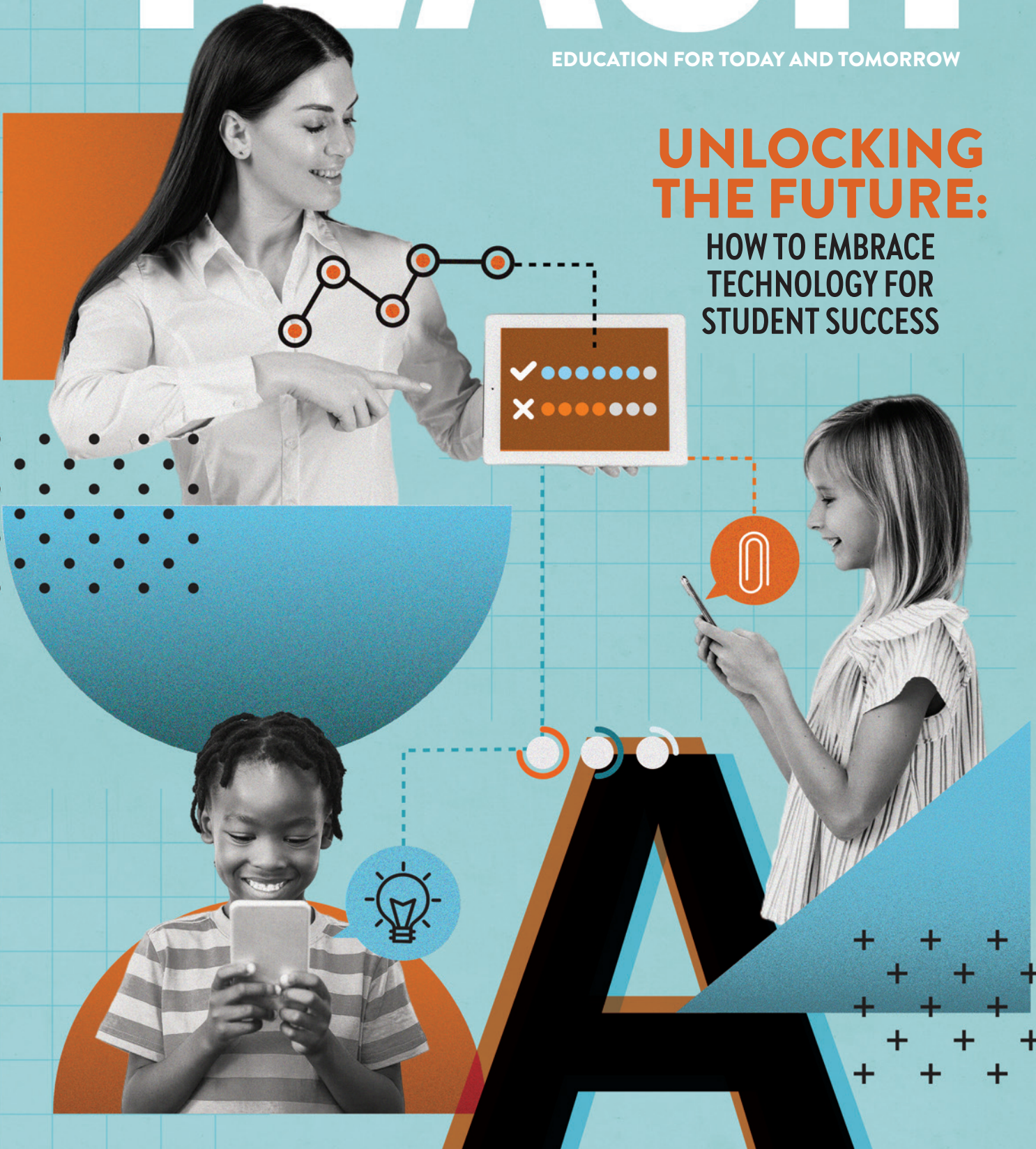


# TEACH

EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

## UNLOCKING THE FUTURE:

HOW TO EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS



# NOTES

Another school year is upon us, bringing with it the opportunity to try new strategies and approaches in the classroom. Perhaps you're looking for ways to get kids outside, or are interested in innovative methods for reaching and connecting with students. Then this is the issue for you!

Reading teacher Kayla Perry starts things off by outlining her opinion on technology in the classroom: embrace it! Today's students have a unique set of technological skills, and it is through these skills that they can take control of their own education. Whether by showing kids how to track their own school-related data, making lessons fun through game-based educational tools, or incorporating collaborative strategies using online learning platforms, there are so many ways teachers *and* students can use the digital revolution to their advantage. The world around us is constantly changing and there's no telling what the future will hold, but one thing is clear: we can't go backwards. Like it or not, the technology of the digital age is here to stay, so we might as well take advantage of it and use it to help our students succeed.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, another concept that's becoming more popular is outdoor education. Taking your lessons outside of the classroom can have many benefits, from fewer behavioural issues to increased resilience. In her latest article, reporter Carolyn Gruske speaks with several educators who have fully embraced learning outdoors. They share advice on how to get started—take it slow!—as well as how to adapt lessons for outside in ways that allow students to develop a greater connection with the natural world.

Forming a bond with nature is important, but as Lynn Ouellette shows in her article, connecting with other people is just as essential. After starting a new job as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Lynn found out that one of her students was being bullied. She quickly put him in touch with RobenX, a musician and activist who uses his platform

to speak out against bullying, and the mentorship ended up being so successful that RobenX actually came to Lynn's school to hold assemblies focused on overcoming adversity and building resilience. This unexpected collaboration was a learning experience for Lynn too. Not only did she discover new ways to reach her students, she took RobenX's messages to heart and was able to apply them to her own sense of self.

Megan Harding also writes about her experience of moving to a different position in the education sector. Through her article, she tells the story of switching from elementary school to middle school ELA, why she decided to make the change, and just how much she loves her new role!

