members of the group began to travel further across Canada. They visited the West Coast and the Arctic. The Group of Seven were the first documented artists of European descent to paint the Arctic. By the end of 1931, the Group of Seven were well known and decided it was no longer necessary to continue as a group. The Group of Seven subsequently announced they had disbanded and a new association of painters would be formed called the Canadian Group of Painters. The Canadian Group held their first exhibition in 1933 and continued to showcase their work until 1967.

In 1955, Robert and Signe McMichael began to collect and exhibit works from the Group of Seven at their home in Kleinburg, ON. In 1965, the McMichael family formally reached an agreement to donate their collection and their Kleinburg property to the Government of Ontario for the purpose of establishing an art museum. In addition to housing a collection of works by the Group of Seven, the museum property also contains the burial ground for six members of the group, including Jackson, Lismer, Varley, Harris, Johnston, and Casson; along with four of the artists' wives. The Group of Seven introduced Canadian art to the international stage and for many, their work continues to represent the Canadian national identity.



STEP ONE

TEACHER DIRECTED DISCUSSION

- Students begin by reading the Group of Seven graphic novel and discussing their work and its significance;
- Teacher guides students through analysis of the Group of Seven artwork, focusing on colour theory, elements and principles of art found in the Group's work;
 - ▶ Analysis ends with touching on the concept of Canadian cultural identity and the Group of Seven's role in bolstering Canadian identity through art



- Teacher leads class discussion on the concept of Canadian identity and the various lenses that we typically apply to the concept of that identity (eurocentric, colonial, etc.) and discuss alternative points of view to that identity;
 - This could be done as a group activity; the teacher has student groups present their ideas to the class to facilitate further discussion and gauge student understanding



STEP TWO STUDENT LED EXPLORATION

- Individually, students are then asked to reflect on their own concept of cultural identity, drawing parallels from the class discussion; students are asked to think of specific places that come to mind that solidify the connection
- Students then use their sketchbooks to explore landscapes of personal significance to them; students can use devices to find images of these specific locations



STEP THREE CREATING LANDSCAPE REFERENCE IMAGE

- Once students have picked a landscape of personal significance to them and their identity, they will digitally manipulate the image with teacher guidance
- Ensure the image ratio is the same as that of available canvas; if not, crop the image before editing
- Students will use the free version of a basic photo editing app, PicsArt, to simplify the shapes in their image: smoothing out edges and blurring out small details using the Oil Painting filter
- After the image has been simplified, students will break their image down into no more than 10 colours using the Poster filter
- Students download their edited landscape reference image
- These ten colours and the simplified landscape will be the reference point for the student's painting; have students print a minimum of 2 copies of the reference image, ideally in colour if available



STEP FOUR CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Please refer to **LM #2**

1. Prepping the Painting

- Students will begin by using the grid method and transferring the basic lines of their chosen landscape's edited reference image to the canvas
- After the outlines of the landscape have been transferred to the canvas, students will begin mixing their ten colours as per their reference image

- Using their colour reference image (or the final reference image on their device if colour printing is unavailable), students will mix each of their ten individual paint colours using the colours generated in creating the reference image;
 - Colours can be isolated using the eyedropper function in software such as Photoshop; alternatively, an app such as Color Hunter can aid students in creating a separate palette of their 10 generated colours

