

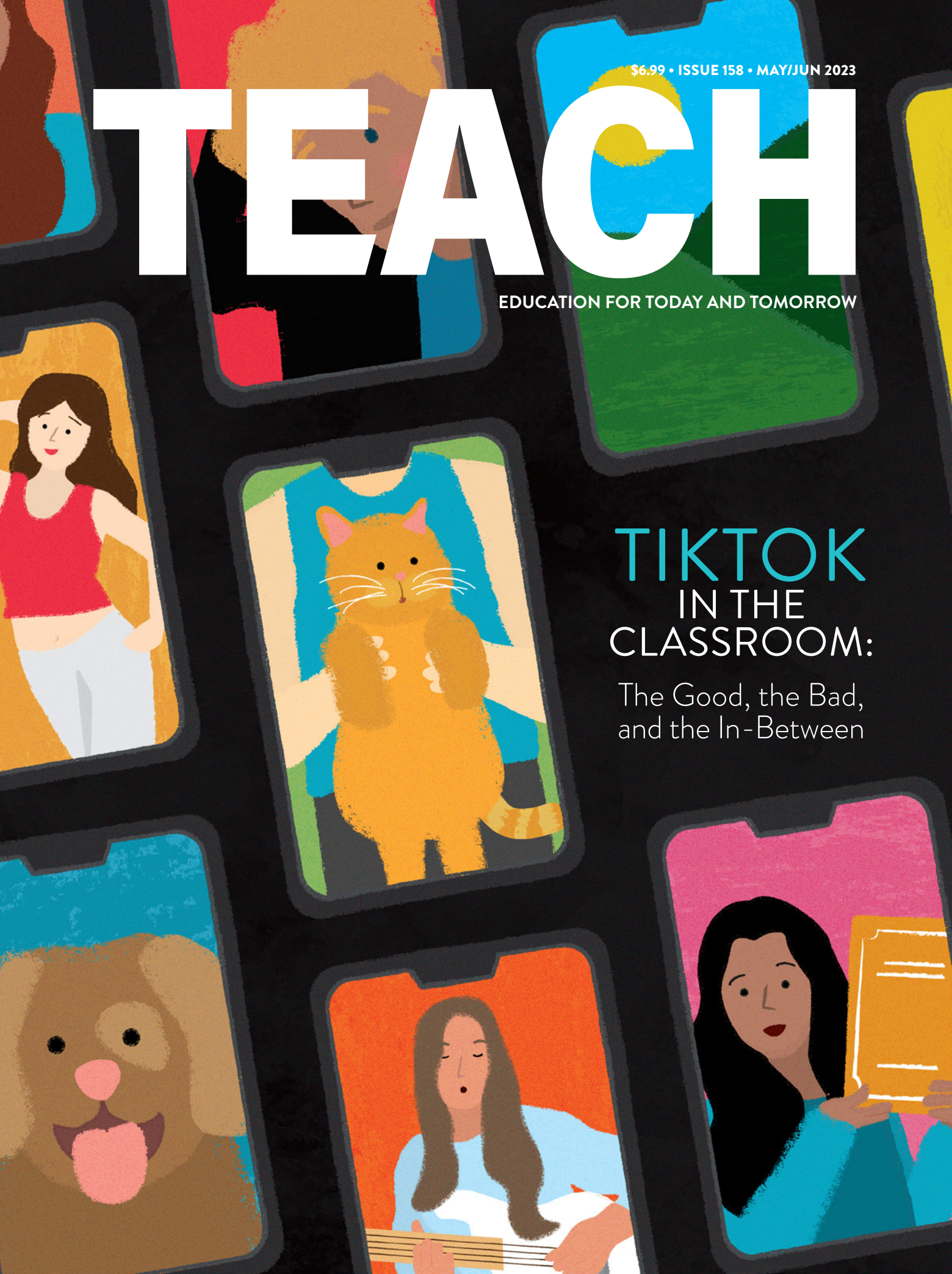
\$6.99 • ISSUE 158 • MAY/JUN 2023

# TEACH

EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

## TIKTOK IN THE CLASSROOM:

The Good, the Bad,  
and the In-Between



# NOTES

The 2022-23 academic year may be drawing to a close, and often students tend to lose focus during the home stretch, but, as we explore in this issue, there are plenty of innovative ways to keep kids motivated until the last day of class.

Dr. Sunaina Sharma, a secondary teacher, has found success in keeping her students engaged simply by changing her questioning style. In her article, she writes compellingly about the importance of critical thinking in the classroom, and how to keep students interested in the material while also encouraging them to think. It all begins with asking the right questions. Dr. Sharma breaks down her own questioning process, and even provides a template to help students become active critical thinkers.

In today's digital age, a time of constant distraction and instant gratification, teachers have to be creative in order to capture and hold their student's attention. Many educators have begun utilizing the same technological platforms that kids spend a lot of time on, and repurposing them in a learning context. One such platform is TikTok. The app is not without controversy, however, particularly when it comes to privacy and the sharing of data. In our feature article, writer Deidre Olsen outlines some of the major concerns associated with the app, along with the potential benefits of using it in an educational setting.

Student engagement and attendance often go hand-in-hand. This was made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning. Many schools saw increased absence rates, while concerns around

declining student engagement became a challenge during the 2020-21 school year. Of course, other factors contribute to attendance rates as well, and assistant principal Crystal

Carranco explores some of these causes in her insightful article. She also lays out several strategies that her school has begun employing to raise awareness and help mitigate the effects of chronic absenteeism.