The beginning of the school year is a time of change for many—teachers and students alike. It's also a period of change for nature itself, as we transition from summer to fall. The weather gets cooler, the days get shorter, and the leaves start to take on their vibrant, multi-coloured hues. The beauty of trees in autumn marks the perfect time to get students thinking about the important roles these magnificent beings play, and how they contribute to healthy ecosystems all year round. Check out this issue's Bookstuff for more details.

Just as fall is a time of transformation, it is also a time of goodbyes. As we say goodbye to the leaves and the lazy days of summer, we are also saying goodbye to the print edition of *TEACH Magazine*. Our print issues have been a cornerstone of the magazine, but regrettably we're no longer able to keep them going. However, while some things may be changing for us, in many respects they will also stay the same. We'll strive to continue bringing you

the best content through our digital issues and [website](#), so that you in turn can continue to be your best teacher selves.

We appreciate you sticking with us through this transition, and we thank you for your continued support over the years.

See you next time.

**KELSEY MCCALLUM**  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



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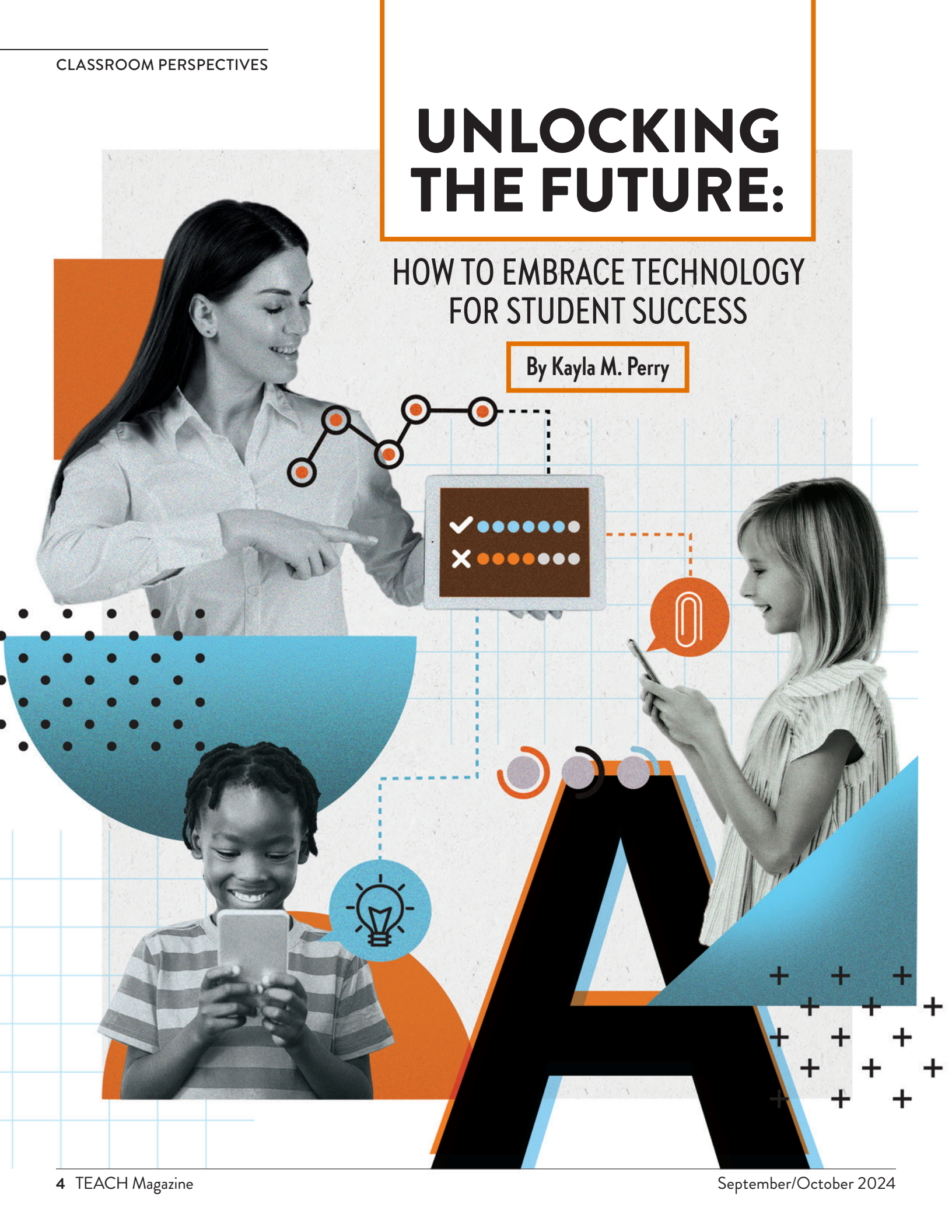
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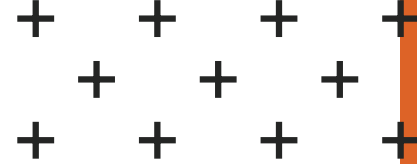
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# UNLOCKING THE FUTURE:

## HOW TO EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

By Kayla M. Perry





I grew up in rural Arizona, in a house ten minutes outside of the nearest town, right beside a river and a forest. This was before the Internet was mainstream in every household, so my four younger brothers and I had to find other ways to entertain ourselves. And it was great! We would spend hours playing outside, finding places along the river that we dubbed “the rapids” and “fish rock,” or exploring in the woods that we had all to ourselves.

Much of my childhood featured activities that weren’t based around a screen: flipping through my mom’s *Oprah* magazines when I was sick in bed, or searching for just the right recipe in one of our many cookbooks, or making “back to school” wish lists by circling items in a catalogue. In fact, one of my most cherished memories is learning how to read with my mom at age three. Just me, her, the books, and phonics sounds. Not an iPad or tablet in sight.

## THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

A lot has changed since then. Now I am an elementary school reading interventionist, and part of the last generation who remembers what life was like without the Internet. The world is currently in the midst of a technological revolution that has surpassed all expectations, and I’m witnessing firsthand how growing up in this new digital age is impacting our students.

The current generations only know the world as Internet and screen-based. These kids are used to gaining information with a mere tap on a screen. They are also accustomed to using technology to do hands-on learning and calculating work, without having to rely on their computation and comprehension skills. It’s very different than how things used to be done and even more different than how we could’ve ever imagined.

Given this, some people may feel as though technology is taking over our lives and that we need to go back to the analog ways of the past, but I don’t see technology as a problem. Rather, I think that today’s students simply have a unique set of skills—they problem-solve differently and hold new characteristics. Shouldn’t we adjust our approach based on these new skillsets, rather than trying to hold on to outdated methods? This way, not only can we better guide our students in seeking and retaining information, but we can also prepare them for the rapidly evolving world ahead.

## PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

The first step is embracing all this new technology, instead of trying to take it away. We are living in a time where students are never far from their devices and it’s unrealistic to pretend that this isn’t the case. Instead, we must guide them in using the technological tools at their fingertips for academic achievement. Doing so will not only bring the excitement back into learning, it can also help students take control of their own education.

So what does this look like? It can be as easy as introducing students to programs that track important school-related data. In this way, they can know why and where they are with their academics, using the screens they’re so attached to.

Through my work as a reading specialist, I have seen the value of technology that collects such data, and how it can be used to diagnose issues and ultimately guide instruction and achievement. This systematic approach to learning can get students on track with their academics in much less time than traditional methods.

Online data assessment programs like [mCLASS](#) have efficiently assisted me in pinpointing interventions needed for students in the blink of an eye. This user-friendly tool makes collecting data quick and easy, and it stores everything in one place for continual reference. In my experience, the ability to instantly pull up historical data to see where a student is struggling has saved me a lot of time when prepping for interventions and meetings.

Students can be part of this data collection process too, giving them power and guidance over their learning. An example of a student tracking their reading data would be using [Google Jamboard](#) to record their oral reading fluency with words per minute and accuracy on a daily digital chart. Or they could use a program like [ReadWorks](#), which helps record progress in reading comprehension. For other classes like math, data tracking could be done using online programs such as [ggmath](#) and [XtraMath](#) that incentivize and give students the fast-paced screen engagement they crave.

## ADDING FUN TO LEARNING

Other ways to use technology in the classroom could include collaborative lessons through [Quizlet](#), [Kahoot!](#), or [Blooket](#)

on an interactive whiteboard, where students can answer questions on their one-to-one issued Internet device. And these days, presenting group projects is a breeze thanks to casting tools. Pair all this with an understanding of the different learning styles that students hold—kinesthetic, auditory, visual, and reading/written—and it's possible to create an environment where everyone is able to excel.

Another approach that utilizes technology is game-based learning. This fast-paced, digital framework can be a hugely effective way to help students learn new concepts while also applying their prior knowledge. These educational tools can be used both in the classroom and by the students at home, and best of all, they look so much like games offering rewards and tasks that students don't even realize they're learning along the way!

This is seen in a game like [Prodigy](#), which is an independent learning video game for both reading and math. Students create avatars and explore a virtual world, solving reading or math problems to level up and earn virtual currency. The online reading program [Raz-Kids](#) follows a similar format, where students read to get currency that allows them to customize their robot avatar and virtual reading room. [Lalilo](#), [Starfall](#), and [ABCya!](#) also have similar game-based structures coupled with engaging curriculum content. Students are

motivated to “win the game” and are actively engaging with the subject matter that teachers want them to learn.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

The missing component in this technological revolution is incorporating these strategies at home. Students with access to one-to-one devices can now work on assignments and practice content using some of the specialized tools mentioned above outside of the classroom. However, this may look different from district to district and is dependent on a community's economic state of affairs.

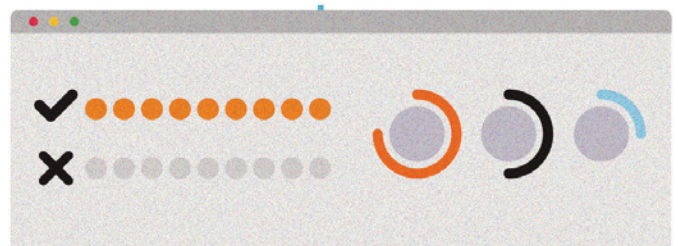
### FINAL THOUGHTS

When it comes to technology, I feel that I've embraced it both personally and professionally. The world keeps changing and technological advancements continue to shape every aspect of our lives, but I won't let that slow me down or affect my teaching. Instead, I try to be intentional with these new digital tools in order to maximize my students' potential and give them ownership of their own academic trajectory.

Students have more voice than ever before, and showing them how to use it in positive and learning-inclined ways can empower them to success. (Meanwhile, the only voice I had as a kid was calling up the local radio station, requesting a song, and hoping it would be played. But I digress... Those were the days!)

---

**KAYLA PERRY** is a reading teacher from the Ponderosa Pine forest town of Payson, AZ. She has been in education for 9 years and holds a Master of E-Learning degree to continue broadening her passion for technology.