2. Execute the Painting

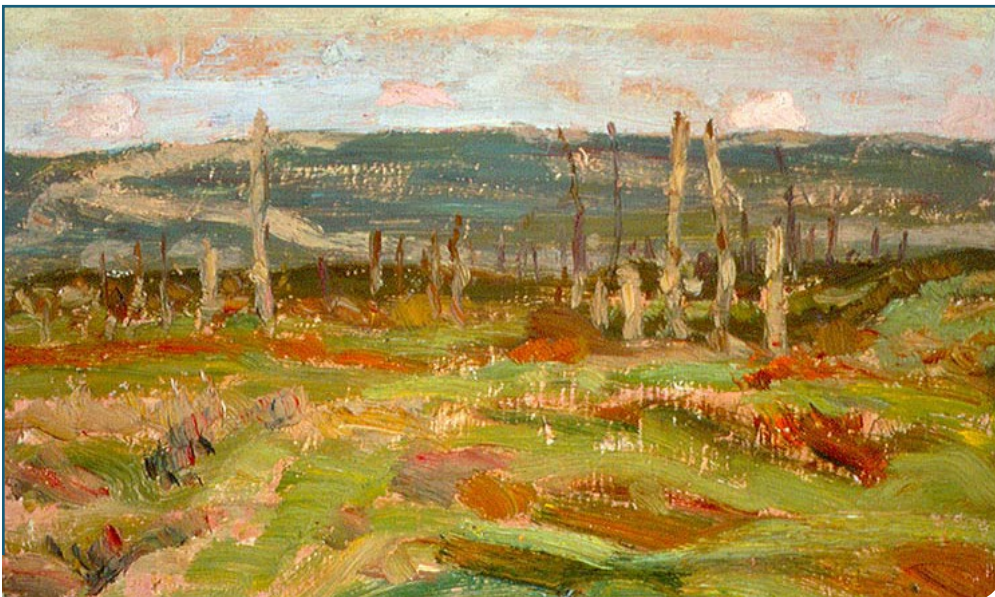
- After paints are mixed, students may find they want to assign numbers to their paints and their prepped canvas with landscape outlines and complete their painting in a “paint by number style” using their manipulated reference image
- Students who wish to further challenge themselves can focus on blending within areas of colour; this would require the mixing of additional paints, or blending additional colours on the canvas
- For students who are confident with their painting skills, challenge them to go a step further and explore different brushwork techniques
 - Students could choose to emulate a specific Group of Seven member’s painting style selected from the supplementary learning materials
- As students work on their individual paintings, consider doing one or two group critiques during the process for students to engage in constructive criticism; alternatively, have students do periodic gallery walks to see what others are creating

3. Final Critique

Please refer to **LM #1**

Ongoing Critical Reflection

- In what ways do you feel your work is successful?
- In what ways would you change the work to improve it?
- How does your painting reflect your own identity as a Canadian? How does this differ from the Group of Seven?



A.Y. Jackson.
Detail of *Vimy Ridge* from
Souchez Valley (1917)

4. Reflection

Please refer to **LM #1, LM #3**

Ongoing Reflection

- In what ways do you feel your work is successful?
- In what ways would you change the work to improve it?
- How does your painting reflect your own identity as a Canadian? How is this similar or different from the Group of Seven?



OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- With the Multicultural Policy of 1971 came a radical shift of cultural priorities. Canada was identified as having “no official culture.” No longer was Canadian nationalism, especially iconographies of landscape produced by a single ethnic-group, deemed to represent the multi-ethnic society. Have a discussion with the class about whether the paintings by the Group of Seven truly represent Canadian identity.
- Landscape painting is always tied to economic and social circumstances. Look at how landscape art has been used across cultures and societies as a means to showcase economic and social circumstances.
- Use a critical social justice lens while viewing the artwork of the Group of Seven to: 1) focus information from multiple, non-dominant perspectives, and see those as independently valid and not as an add-on to the dominant, hegemonic one; 2) de-centre students’ analytical frame and open their minds to a broader range of experiences; 3) analyze the effects of power and oppression; and 4) inquire into what alternatives exist with respect to the current, dominant view of reality of the artwork of the Group of Seven. For this lesson, students will need to understand how non-dominant perspectives are not seen in the artworks of the Group of Seven. Students will be encouraged to analyze the effects of power and oppression on the First Nations populations and inquire into how this affects Canadian cultural identity.

Algonquin Park, Ontario



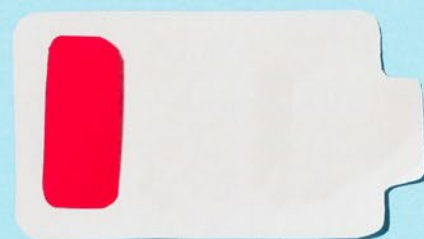
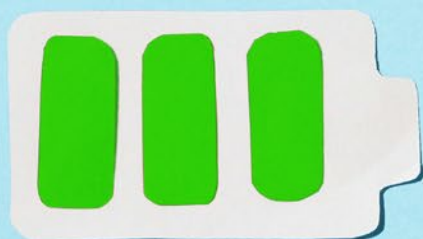
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June-Tired: Boosting Morale When a Pandemic Drags On



By Meagan Gillmore

Eva Tsang’s plans for the winter holiday break were simple: she was going to end 2020 by making individual coding kits for her Grade 3 students and watch Netflix—lots of it, along with some Hallmark movies. “Netflix is my new best friend,” she says, noting many of her teacher colleagues spend their off-work hours with the streaming service.