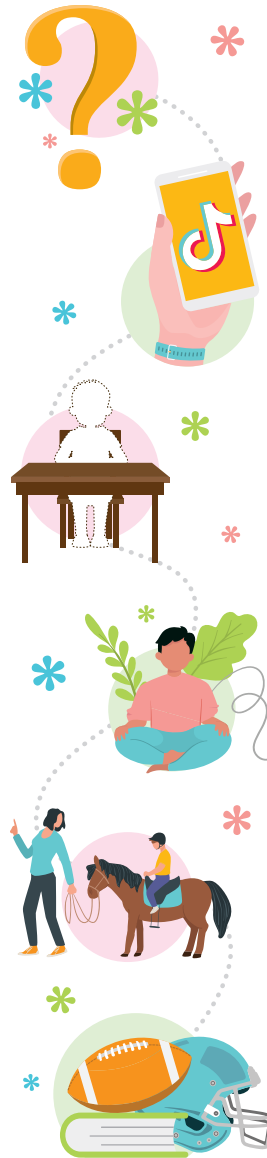
Another impact of the pandemic, the effects of which are still being felt today, is the toll it has taken on mental health and well-being. Since May is Mental Health Awareness Month, we wanted to share a selection of books that address some of the mental health issues youth are experiencing today. Check out our Bookstuff column for more details.

One tried and true method to improve mental health is to get outside and enjoy some fresh air. Another is to spend some time with animals. Our latest Field Trips column combines both methods in the form of horseback riding. Each curriculum-connected trip takes riding to a new level, while also instilling students with a love and appreciation of horses. Time to saddle up and hit the trail.

Finally, the focus of this issue's Curricula has students examining issues of racism that have plagued professional sports and black athletes in particular, for generations. This lesson serves as an introduction to an inquiry of their struggles and achievements while overcoming anti-Black racism. It encourages teachers and students to take a stand against racism, initially

in sports, but ultimately in all aspects of life.

Until next time.



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# ATTEND TODAY, ACHIEVE TOMORROW:

## Addressing the School Attendance Problem

By Crystal Carranco

When we talk about school attendance rates, we're actually talking about students who are *not* in attendance. This is not a new issue in education, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have only added to this growing problem. During the 2021–2022 school year, for instance, more than [70% of public schools in America](#) saw an increase in chronic student absenteeism. Pre-pandemic, and still, there are many factors that have contributed to poor attendance.

One such factor involves misconceptions around the importance of elementary school, which is something I have seen first-hand as an early childhood educator. These early grades are often seen as “play” grades, when in fact they are the most important years with regard to reading acquisition. According to [HealthyChildren.org](#), children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are less likely to read at the expected level by the time they reach third grade.

Ultimately, students attending school is out of teachers' control, but that doesn't diminish the urgency and anxieties they have to meet their student's needs.



## RAISING AWARENESS

In fact, the circumstances are more frustrating when often the solution can be so simple: sometimes parents just don't realize how many days their kids are really missing. But even sporadic absences add up! Missing only two days a month means a student has missed 10% of the school year.

On the flip side, schools have to check themselves too. Is your school a place where kids want to be? Is your teaching engaging? Is your school supporting the whole child and, equally as important, is it supporting the whole family?

My school really looked inward this year to troubleshoot the attendance problem. In September, we used our school social media outlets to share graphics from [Attendance Works](#), informing parents of the statistics surrounding poor attendance. Then the next month we had a popcorn party with the principal for students who had missed no more than one day of school during the month.

This resulted in improved attendance, but also inspired parents to start asking questions about our new focus, creating an opportunity for us to inform. We decided to host a "town hall" meeting at the school, where we discussed initiatives, curriculum, and attendance. The meeting was met with resounding positive feedback from parents who appreciated the communication and clarity.

Throughout November, individual classrooms worked to spell the word "attendance," earning a letter each day the entire class was present. Classrooms that were able to complete the entire word received a group reward.

Since then, our school leadership team has met monthly to discuss future incentives. We are learning as we go, and hope to derive a plan that is equitable for all students; possibly one that allows students to earn points for the days they *are* in class, rather than disqualifying them completely for absences (that they ultimately can't control). The point is, we recognize there is an issue and we're trying to circumvent poor attendance where we can.

## IDENTIFYING ROOT CAUSES

Although our efforts are addressing one factor, there are other reasons for poor attendance, some of which can have far more serious implications, such as embarrassment surrounding academic deficits, bullying, transportation issues, and physical or mental health conditions. If you're a teacher, you know what I mean when I say, "Maslow before Bloom." We know that in order for a child to effectively participate in the educational process, they must first have their most basic needs met.

Educators should focus on identifying the root cause of absences, building strong systems of support, and using positive practices. The first step is simply communicating with families about absenteeism, addressing common misconceptions, and educating stakeholders about the long- and short-term effects. When you know better, you do better!

Families can help by making every effort to schedule medical appointments outside of school hours, limiting unnecessary early check-outs, avoiding planning extended trips during the school week, and not keeping their child at home unless they are truly sick. It is also important that families communicate with their child's school if there are other factors contributing to absenteeism, so the school can provide support.

Parents and educators should always assume good intentions on both sides; every one of us is doing our best for the student. When schools include parents in their child's education, it helps to remove many misunderstandings and ambiguities about daily life in school, and also encourages children to be more engaged. Let's all work together so children can attend school today and achieve tomorrow!

---

CRYSTAL CARRANCO is an Assistant Principal at Stagecoach Elementary in Cabot, AR, and previously taught first grade for 10 years. She is passionate about working alongside and supporting teachers, and serving our most at-risk student populations. Crystal is a 2022 ASTA and AAEF Advocacy Fellow.



## GLOBAL ISSUES:

## Racism – Author Visit

By Carol Koechlin and Jonelle St. Aubyn

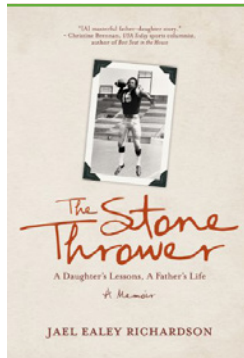
**GRADE LEVEL:**  
SECONDARY (11-12)

**THEME:**  
GLOBAL ISSUES

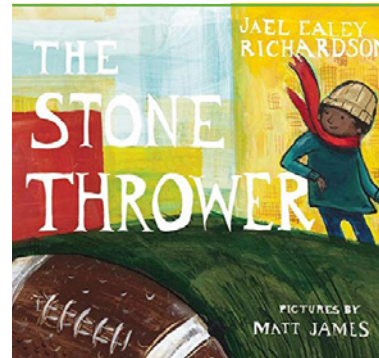
**SUB-THEME:**  
RACISM



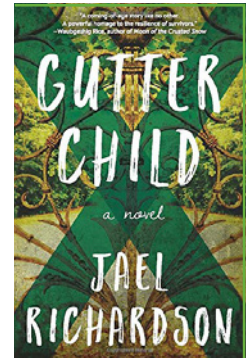
## FEATURED BOOKS



*The Stone Thrower: A Daughter's Lessons, A Father's Life* by Jael Ealey Richardson (Dundurn Press, 2012)



*The Stone Thrower* by Jael Ealey Richardson, illustrated by Matt James (Groundwood Books, 2016)



*Gutter Child* by Jael Ealey Richardson (Harper Avenue, 2021)



## LEARNING FOCUS

Preparing for an Author Visit: Students need to be prepared to get the most out of in-school and virtual author visits. This activity is designed to not only give students knowledge of the author but also to help them understand the author's motivation to write about growing up Black.



## LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Introduce students to the author, Jael Ealey Richardson, who will be visiting the class (in person or virtually). Show a portion of the documentary [Stone Thrower: The Chuck Ealey Story](#) so students can meet Jael's father, Chuck Ealey, and learn about his experiences as an athlete dealing with racial prejudice and his personal philosophy.

Discuss this [quote](#) by Chuck Ealey: "My past experiences have taught me, that no matter what; if you believe in yourself and are confident, regardless

of circumstances, you can achieve anything.” There are other resources on this website that may also be helpful in setting context.

Share current photos and/or short video clips of athletes and sport teams taking an anti-racist stance. Discuss the who, what, when, where, and why to flush out why athletes in particular took such a public stand in the civil rights movement or the Black Lives Matter movement.

Discuss anti-Black racism and brainstorm further evidence of it in the world of sports. Possible athletes to discuss include: Muhammad Ali, Colin Kaepernick, John Carlos, Tommie Smith, Warren Moon, Serena Williams, Debi Thomas, Jack Johnson, Althea Gibson, Hank Aaron, Wilma Rudolph, Bill Russell, and Jackie Robinson.

### READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Read aloud the picture book *The Stone Thrower*. Also read the back page to give a little background for students and to help them understand how Chuck Ealey, the author’s father, built up his skill of throwing to hit a moving target as a child at the railroad, and how this same determination carried over to his career as a quarterback who had to accurately throw the football to a moving target down the field (the receiver). What price did he pay? What was going on in his life that made it challenging for him to succeed (i.e. siblings, single motherhood, friends and family, change of schools)? Is determination enough and what factors impacted his success (i.e. opportunity, access, support, sacrifices, and choices)? What if he couldn’t play football? Where could determination have played a role in his life?

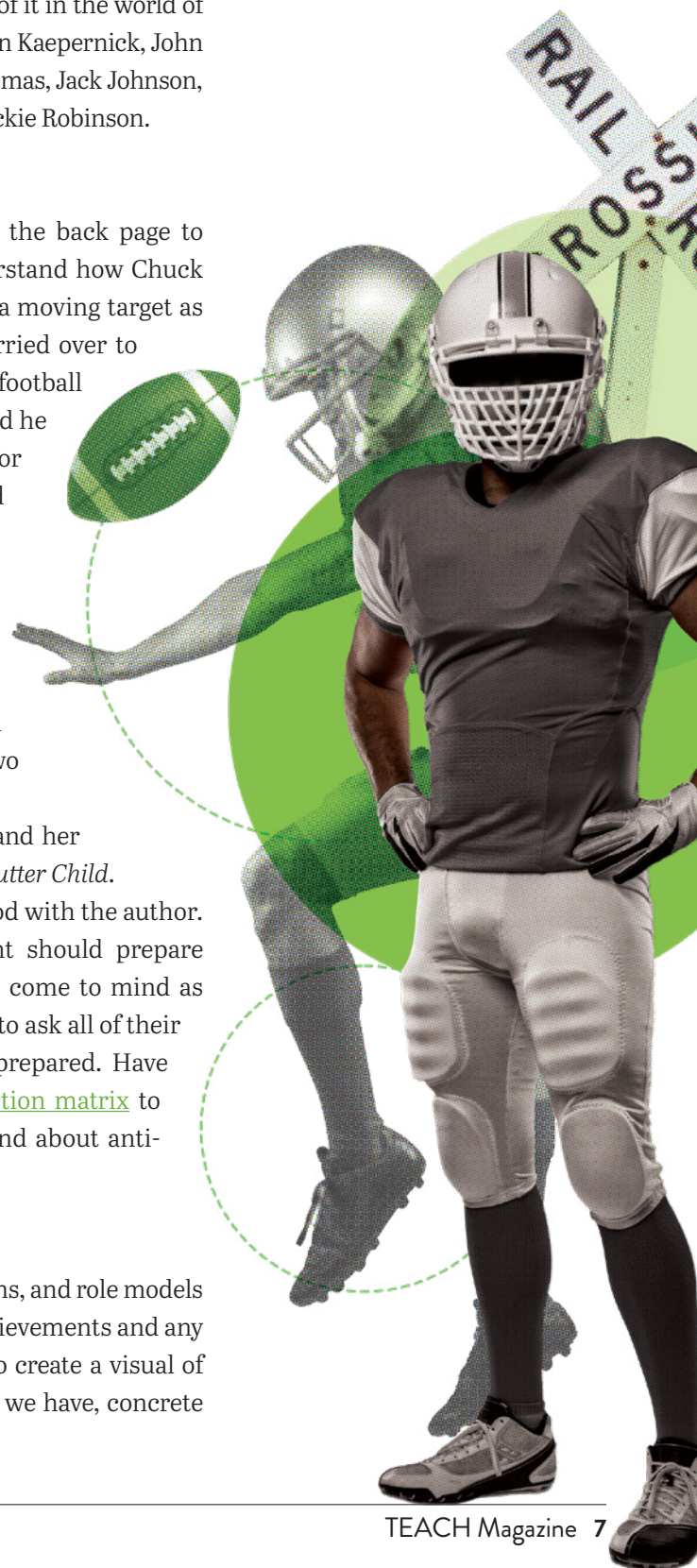
Introduce the biography the author wrote earlier by the same title. Discuss: Why do you think it was important for Jael to research her father’s history and document it in these two books?