# 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](#).



**Capt'n Crunch** | 2y | Syrian Hamster  
Location: Ontario, Canada  
Parent: Marilena M.  
*Loves Cooked Rice and Oatmeal, Shy*



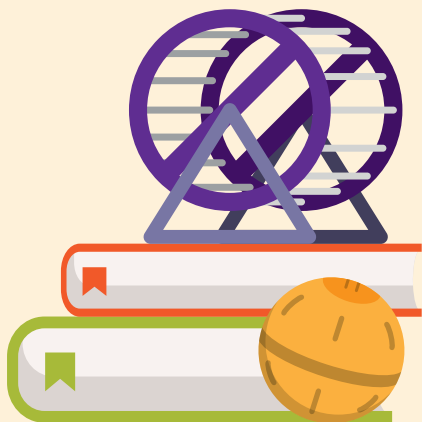
**Luke** | 11y | Golden Doodle  
Location: British Columbia, Canada  
Parent: Linette M.  
*Loving, Loyal, Sweet*



**Tyrion** | 2y | Long-Haired Chihuahua  
Location: Texas, USA  
Parent: Flor J.  
*Not Friendly, Protective, The Cutest Dog in Existence*



**Peaches** | 4y | Domestic Shorthair  
Location: British Columbia, Canada  
Parent: Jaimie L.  
*Affectionate, Cuddly, Loves Food*



# RAIN OR SHINE:



## EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION



MON



TUE



WED



THU



FRI

**BY CAROLYN GRUSKE**



**B**lue skies, green grass, and fresh air don't usually come to mind when describing the features of a typical classroom, but that's exactly what outdoor education offers—even if snow-covered fields sometimes substitute for lush lawns.

“We live in Winnipeg, and it's really, really cold.... Our school division has policies that say that any temperature colder than -28 Celsius and we are not allowed to be outside,” says Shannon Siemens, a Grade 1/2 teacher at Brooklands School, but still, she found a way to make outdoor education work.

### EASE INTO IT

Siemens, who is also a certified trail guide, and her colleague Mara Le Clair, a Grade 1/2 teacher and a trained play therapist, began taking their students outdoors and teaching lessons outside ten years ago. Now,



the entire K-5 school participates in what they call “outdoor school” for at least six weeks, starting around mid-May and stretching until the end of the school year. To prepare for this, Siemens and Le Clair first gradually introduce walks and shorter outings into the curriculum during the fall, then they spend about two weeks outside with their class in the winter, before transitioning to six straight weeks outdoors in the spring.

Just like the students, teachers have to be gradually eased into doing their schooling outside too. It takes time to adapt pedagogies and curriculums to teaching outdoors, just as it takes time to understand what benefits the outdoors offers. That is something Le Clair experienced when she and Siemens first began moving their classes outside.

“We started [with] Walking Wednesdays. There’s a whole bunch of things near our school that we discovered as we decided to go outside,” says Le Clair. “Shannon and I would drive around and figure out where we could walk to with the students and what would be a neat experience for them. You can’t just take a classroom outside and say, ‘We’re walking for forty minutes.’”

Le Clair and Siemens decided to embark on their outdoor education journey after attending the [Manitoba Nature Summit](#). They learned about a two-week challenge for teachers, with the goal of getting students outside all day, rain or shine, for two weeks.

Spurred on by the concept, they convinced two other teachers to also hold their classes outdoors. “When the two-week challenge was over, we had to come back inside. That was the worst,” says Siemens, laughing, but that’s how she knew their experiment was a success.

Learning curves aside, Le Clair and Siemens both believe the benefits of being outside outweigh the challenges. Overall, they say the students exhibit fewer behavioural issues, as they have more freedom to move around; that they are more invested in learning, as they have more autonomy to make decisions about how they engage with the lessons; that their attendance improves; and that they build resiliency, having learned that they can survive experiences such as unpleasant weather conditions.

“We’re teaching the children by being outside on a rainy day that this too shall pass, that the rain will not be there forever,



we will not be wet and cold forever,” says Siemens. “This is a beautiful metaphor for how they will grow and develop that sense of understanding that any moment they’re in also can pass and that, literally, the sun will shine again.”

## RESILIENCY AND INCLUSIVITY

Stephen Mullaney is another educator who has found that teaching and learning outdoors instills a sense of resiliency in students. Serving as the outdoor adventure and education coach at Merrick-Moore Elementary—a K-5 school located in North Carolina’s Durham Public Schools District—part of Mullaney’s role is to help other teachers find ways to conduct their lessons outside. He models lessons, assists in adapting lessons for the outdoors, and develops ideas suitable for “Wilderness Wednesdays,” when students engage in hands-on learning and participate in programs that benefit the community and the environment.

A certified wilderness first responder, Mullaney is also involved in organizing bigger and more adventurous learning opportunities at the school, including swimming, bike safety, canoeing, kayaking, camping, and mountain climbing, for all of the students.

Mullaney describes his school as one that is historically “low performing.” However, building up Merrick-Moore’s

outdoor education opportunities has improved the school's reputation and student morale.

But as much as Mullaney loves being outside and can see the benefits outdoor education offers, he knows not everybody feels that way.

"I don't expect every student to be miraculously changed by the outdoors.... And I even tell them that," Mullaney says. "What it does, though, is gives them a shared experience. And especially for students who find that being outdoors is hard, no one can ever take that away from them. If they... have these difficult experiences in the face of obstacles, they know they have that mental [fortitude] within themselves to understand that they've overcome really difficult things before in the outdoors, and that they can apply that in other situations."

This seems to be especially true of students who have different physical or mental abilities, says Mullaney, explaining that the teachers make alterations to the activities as needed to ensure inclusivity. "Those students rise to the top.... They shine in a totally different light than anybody's ever seen them."



Seeing students become stronger and more resilient is one of Mullaney's primary goals. He believes that academic learning goes hand-in-hand with building social, emotional, and leadership skills, and that those develop better outside of the four walls of the classroom; this belief came about, in large part, due to his own experiences as a student who didn't thrive in a traditional educational environment.

## RECONNECTING WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

Those observations about the types of benefits students obtain from being outside are very familiar to Gillian Judson. A former high school teacher who taught social studies and French as a second language, Judson is now an assistant professor at Simon Fraser University in the Faculty of Education, where she specializes in education leadership. She also runs the website [imaginED](#), which provides teachers information and resources about imagination-focused teaching and education.