It’s been a challenging school year. After nearly 20 years of teaching junior grades, she was moved to Grade 3 in September 2020. Along with learning a new curriculum, she has had to adjust to the new rules of teaching in-person during a pandemic. The school is divided into cohorts so periods are longer and she rarely sees colleagues.

She spends two or three hours a week, after school, getting materials ready for students. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, her students can’t share anything, including markers for the class whiteboard. Books she gives them to read are stored in their desks. Sports teams and trips are cancelled.

“A lot of the fun has been taken out of teaching,” she says. There are some positives, however. “The kids are still sweet at this stage,” she says, reflecting on the differences between teaching primary as opposed to junior grades. “They want to please you.”

The greater struggle can be pleasing herself. “Sometimes I feel that maybe I’m not doing enough, or maybe I need to do a little bit more to reach one particular student. But at

the end of the day, we're doing the best that we can during these COVID-19 times." That offers little consolation. "I'm burnt out," she admits, a few days before winter break. Tsang isn't alone.

In November, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) released the results of a [survey](#) of 13,770 teachers across the country, which asked them about their mental and physical health. The survey, conducted in October, was a follow-up to one in June that sought to determine a baseline measure of how the pandemic has influenced teacher health. "It is clear that there is a need for timely, wide-reaching, and continued support to alleviate the reported deteriorating mental health of Canadian public school educators," the report says.

The federation found an increasing level of unhappiness among teachers. Less than 20 percent of teachers surveyed in October said they felt happy, and almost 46 percent reported some degree of unhappiness. Just over 17 percent said they were coping well with job stress, while 32.7 percent of teachers said they were "barely coping," and another 4.4 percent reported "not coping at all." Teachers also said they were struggling to maintain physical health: more than 80 percent reported some difficulty getting quality sleep every night, and around 60 percent said they struggled to eat regular and nutritious meals.

"[Teachers] were talking about being 'June-tired' in October," says Shelley Morse, CTF president, and a former schoolteacher with more than 30 years experience teaching in Nova Scotia. "If you're 'June-tired' in October, June is a long way away to try and maintain your mental health and do your job well."

Teachers need to provide stability for students, while at the same time following public health guidance and learning new ways to do their jobs, often with little notice about those changes. (For example, during the winter break—the same time Eva Tsang planned to create coding kits for her class in Scarborough, ON—the Ontario government announced classes would not resume in-person as usual come January.)

"Teachers are dedicated," says Morse. "They're trying to do all that they can. They're trying to go above and beyond. And they're trying to make the best of this current context and the challenges that the pandemic is presenting. They're trying to ensure that

their children are doing well and learning as easily as possible, but the pandemic sometimes doesn't allow that to happen."

"The teacher level of stress and anxiety is almost two months ahead of what it should be," says Dr. Andrew Miki, a psychologist in Vancouver, BC, who has worked with teachers across Canada for more than 10 years. This means more teachers than usual could experience burnout before the school year ends.

Teachers, explains Miki, are generally more conscientious than the average population. They're likely to be goal-oriented and have high personal standards. They also like to have plans, so constant change can be particularly stressful for them. "COVID-19 infuses so much uncertainty into everybody's lives, it drains [teachers'] batteries more," he says.

Yet the same conscientiousness that can contribute to poor mental health can also help teachers find strategies to improve their well-being. In Miki's experience, teachers are willing to take necessary steps to improve their mental health. He founded Starling Minds, a company that provides online cognitive behaviour therapy and mental health supports, including services specifically for educators. It's not enough to just say that relaxing outside of work is important; there needs to be a plan about how to relax. It may take a while to find what works.

"If you're going to do something relaxing, then you've got to test it out and see what's the right [activity] for you," says Miki. "Not everybody learns math in the same way; not everybody relaxes in the same way."

Teachers need to evaluate their own mental health and energy levels, while remembering they are not the only ones experiencing stress because of COVID-19, he says. "When you hear that story about what happened in [someone's] life and what the stressors were, and how their battery got drained over time, and how they experienced more and more symptoms over time, it always makes sense," says Miki.

Sharing those stories with others is key—for teachers and students alike. For many teachers, one of the biggest struggles has been keeping students engaged and forming personal relationships with them while teaching online.