Give students a little background about Jael’s work today and her creation of the [Festival of Literary Diversity](#) and her new book *Gutter Child*.

Inform students that there will be time for a question period with the author. Just like a reporter conducting an interview, each student should prepare thoughtful questions. Advise them that other questions will come to mind as they listen to the author, and that while there will not be time to ask all of their questions, by practising ahead of time they can be better prepared. Have students work in small groups using a paper or [digital question matrix](#) to record their questions about Jael Ealey Richardson’s work and about anti-Black racism.

### MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Invite students to think about their favourite Black athletes, icons, and role models today. Have students work in small groups to discuss their achievements and any barriers they had to success. Students will choose a format to create a visual of their ideas and questions: poster, web of our ideas, questions we have, concrete poetry, etc.



Post visuals around the room/library so the author can see that students have done some deep thinking about her work.



### REFLECT AND CONNECT

After the author visit have students return to the question matrix they created and consider what they now understand and the questions they still would like to find answers to. Debrief as a class and develop a list of big ideas and big questions.



### ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS AND BOOK LISTS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME

- [Canadian Books to Help Tackle Racism](#) (Canadian Children's Book Centre)
- [Awesome Anti-Racist Kids' Books](#) (49th Shelf)
- [Raising and Teaching Anti-Racist Kids](#) (OISE Library News)
- [A Different Booklist](#)



### ADAPTATIONS FOR THIS LESSON

This lesson would serve well as an introduction to an inquiry of Black athletes, icons, and role models—their struggles and achievements while overcoming anti-Black racism.



### MORE RESOURCES

- Jael Richardson's [website](#)
- Chuck Ealey's [website](#)
- [Festival of Literary Diversity \(FOLD\)](#): Celebrating diverse authors and storytellers
- [How Do We Nurture Student Questioning?](#) (Canadian School Libraries Journal): This article outlines the role of questioning in learning and shares strategies for learning to question.







# MEET THE LATEST TEACHER'S PETS!

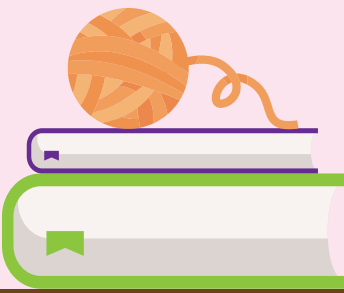
If you'd like your furry or feathered friend to be featured, visit our website and check the [submission guidelines](#).



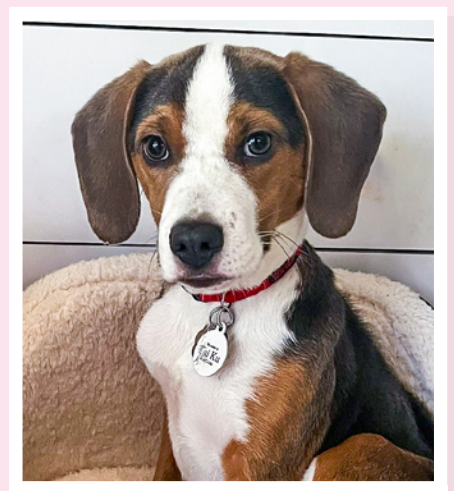
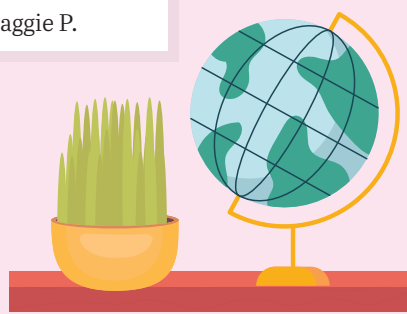
**Stevie** | 1y | Mixed Breed  
*Faithful, Over-Achiever, Protective*

**Nyla** | 1y | Mixed Breed  
*Alert, Inquisitive, "The Destroyer"*

Location: Hong Kong, China | Parent: Maggie P.

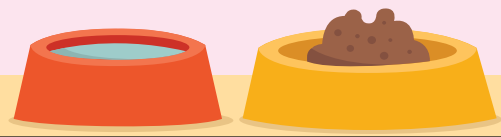


**Franklin** | 4y | Domestic Shorthair  
Location: Florida, USA  
Parent: Rebecca P.  
*A Baby, Hungry, Snuggly*



**Taiku** | 1y | Beagle Mix  
Location: Florida, USA  
Parent: Brunilda L.  
*Loving, Playful, Smart*

Taiku means "Good Spirit" in Taino language



# Horseback Riding

Immerse your students in the wonderful world of horses through these exciting equine field trips!

Learning how to ride a horse can have many benefits for kids. It helps them build self-confidence, while also improving their strength, coordination, and balance. By taking care of these majestic animals, children are taught the importance of responsibility and a good work ethic. They also develop empathy as they bond with the horses, and gain valuable communication and leadership skills through riding together. Horseback riding is a great way to relieve stress and pent-up energy too. With so many positive takeaways, there's no better time to get kids outside and into some saddles. Check out these six spectacular field trips across Canada and the U.S. and start riding today.

## AMAZING GAITS EQUESTRIAN CENTER

Theodore, AL

Amazing Gaits' Educational Riding Field Trip is interactive, customizable, and plenty of fun. Students will learn about horse care and nutrition, pasture maintenance, and more, while having an opportunity to ride the horses too.

## A&T EQUESTRIAN

Surrey, BC

At A&T Equestrian, customizable programs are available for elementary school students. Along with horseback riding, other educational opportunities can include: practicing how to lead and handle horses, learning about grooming and tacking, and understanding feeding and equine care.





### CIRCLE R RANCH

**Delaware, ON**

The Western Horseback Riding trip at Circle R Ranch is suitable for Grades 4-12, and provides students with the unique opportunity to take a leisurely ride across the ranch's 80-hectare trail system. Each rider is paired with a horse that is best suited to their age and riding ability, and then given a lesson about the basics of horsemanship before following the ranch's qualified instructors onto the trail.