Judson began researching what is required to encourage students to develop ecological understanding, experience a connection to the environment, and acquire a desire to care for the Earth. It also led her to learning from Indigenous colleagues who believe and teach that a connection with the natural world is "at the heart of being human" and as such contributes to a person's inherent physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness.

"In that research, I realized that some of the ways we're teaching are not conducive to cultivating a sense of care, concern, and emotional connection with the natural world," Judson says. "My doctoral research led me to think about ways of teaching and learning that are conducive to supporting that. I'm interested in outdoor learning, but not just any outdoor learning. I'm interested in the role of imagination, and emotional connection in the natural world."

According to Judson, while there are still benefits to taking students outside and having them sit through their regular lessons, there are better ways to take advantage of the open spaces.

"I do not think all outdoor learning experiences are created equal. For example, I don't think that we have as big an impact on children's learning and development when it comes to connecting with the natural world if we just take

a worksheet outside and they sit and do the same practice [questions]. We need a different pedagogy when we're outside if we want to foreground emotional connection."

Judson suggests that teachers who are new to teaching outside start with what she calls a [walking curriculum](#): exploring the schoolyard or playground with the goal of better familiarizing students with the natural world. Ideally, this would be done in support of the regular classroom lessons. For a French teacher, for example, a walking curriculum might be built around vocabulary that describes what the students see (such as trees and plants) or ways that the children move as they explore the grounds (running, walking, jumping). For a teacher who is introducing a unit on animals to a class, students can look for places where a small prey animal like a mouse could live and then try to spot where a larger predator might hide.

But no matter what the subject or grade, Judson says "my advice would be first get outside."

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION IS FOR EVERYONE

Just getting outside is the approach that Le Clair and Siemens took at the beginning and it's the advice Mullaney offers any teacher who is contemplating adding an outdoor element to their teaching. Ideas about how to take advantage of the natural environment will come with exposure and time, and with watching what catches the students' interest.

"They're discovering and playing, and then their inquiry leads to what happens next. It requires a lot of observation,"



says Le Clair. "You don't really plan for a big chunk of time all at once. You see what the kids are doing, what they're interested in, and then you evolve your plan."

Mullaney, Le Clair, and Siemens also insist that outdoor education is for every school, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. Mullaney says his school pursues grants and strikes deals with local wilderness outfitters, and that even if a student can't afford to take part in a hiking or climbing trip, the school will find a way to ensure their participation. Siemens and Le Clair recall starting out using dollar store ponchos and garbage bags to keep the rain off their students, but say that over time their school has built up a stockpile of outdoor clothing and gear that students can use if needed.

And as much as it can be challenging for teachers to add yet another thing to their already overloaded list of responsibilities—especially something as daunting as outdoor education—there is a personal benefit to be derived from doing so.

"Something that I didn't realize was how beneficial [being outside] was going to be for me as well," says Le Clair. "It really does affect my mood and my energy level and my happiness metre."

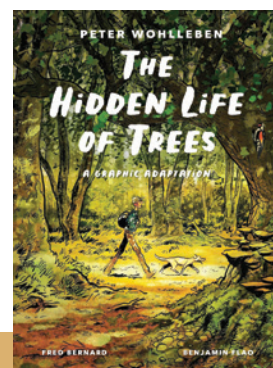
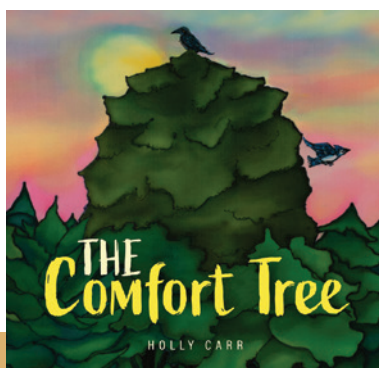
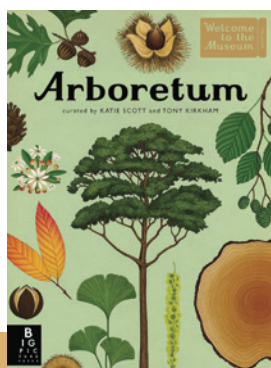


**CAROLYN GRUSKE** is an award-winning reporter and magazine editor. She often writes about the intersection of business, technology, and the law, but she also has a deep interest in educational topics.

PHOTOS BY STEPHEN MULLANEY

# TREES

Fall is almost here! Soon the days will be getting shorter, the temperature will start dropping, and the leaves will begin changing. As forests transform from lush curtains of green into vibrant shades of red and gold, what better time to inspire students to explore the life cycles of trees and their importance to all living things? Plus, [National Tree Day](#) takes place on September 25 this year in Canada, in the middle of [National Forest Week](#). To help you and your students honour the magnificence and magic of these living monuments, here are some tree-themed books to bring into your classroom.



## 1 ARBORETUM

BY TONY KIRKHAM, ILLUSTRATED  
BY KATIE SCOTT

*Big Picture Press (March 2024)*

**Grade Level: 3-7**

Celebrate trees from all over the world with this beautifully illustrated guidebook. Within its pages, students will learn about a number of unique and unusual trees—including ones associated with ancient mythology—and the important role they play in maintaining a healthy planet.

## 2 THE COMFORT TREE

BY HOLLY CARR

*Plumleaf Press (August 2024)*

**Grade Level: K-2**

Deep in a forest stands a big tree: the comfort tree. Using a series of silk paintings, author-artist Holly Carr shows readers how different animals rely on this tree throughout the seasons. *The Comfort Tree* is a stunning representation of the wonder of nature and the interconnectedness of all living things.