“The biggest trick is to build a community among the students,” says Michelle Watrin, a Grade 8 teacher in Abbotsford, BC, who is taking a graduate certificate in online education and taught online for four years when her children were younger. This past fall, she would gather students she was teaching online every morning for an activity she’d planned, and then they would go do their work.

Watrin’s school offered sessions at the start of the 2020-2021 school year about the importance of proper sleep, nutrition, and exercise for mental health. At the beginning of each month, Watrin asked her students what their monthly health goal was, and then would follow up with them a few weeks later. Her students, in turn, gave her suggestions about how she could meet her own goals. One suggested that blinking her eyes 200 times would help her fall asleep. “They were giving me advice and that was really sweet and just a really good connection,” she says.

Watrin prioritizes personal interactions with students, especially when teaching online. “Some kids are really going through trauma right now,” she says. “I’m trying to keep that in mind more than ever.... How can I help them know that I care about them as a person before I care about them as a student?”

She places students into breakout rooms—she’s allowed to do that—and joins them periodically. She tracks the number of meaningful conversations she has with students on her attendance sheet so she can see who needs an individual connection. “If I get in three [personal conversations] a day, I’m pretty happy,” she says. “Some days, it’s only one. Some days it’s five.... I’m really trying to make that a priority rather than ‘Did we make it through the Middle Ages in social studies?’”

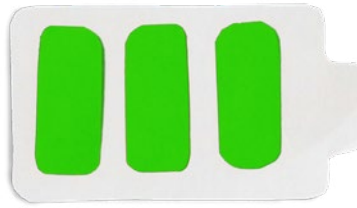
The desire to connect with students has also helped create relationships between other teachers. In July, Heather Carlsen started a Facebook group to support teachers during COVID-19. (As of early January, it had 2,857 members.) The high school chemistry teacher from Fairfax County, VA wanted help engaging students online. “I felt really overwhelmed,” she says. “Finishing out the [2019-2020] year virtually showed me where a lot of weaknesses are in terms of my practice, and areas that I really could be growing and I don’t even know how. Either the books haven’t been written or I couldn’t find them.”

She synthesized the group’s many suggestions into a resource document that’s been used by schools in various states. For her, that advocacy has been a major positive that’s come from the pandemic. “The group is a

big success,” says Carlsen. “I’m building bridges for people to connect with the people they need.”

Some needs are difficult to meet. Some group members have shared how they’re leaving teaching, or asked for advice about how to transfer teaching skills to other professions. “That’s been hard,” says Carlsen. “I don’t know how to proceed with that.... I love teaching and I believe in teachers, so to essentially hold somebody’s hand as they’re walking away from something that they want to do, is a bit like hospice, I guess.... There is a grief there, and I think that’s something that we socially haven’t processed yet.”

Watrin has also found support in teacher Facebook groups, but sometimes unplugs if reading the posts makes her too anxious. “This year, more than ever, if I have a bunch of things to mark, I make sure I do something physical before I sit down and mark. And then maybe I don’t mark that night—it gets put off. That’s OK. Have



grace for yourself; it’s OK not to mark everything on a schedule. Get to it as soon as you can, but take care of yourself first.”

She can’t escape all reminders of pandemic anxiety though. Every morning, it still shocks her to see students depart the bus wearing masks. “I think those constant reminders every day really wear on you, and I do feel that there’s a level of exhaustion that I’ve never had before teaching,” Watrin says. She walks to and from school; the exercise helps.

“I truly love my job,” she says. “I find myself walking home happy [thinking], ‘I really had a good time today. I really enjoyed these kids. Yes, this was hard. Yes, this came up. I would definitely trade COVID-19, but I wouldn’t trade being a teacher.’”

MEAGAN GILLMORE is a freelance journalist in Toronto, ON.

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Virtual Winter Field Trips

Remote learning has reinvented the concept of traditional field trips. These days, virtual field trips can be an exciting change up from the “new normal” of the virtual classroom, and are a great way to keep learners engaged. Check out some of the coldest places on Earth with these winter-themed virtual field trips—no survival gear required!



[GOOGLE MAPS TREKS](#)

While Google Earth and Maps can be great ways for students to travel the world from the comfort of their own homes, the newly-developed Google Maps Treks platform offers a more immersive experience. Each “trek” contains a series of interactive modules—from 360° panoramic views, to audio and video tours—that are designed to tell a story about each location. Students can learn about the Canadian north by exploring places such as [Churchill, MB](#) and [Iqaluit, NU](#). Or they can climb mountains like [Everest](#) in Nepal and [Mont Blanc](#) in France.