### FOREST VIEW FARMS

**Tinley Park, IL**

Forest View Farms offers 30-minute and 1-hour rides for students in Grades 4 and up. Each student is paired with a horse that matches their skill level, before setting off on exciting trail rides that wind through the picturesque Cook County Forest Preserve. Pony rides for students in Grades K-3 are also available on the farm.

### MOUNTAIN TRAIL RIDES

**Davis, WV**

Students can take in the unparalleled beauty of Canaan Valley on horseback with the help of Mountain Trail Rides. Specializing in beginners and groups, Mountain Trail Rides provides instructions about horse behaviour and riding safety for all visitors. An age-specific curriculum is available, and can be customized to emphasize certain topics, upon request. Groups of 15 or more students receive a discount.

### SUNSET TRAILS STABLES

**Lee's Summit, MO**

These field trips provide an exciting introduction to the world of horses. Students will learn about horse behaviour and breeds, how to keep horses healthy, how to groom them, and more. Sunset Trails offers optional horse rides as well, where students are taught about proper riding positions and safety, and also how to mount and dismount, and how to steer, etc.



# THE POWER OF A GOOD QUESTION: Prompting Critical Thinking in Students

By Sunaina Sharma

**W**hat makes a good question? We ask students questions all day long, but how do we know they are actually helping students learn and, more importantly, getting them to think? Being able to think for themselves, and especially to think critically, is one of the most important skills students will ever use—both in the classroom and beyond.

Critical thinking is the process of objectively analyzing information to form a judgment. It requires students to read, consider, observe, interpret, evaluate, reason, and conclude, but then it also requires them to articulate their position and justify it, meaning students must be able to effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas. Critical thinking is a skill that is expected of today's 21st century learners and is a pillar of many province and state curriculum documents.

## REIMAGINING MY QUESTIONING STYLE

A good question always prompts my brain to think, and I wondered if it would do the same for my students. I began to consider what would happen if I changed the types of questions I asked. Was there a way I could invite students to construct their own knowledge?

To inspire curiosity in my students, I had to start by exploring how to transform my questioning style. In my inquiry, I came upon a critical thinking skills graphic that provided examples of different levels of questions to help students learn actively. The level six questions were exactly what I was looking for. These were intellectually engaging enough to have students reflect on what they already knew, and research to understand what they didn't, in order to seek out an answer.

I was eager to try out some of these questions for myself, so after my Grade 9 class finished reading the short story *Lamb to the Slaughter* by Roald Dahl, I asked the students my version of a level six critical thinking question: "We know Mary killed her husband. If you were the detective investigating the case, what would you charge her with and how would you defend your conclusion to the Crown?"

I had students break into groups to begin forming their answers. I never gave them any additional prompts or suggestions. They began talking immediately, but quickly realized that they needed more information. First, they had to figure out the legal consequences of killing someone.

Out came their prior knowledge. Students pooled together what they already knew from watching movies or television shows, then determined that they needed

to know the difference between manslaughter, second-degree murder, and first-degree murder.

Out came their devices. They Googled, read, and shared the definitions they found. Once each group had a good understanding of the terms, they moved forward.

Out came their textbooks. They reread portions of the story to analyze specific plot events in light of the new definitions they had learned.

Out came their ideas. Students expressed their opinions, listened to each other, debated, disagreed, and worked towards forming a collective answer. They took notes and some even chose to mind-map or use a chart to keep track of all their ideas. We then gathered as a class to engage in a whole-group discussion so we could hear each other's thoughts.

Out came their voices. Students communicated their answers and instinctively provided evidence from the text in support. Because of the amount of thought that went into drawing their conclusions, students referenced page numbers from the story and sources from the Internet. They were confident in their final decisions and sought to convince their peers to agree with them.

## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AS A LEARNING TOOL

After the success with my Grade 9 students, I wanted to continue refining my questioning style. I also had the idea to try and combine asking effective questions with using digital technology. My own PhD research taught me that when students use technology to construct knowledge, it engages them. As such, I developed a graphic of my own to guide me and my students:



LEVEL 1 COMPREHEND	LEVEL 2 ANALYZE	LEVEL 3 SYNTHESIZE	LEVEL 4 CONCLUDE
Any question that has students re-telling information.	Any question that has students combining ideas.	Any question that has students combining ideas to develop their own new idea.	Any question that has students combining ideas while using technology to access additional information so that they can make a final conclusion.
<b>SAMPLE QUESTIONS</b>			
What is the main idea of the piece?	How is this similar to the other piece?	Is this piece more similar or more different to the other piece?	Of all the similarities between this piece and the other piece, which similarity would be most appealing to students?
	What would you predict or infer from this piece?	Based on your prediction/inference, what would you do to solve the problem?	With all the potential solutions, which solution would be the most/least expensive?

The graphic prompted students to use technology to access outside information that would help them answer questions. In addition, the four levels aligned with the four-level rubric in the Ontario curriculum. With this simplified graphic, I continued to ask my students questions that prompted their thinking.

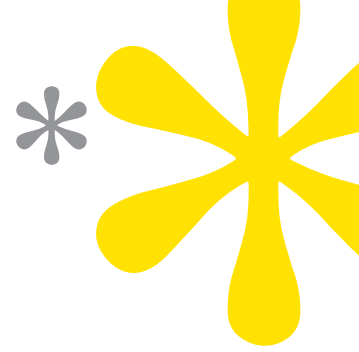
My Grade 11 students had been reading the graphic novel *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* by Jean-Philippe Stassen. It is a text that has parallel storylines—one tells the tale of the main character, Deogratias, before the Rwandan genocide and the other tells of his life afterwards. To understand the impact of the genocide on Deogratias, I engaged my students in an examination of traits he demonstrated before and after.

As students were contributing their ideas, someone called out, “After the genocide, he’s gone crazy.” I interjected and talked about the harm of that word, then asked the class to reconsider what adjective they would use to describe the main character. One student said,

“I think he has PTSD.” I paused and asked everyone else what they thought. They couldn’t answer the question because they didn’t know exactly what post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was.