### 3 THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES: A GRAPHIC ADAPTATION

BY PETER WOHLLEBEN AND FRED BERNARD,  
ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN FLAO

Greystone Books (October 2024)

Grade Level: 7-12

This graphic novel adaptation of Peter Wohlleben's bestselling book introduces students to the secret social network of the forest. *The Hidden Life of Trees* follows Peter throughout his career as he strives to learn more about trees in order to protect them. Through simple, easy-to-follow text, Peter explains how trees communicate with each other, how they can impact the weather, and even how they grow together as a family!



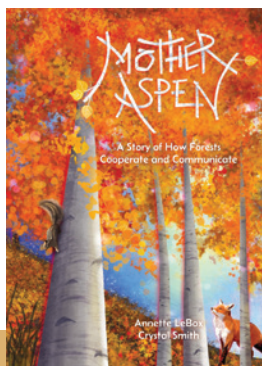
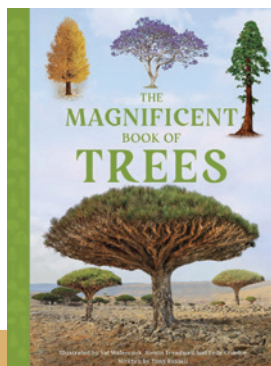
### 4 THE MAGNIFICENT BOOK OF TREES

BY TONY RUSSELL, ILLUSTRATED BY VAL WALERCZUK  
AND SIMON TREADWELL

Weldon Owen (October 2024)

Grade Level: 7-12

*The Magnificent Book of Trees* takes readers on a journey across the world, introducing them to 36 spectacular trees of different shapes and sizes, such as the brilliantly coloured rainbow eucalyptus or the ancient monkey puzzle tree. Students are sure to delight in the vibrant illustrations and fascinating facts that accompany each tree. They'll also get to observe the wildlife that thrives alongside these species.



### 5 MOTHER ASPEN: A STORY OF HOW FORESTS COOPERATE AND COMMUNICATE

BY ANNETTE LEBOX,  
ILLUSTRATED BY CRYSTAL SMITH

Groundwood Books  
(September 2024)

Grade Level: K-1

Inspired by Dr. Suzanne Simard's groundbreaking book *Finding the Mother Tree*, this kid-friendly version explains the concept of symbiosis by following an aspen grove through the seasons. Within the pages of *Mother Aspen*, young readers will watch as the Mother Tree cares for the other trees and animals in the grove, passes on messages through the fungi beneath the earth, produces new trees through her roots, and much more.

### 6 A TREE IS A COMMUNITY

BY DAVID L. HARRISON,  
ILLUSTRATED BY KATE COSGROVE

Holiday House (October 2024)

Grade Level: K-2

This STEM picture book showcases the incredible biodiversity of trees, proving that they are more than just plants—they're entire ecosystems! Trees provide food and shelter for all kinds of different animals and insects. They also keep the air clean, prevent flooding, and protect their many residents from bad weather. Through this book's lyrical, rhythmic text and rich, dynamic illustrations, kids will gain a whole new appreciation for trees and the work they do.

### 7 WHY DO WE NEED TREES?

BY OLIVIA WATSON, ILLUSTRATED  
BY TJARDA BORSBOOM

Hungry Tomato (August 2024)

Grade Level: 1-4

*Why Do We Need Trees?* explores the many ways that trees support life on earth and nurture the world around us. The book introduces readers to key topics such as habitats and ecosystems, while also explaining the healing power of trees, which species humans rely on for food and shelter, the impact that climate change is having on trees across the globe, and much more. Be sure to check out the other books in the [Trees series](#) as well.