[MINNESOTA COLD](#)

This YouTube channel lets students view fun science activities that can be done in the cold, while they stay warm and dry inside. It’s run by a Minnesota high school principal and his family, and features plenty of cold weather science experiments and how-to videos. Students can learn how to make ice lantern luminaries, maple candy in the snow, watch bubbles freeze outside, and plenty more.

[ALASKA SEALIFE](#)

These virtual field trips are a fun way to teach students about Alaska’s marine ecosystems. Follow along with Alaska SeaLife researchers as they travel to the Bering Sea, study polar seals in Antarctica, watch walrus at Icy Cape, and more! Each field trip also includes lesson plans for grades 5-8.

[ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS](#)

Canada’s Royal Botanical Gardens is offering virtual programs to help students explore topics of biodiversity, conservation, and the environment—no matter where they are. “Insects in Winter” uses specimens and an experiment to show students in grades 3-8 how insects survive the winter. “Winter Tree ID” teaches grade 7-12 students how to use buds, twigs, and bark to identify common plants. Both programs are available until March.

[POLAR BEARS](#)

These free resources from Polar Bears International are a great way to transport students to the world of the polar bear. The site provides PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets, lesson plans, and activities across all grade levels. It also includes short YouTube clips designed to teach students about polar bear adaptations, environments, and extinction rates. Longer videos include a journey to the arctic through the eyes of a polar bear, and a 40-minute video experience of polar bears on the tundra.

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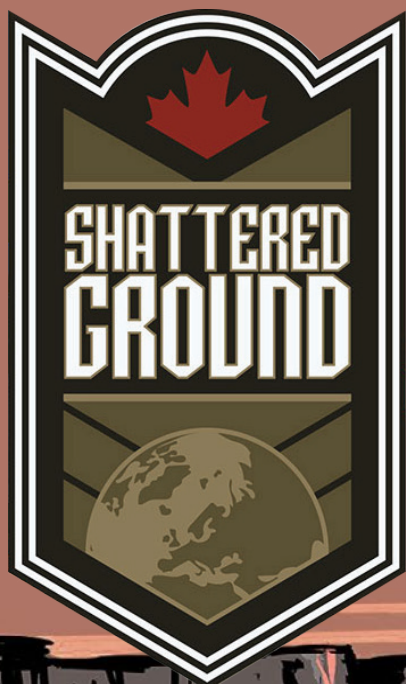
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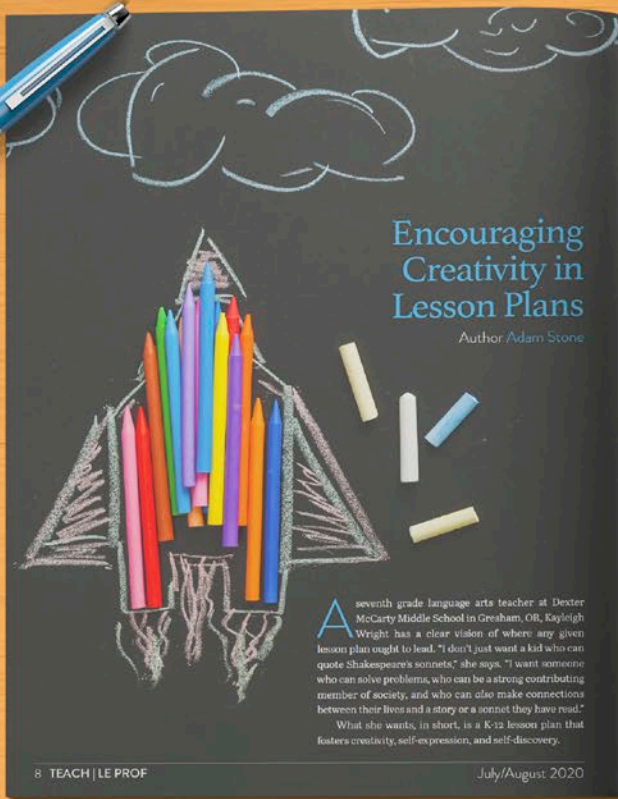
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TEACHMEDIA

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