I divided the students into small groups and handed each group a blank piece of paper. I had them write “Does Deogratias have PTSD?” at the top of the page, then asked them to research the symptoms of PTSD and list them on their sheet. Students began to talk with each other and some even shared stories of a family member dealing with the disorder. After sharing what they already knew and respectfully listening to their peers’ experiences, students realized they needed technology. Some grabbed their phones and others borrowed a classroom device to begin exploring and researching.

Once they accessed reliable websites, students also started flipping through the graphic novel to look for evidence they could use to prove or disprove whether Deogratias had PTSD. Again, students accessed their prior knowledge, used their technological devices, reread their book, constructed their own ideas, and shared their voices with their peers.



Here are some student responses to the question “Does Deogratias have PTSD?”

### ANALYSIS 1

- Emotional numbness → **No:** he feels all the emotional things said from people
- Nightmares or flashbacks → **Yes:** page 12, sitting outside of the church and flashes back to school days
- Avoidance → **No:** meets the general multiple times after

**We think he does not have PTSD X**

### ANALYSIS 2

#### Criteria of PTSD

- Intrusive distressing
  - Flashbacks → **Yes,** flashbacks, page 11 and 12. Stealing money from the church
  - Nightmares → **Yes,** flashbacks, page 11 and 12. Stealing money from the church
- Difficulty sleeping → **No** because he had feeling when sergeant tried to kill the cockroach
- Easily irritated and angry → **No** because he had feeling when sergeant tried to kill the cockroach
- Jumpy → **No** because he had feeling when sergeant tried to kill the cockroach
- Emotional numbness → **Yes,** avoiding the church since he got caught, page 3, 11 and 12
- Avoids certain places → **Yes,** avoiding the church since he got caught, page 3, 11 and 12

#### Does he show this?

**We think he does have PTSD ✓**

### ANALYSIS 3

**Before** → Happy  
“Typical”  
Clean/taken care of  
Social

**After** → Sad  
Experienced genocide  
Dirty/diseveled  
Working/employed  
Anti-social/lost

### THE IMPACT OF USING ENHANCED QUESTIONS

As educators, sometimes our passion for our subjects can lead us to get so focused on content that students are left wondering how their learning is relevant to the world beyond the classroom. But by reframing our questions, students are able to see the relevance of what they’re learning.

Asking students enhanced questions sparks their intellectual engagement. When we ask questions that prompt critical thinking, students are invested in choosing strategies to find the answer. They inevitably start by examining what they already know to act as a foundation for deeper learning, then they do a close reading of the text to analyze particular lines. They also use technology to deepen their learning, then form an opinion and justify that opinion with evidence. What’s more, because they are so engaged, students are willing to share their ideas with others. They communicate, collaborate, and participate in active listening. Those are the skills I want to arm my students with because those are the skills they will use in the future.



**DR. SUNAINA SHARMA** is an in-school program leader and secondary teacher with over 20 years’ experience teaching in the Halton District School Board. She is also an instructor and practicum advisor in a Bachelor of Education program, where she is able to share her classroom experiences with future educators.

# Mental Health

Mental health plays an important role in all aspects of our lives, and is crucial to our overall well-being. May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a time to share strategies for achieving good mental health, while also raising awareness about mental health conditions and challenging the stigmas surrounding them. We've come up with a list of books to do just that: each one offers stories and resources that focus on mental health and well-being, while also shining a spotlight on different mental health conditions. Read on to discover some titles that can be incorporated into your classroom today.

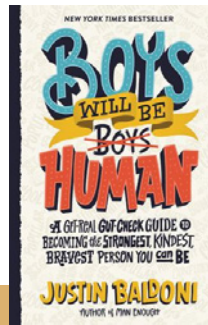
## 1 **AB(SOLUTELY) NORMAL: SHORT STORIES THAT SMASH MENTAL HEALTH STEREOTYPES**

EDITED BY NORA SHALAWAY CARPENTER AND ROCKY CALLEN

*Candlewick Press (April 2023)*

**Grade Level: 9-12**

In this mixed-genre short story collection, 16 authors have turned their own mental health experiences into empowering works of fiction. The stories defy stereotypes and are meant to remind students that they don't have to be defined by their mental health conditions. A note from each contributor is included after their story, and a comprehensive list of resources can be found at the back of the book.



## 2 **BOYS WILL BE HUMAN**

BY JUSTIN BALDONI

*HarperCollins (October 2022)*

**Grade Level: 6-8**

*Boys Will Be Human* is a social-emotional learning tool for middle-school boys, written by filmmaker and actor Justin Baldoni. This self-esteem guidebook is designed to help boys embrace their feelings instead of repressing them, and includes activities and sidebars that can be used to start open and honest conversations around masculinity and emotions.



**3 DARK CLOUD**

BY ANNA LAZOWSKI,  
ILLUSTRATED BY PENNY NEVILLE-LEE  
.....

*Kids Can Press (May 2023)*

**Grade Level: K-2**

This book is a sensitive tale about a girl named Abigail who learns to cope with her depression by visualizing it as a cloud that follows her around. Throughout the story, Abigail figures out how to live with and even move away from her dark cloud and step into the sun. *Dark Cloud* is a great tool for social-emotional learning, and provides useful examples for teaching kids how to talk about their feelings.

**4 FOREVER IS NOW**

BY MARIAMA J. LOCKINGTON  
.....

*Farrar, Straus and Giroux (May 2023)*

**Grade Level: 7-12**

*Forever Is Now* is a novel in verse about mental health, Black joy, activism, and coming of age in an unforgiving world. Sadie has been struggling to manage her chronic anxiety for a while, but when a violent incident of police brutality happens in front of her, she begins to spiral. Over the course of one fateful summer, Sadie begins to set forward on a path of healing, while also learning how to use her voice to speak up and affect change.

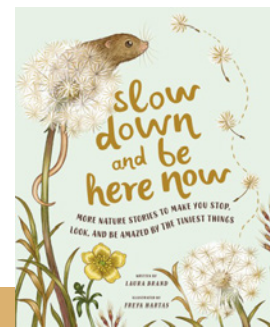
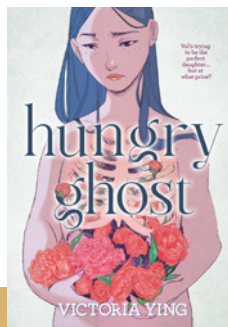
**5 GOOD DIFFERENT**

BY MEG EDEN KUYATT  
.....