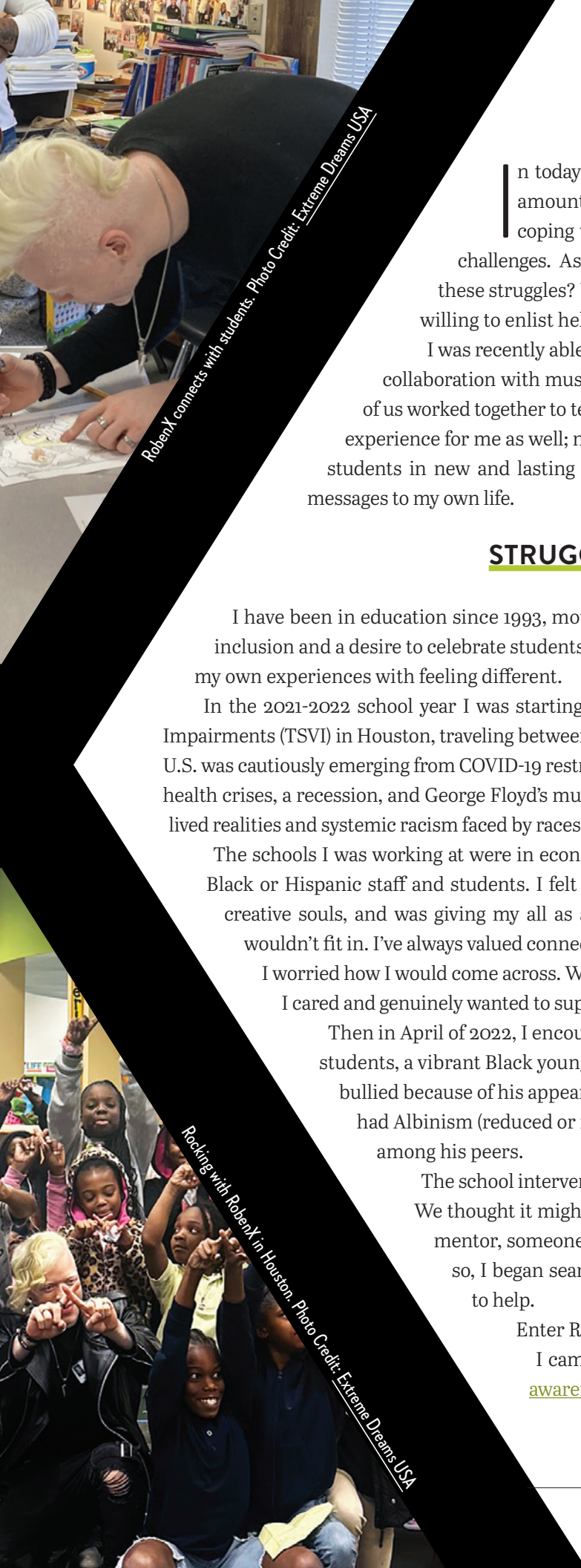
# ROCKING OUT WITH **ROBENX**

**ENHANCING STUDENT  
RESILIENCE THROUGH  
COLLABORATION**

**BY LYNN OUELLETTE**

Photo Credit: Andrew at Ejji Studios





RobenX connects with students. Photo Credit: Extreme Dreams USA

Rocking with RobenX in Houston. Photo Credit: Extreme Dreams USA

In today's world, students are faced with an overwhelming amount of pressure, not just academically, but also in coping with an increasing number of external factors and challenges. As educators, how can we support them through these struggles? We have to get creative, try different things, and be willing to enlist help from others.

I was recently able to put this advice into practice myself, thanks to a collaboration with musician and anti-bullying advocate [RobenX](#). The two of us worked together to teach students about resilience, but it was a learning experience for me as well; not only did I discover many strategies for reaching students in new and lasting ways, I was also able to apply some of RobenX's messages to my own life.

## STRUGGLING TO FIT IN

I have been in education since 1993, motivated to enter this field because of a passion for inclusion and a desire to celebrate students with special needs—interests that stemmed from my own experiences with feeling different.

In the 2021-2022 school year I was starting a new role as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) in Houston, traveling between schools to teach [Expanded Core Curriculum](#). The U.S. was cautiously emerging from COVID-19 restrictions and facing painful truths, including mental health crises, a recession, and George Floyd's murder. I was 53, white, and trying to understand the lived realities and systemic racism faced by races and cultures other than my own.

The schools I was working at were in economically struggling neighborhoods with primarily Black or Hispanic staff and students. I felt honored to be in these communities of dynamic, creative souls, and was giving my all as a teacher, yet I was walking in awkward, afraid I wouldn't fit in. I've always valued connection, but social skills are my biggest weakness and I worried how I would come across. Would I be able to express to the students how much I cared and genuinely wanted to support them?

Then in April of 2022, I encountered a situation that broke my heart. One of my students, a vibrant Black young man, had courageously shared that he was being bullied because of his appearance, and that he was afraid to come to school. He had Albinism (reduced or no pigment in skin, hair, and eyes), so he stood out among his peers.

The school intervened swiftly for his safety, but his mom still worried. We thought it might be beneficial for the student to talk to a relatable mentor, someone who understood what he was going through. And so, I began searching high and low for anyone who might be able to help.

Enter RobenX.

I came across his [anti-bullying messages](#) and [Albinism awareness work](#), as well as his music and videos online.

He grew up as Robdarius Brown in [Orange Mound](#), another economically struggling, predominantly-Black neighborhood in Memphis, TN, and had endured severe bullying throughout elementary school. He had what I did not—youthfulness, swagger, and a way with words. We also had some things in common; mental health struggles that we'd managed to overcome, and, most important of all, a drive to help others.

I sent an email and he responded quickly, eager to help.

## **AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS**

We had a series of video calls with my student, during which RobenX kindly offered to stick with him until his confidence grew. While one of the calls was taking place, a peer walked by and asked my student if he was on a video with his brother. RobenX casually replied, “No, we just both have Albinism, and we’re chatting..” The peer acknowledged this with a respectful nod and went on his way. My student’s confidence visibly increased after that, and he and RobenX began to talk more freely.

One question the student asked was, “Do you try to hide your Albinism?” RobenX responded honestly by talking about his struggles. Then he shared some advice: “We may have Albinism, but that does not define us. Who we are is our interests, talents, goals, dreams. Focus on those things and walk with your shoulders back and your head held high. *You* decide what people will notice about you.”

These one-on-one talks were so meaningful that RobenX agreed to participate in a whole class discussion. He joined virtually and read his book [The Colors of Olleh](#). It was a huge hit. RobenX’s urban vibe, confidence, and poetic/mangaesque book captured the students’ attention, and his honest sharing, genuine listening, and encouraging words really built them up—so much so that by the end, all the kids were begging him to come in person.

I began sharing RobenX’s book and videos with even more students. Myself and other teachers found that these made [great conversation starters](#) for students who had big dreams, as well as for those who were struggling with issues beyond the classroom.

I was so personally inspired that I actually went to Memphis to meet RobenX and his team, then later they all came to Houston to do literacy discussions, a presentation, and a

music workshop. This was made possible thanks to a number of donations, as well as a [LIT Java](#) event invitation.

RobenX is consistently authentic. His songs explore coping with his deep struggles, the ups and downs of maturing, and the realities of the world around him. My students have experienced their own harsh realities, and they respected that RobenX not only dealt with similar situations, but openly talked about them.

For class or assembly presentations, he spoke frankly about his Albinism and how he was able to overcome adversity, before jumping right in to answering the students’ many questions. He listened attentively, making sure everyone’s voices were heard, and showing delight in their interests and lives. Kids felt comfortable enough to approach him afterwards. They also delighted in sharing their work with RobenX during class visits and singing with him during the music workshop.

These authentic connections made a [lasting impact](#). The student RobenX initially spoke with is now socially respected and personally confident. He makes friends easily, focuses on his talent with technology, and strives for academic success. The other students ask about RobenX every time I see them, and he sends them messages to this day!

## **“INNER-STANDING”**

Behind the scenes, I learned more about RobenX. He shared that he learned to cope with life’s challenges by holding on to the things he loved. He also found words to describe trauma by watching public speakers and listening to music. He acknowledged his feelings, reactions, and patterns, taking responsibility to discover what was really going on inside himself, no matter how light or dark those emotions were. He calls this “inner-standing” and I think it is what makes him so strong.