*Scholastic (April 2023)*

**Grade Level: 3-6**

This middle-grade novel in verse follows Selah, a neurodivergent girl who comes to learn that she is on the autism spectrum. The author uses candid and authentic verse to take readers alongside Selah's journey as she comes to understand and accept all the parts that make her different and unique.



**6 HUNGRY GHOST**

BY VICTORIA YING  
.....

*First Second (April 2023)*

**Grade Level: 9-12**

This young adult graphic novel takes a serious look at eating disorders, family relationships, and, ultimately, what it takes to find the strength to ask for help. Valerie Chu has been suffering from bulimia for years as she struggles to live up to her mother's high expectations about her appearance. But a family tragedy makes Valerie re-evaluate her priorities and begin to take the first steps on her journey towards self-love.

**7 PEACEFUL ME**

BY SANDRA V. FEDER, ILLUSTRATED  
BY RAHELE JOMEPOUR BELL  
.....

*Groundwood Books (May 2023)*

**Grade Level: K-1**

Picture-book creators Sandra V. Feder and Rahele Jomepour Bell have teamed up to create a thoughtful exploration of mindfulness. Young readers will love following along with the narrator of this picture book as he tells them about times when he feels peaceful. But he doesn't always feel that way, and is happy to share how he copes during those times that are not so peaceful as well.

**8 SLOW DOWN**

**AND BE HERE NOW**  
BY LAURA BRAND,  
ILLUSTRATED BY FREYA  
HARTAS  
.....

*Magic Cat (March 2023)*

**Grade Level: 3-6**

This mindfulness book encourages readers to stop and smell the roses—literally. Laura Brand's delightful text, paired with charming illustrations by Freya Hartas, shows us how we can find joy in the present by taking the time to look closely at nature.



# TIKTOK IN THE CLASSROOM:

## *The Good, the Bad, and the In-Between*

By Deidre Olsen

Over the past few years, TikTok has skyrocketed to international renown, becoming a cultural sensation. Chances are you've heard about it from students, if you aren't already using it yourself. The app, which was launched in China in 2016 and globally in 2018, allows users to create short-form videos and share them with people across the globe. In fact, TikTok has been [downloaded more than three billion times](#), making it one of the most popular social media apps in the world.

As it has increased in popularity, the uses for the app have grown exponentially as well. As with other social media platforms, it has become a marketing tool. But it is also a way for its users to connect with each other, share stories, and learn new skills—and it's these qualities, along with its unlimited creative potential, that have made TikTok a useful resource in the classroom.

TikTok has quickly proven to be an invaluable educational tool, one that easily resonates with digital natives. Along with any new technology, however, there are both benefits and drawbacks that come with using the platform.

### PROS AND CONS

One of the biggest issues swirling around TikTok is privacy. The app collects a significant amount of data from its users, including their location, device, and browsing history. In turn, these details are utilized to serve targeted ads to users. There have been a number of concerns about how TikTok handles this data, with allegations that the app [shares the information it collects with the Chinese government](#). These hesitations have led some school districts, such as [Hamilton-Wentworth](#) in Ontario, to consider banning it altogether.

While there have been several issues regarding the app, TikTok does present numerous benefits. Since many students are already using it in their free time, incorporating TikTok into the classroom can be a way to meaningfully engage with them on a platform to which they relate. It can function as a jumping-off point to introduce a concept or idea, the same way YouTube videos can be incorporated into pedagogy to capture student interest.

TikTok is also a space for creative expression, and offers unlimited applications in a classroom context—whether

being used by teachers to [make condensed versions of lessons](#), or by students to complete an assignment.

Another unique aspect of TikTok is its discoverability. In fact, Gen Z uses the app as a [search engine to find authentic content](#) for everything, ranging from beauty trends to restaurant reviews. Many kids are also using it to [help with homework](#).

With all this in mind, what is the verdict on TikTok? And is it worth using despite the privacy concerns? The answer depends on a few factors, each of which deserves careful consideration.

## THE ISSUE OF PRIVACY

As a whole, social media platforms are expressly designed to collect data from their users to serve targeted ads. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook make money this way. So, if privacy is a significant concern, it might be worth avoiding social media altogether. If the benefits of social media outweigh this concern, however, it could be a necessary compromise.

Responding to privacy concerns, TikTok has [updated its privacy policy](#) to be more transparent about how data is collected and used. It's also worth noting that, last year, the app [added a feature](#) allowing users to control who can see their videos and interact with them.

These efforts may not be enough for some users, especially those who are concerned about security. Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to use TikTok is a personal one. If you and your students decide to do so, you can take further measures to protect everyone's privacy, such as encouraging students to use strong passwords and limit the amount of personal information they share on the app.

## TIKTOK AS A RESEARCH TOOL

In 2020, TikTok announced the formation of a [\\$50 million USD Creative Learning Fund](#), which aimed to support creators making educational content. At the time, the

platform shared that it had partnered with “over 800 public figures, media publishers, educational institutions, and real-world professional experts.” TikTok also collaborated with celebrities such as Bill Nye, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and Tyra Banks on content, using #LearnOnTikTok as its flagship hashtag.

While a desire for academic content has proliferated on TikTok, so too has misinformation. In fact, despite being one of the most popular hashtags on the platform, #LearnOnTikTok has been plagued with false, unverified sources, and at times, conspiracy theories.

As students often encounter fabricated sources when searching for information online, it is important that media literacy is taught in classrooms. Without this indispensable skillset, students may not be adequately prepared to verify and fact-check what they see and hear online.

If students are not set up to consciously consume information, they could be routinely engaging with misinformation or harmful, offensive content. In turn, they might draw on the most toxic, negative aspects of TikTok that can be harmful in the long run.



## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

Jordie Burton teaches visual art, photography, and English to students in Grades 9 through 12 at Maple Ridge Secondary in Barrie, ON. She believes TikTok is a useful research tool for her photography classes, given that it has a

plethora of quick, easy tutorials that students can watch. As well, these videos are often created by the peers of her students, who find the videos interesting and informative.

Her students also use the app to help complete their assignments. “I have had students create video posts for reflections,” explains Burton. “Some will [also] use TikTok as a means for editing their videos before exporting them and submitting to class. It has some solid editing features and is accessible to most kids.”

Burton acknowledges that one of the cons of using the app is the potential for students to become easily distracted by it, resulting in wasted class time. Recently,

TikTok announced that it plans to add a [time limit for users under the age of 18](#) to reduce time spent on the app. This has been a consistent criticism of social media as a whole, that platforms divert attention away from learning materials.

And when it comes to privacy concerns, Burton says that they are the same with most social media apps. She emphasizes that students need to be aware their profiles can be public if they choose to share them. A more pressing issue, she adds, is the direct contact and sharing of content between students and teachers, which is often treated as a gray zone, depending on the board and the teacher. With this in mind, it is important for educators to establish ethical boundaries with respect to students, the classroom, and social media.

Regarding the much-discussed and contentious topic of district-wide TikTok bans, Burton believes this is unnecessary. “In my opinion, it is far better to have access to the tools and media that exist and learn to use them appropriately with guidance,” she says.

## A CONVERSATION STARTER

To ensure TikTok is used appropriately, teaching kids about the dangers and risks associated with it is imperative. Along with opening the door to discussions of media literacy, the current TikTok privacy debate can also lead to classroom conversations around cybersecurity, online safety, and the importance of good [digital hygiene](#).

With the right amount of supervision, TikTok can be one educational tool that addresses different modes of learning, engages digital natives, and provides a space for creative expression, connection, and discovery. It is worthwhile for educators to be mindful of the risks associated with TikTok and to keep these concerns in mind when considering bringing it into the classroom. With checks and balances, however, the app can indeed be utilized effectively.

Deidre Olsen is a Canadian, award-nominated writer based in Berlin.

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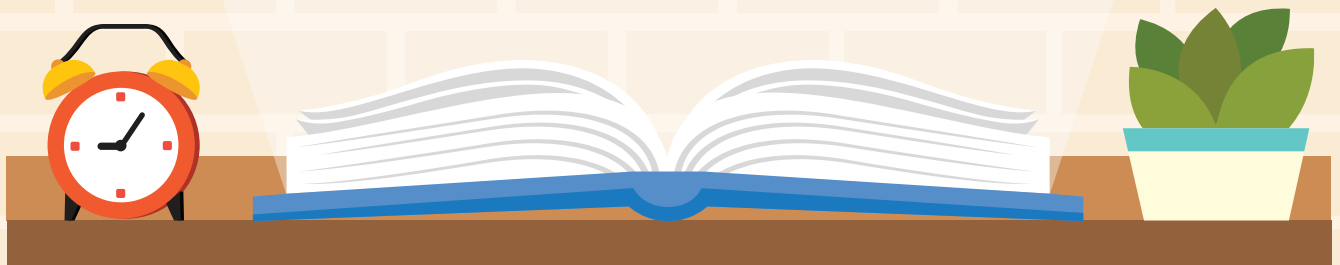


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This is not easily achieved, says Cassie Tabrizi, CEO of educational consultancy, Create-abilities. "It can be incredibly easy to treat lesson planning like a checklist. Objective: check. Standards: check. Activity: check," she says. Education experts say there is a better way. A thoughtful lesson plan can encourage exploration, freeing kids to speak in their own voices and infusing creativity into the learning process. Parents and teachers see the value in this: Gallup research found 87 percent of teachers and 77 percent of parents say teaching that incorporates creativity in the learning process has a bigger payoff for students.

**FIRST STEPS**

In order for students to find their own unique voices, they first need to feel their voices are valid. Before settling down to craft the lesson plan, teachers need to make an upfront investment in relationship-building.

"Whether it's through surveys or one-on-one interviews, you have to know who is in your classroom in order to create an environment in which they will take risks for self-discovery," says Rowena Shurn, senior policy analyst and program specialist at the National Education Association.

Shurn taught in Prince George's County, MD schools for 14 years, and found that this early effort paid dividends when she moved on to the actual lesson planning. "You take that information—who they are, what they are interested in—and you have that profile in front of you when you make your lesson plan," she says. "It's what allows your students to show up as their authentic selves."

Deborah Poulos is a teacher with over 27 years experience and the author of *The Conscious Teacher*. She studied every student's cumulative record files at the start of every year, and built that knowledge into her lesson planning. "I had strategies to individualize and differentiate so I could meet students at their levels," she says. "They knew I thought they were important."

**PLAN FOR CHOICES**

How to write a lesson plan that empowers those valued individuals to speak in their own voices? Step #1: Give them choices. Students learn in different ways, and the lesson plan needs to reflect that individuality.

When Wright gives out a persuasive writing assignment, for example, she keeps it loose. "It can't



always be five paragraphs, five sentences in each paragraph," she says. "You can get the same amount of information from them if you let them do it in different ways. They can create a commercial, they can create a blog, they can [create vlogs]. I just need to see that they can make a persuasive argument."

At The Avery Coonley School in suburban Chicago, second grade teacher Sarah Batzel even finds ways to make math an open-ended exercise. "Let's say I want to talk about fractions. I give them patterned blocks and ask them to build a figure that represents 'one-third.' They grapple with the concept, but there is more than one way of doing it," she says. "They make their own choices."

She did the same in science class, as kids designed their own glue. "We tested corn starch, we tested flour, then the children got to design their own mixture in their own way, using the data we had collected," she says.

It's that combination of data—of facts, information, and a clearly-defined end product—that keeps this kind of open-ended work from becoming a free-for-all. "Parameters foster creativity," Batzel says. "It's not just 'go make a shape.' There is real math in there, and they work within that."

Shurn builds her lesson plans on a tic-tac-toe approach: Eight ways of mastering the information (pick your own) plus a blank square if none of the others appeal to you. "Some people can demonstrate their abilities visually. Another student may be more kinesthetic, so

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