Hearing RobenX’s messages, I knew they were for me too. Corners of my heart still held insecurity from battles I had not won, but after listening to RobenX, I decided it was time to examine my own interests, passions, and dreams, so that I could finally accept myself as who I am; someone with big feelings who has a lot to learn, but who loves to connect and enjoy. I made a choice to walk confidently as this person. I examined my family history and culture, while continuing to



read more about others' lives and experiences. I worked on inner-standing too.

All this allowed me to become stronger as a wife, parent, friend, and teacher. I began trusting my own ideas for lessons, and kept it real about who I am and what I know or do not know. I asked about student's hobbies, activities, and goals more enthusiastically. I connected them with ways to pursue their interests.

In turn, I watched as they let down their guards, sharing more of themselves with me. They started to show more respect and motivation too. Our skill-building lessons became more productive. They opened up about challenges, and I, in turn found ways to teach them how to solve those problems independently.

Over time, I realized that I was no longer anxious about belonging and that I was, in fact, part of the community too.

## WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

I started this journey with the goal of supporting my students, but along the way, I discovered my own strengths as well. I also learned that I don't have to face life's challenges alone—no one does. I hope that by sharing these stories, both mine and RobenX's, other teachers can also find inspiration and see the value in embracing new approaches and building lasting connections.

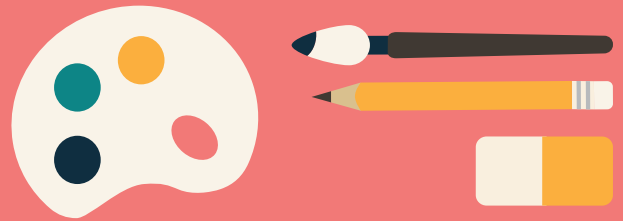
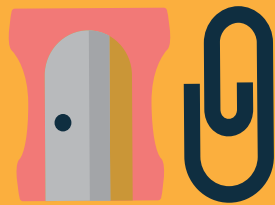


**LYNN OUELLETTE** is a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments and Arts Enthusiast in Houston, TX. She studied Music, East Asian Studies, and Education, and has worked with all ages. Lynn also enjoys volunteering, listening to people's stories, and trying new things. You can follow her on X [here](#).

**Top:** RobenX and Teiyonna Douglas, illustrator of *The Colors of Olleh*, at the LIT Java Literacy Fair.  
Photo Credit: Devron Zeno Photography

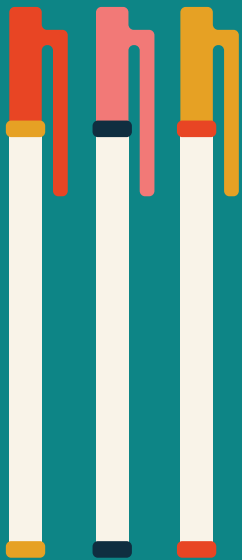
**Bottom:** Lynn Ouellette meets RobenX in person.  
Photo Credit: W. Ouellette





# WHY I BECAME A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

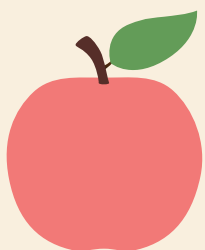
BY MEGAN HARDING

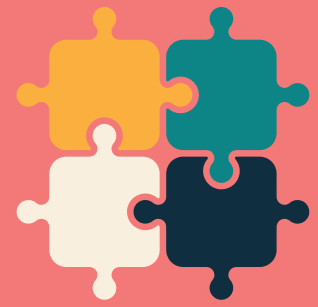


“Teacher, can you tie my shoe?” inquires a five-year-old as she jabs you repeatedly with her pointer finger, indicating that she desperately needs your attention. Later, after a different five-year-old has been in the bathroom for several minutes, you call out to her and ask, “Sweetie, are you having tummy troubles?” Her response: “No, I’m having bottom problems!” Later still, while listening to another kid tell a story about something that happened earlier in the day, you try not to laugh when they inadvertently mix up the term “took a spill” with “took a dump.”

If you can relate to any of these moments, you probably are, or have been, a primary teacher. And you are exhausted!

You rush from teaching one subject to the next, walk your class to specials (art, PE, music, etc.) and lunch, and pick them up from specials and lunch. When you aren’t fighting





to hold kids' attention in the classroom, you're getting them to line up, waiting for everyone to be quiet, and then trying to keep track of all 30 of them while en route to the next class. And when you come back to pick them up later, you're inevitably pulled aside to hear about how your class' behavior was or to speak about a certain student, while the kids are waiting restlessly, pushing and shoving each other in line.

It can be a lot to deal with. And so, after 13 years of teaching primary students, I decided that it was time for a change.

### AN UNEXPECTED OFFER

I've always been passionate about classroom management and building relationships with students. Plus, being part of a school's leadership team, PBIS committee, or any decision-making group really energizes me. I was starting to feel slightly worn out in my current role and wanted to avoid burning out altogether, so I thought that admin would be a good change of pace. The idea of still being involved with students, but without having to be in the classroom every day, enticed me.

I obtained my administrator license and ended up interviewing for a Dean of Students position at a local middle school. I knew was a long shot, since I didn't have any middle school teaching experience and there were very few, if any, admin roles for primary schools in my region. I felt that I'd done well at the interview, but wasn't surprised to find out that the job was offered to someone with the right experience. However, when I received the "thanks, but no thanks" phone call, it wasn't quite what I expected.

I was offered a position teaching 6th grade English Language Arts and social studies as a way to gain experience at the middle school level. I accepted, mainly because I love teaching ELA, and also because the school was located very close to my house, which significantly shortened my daily commute.

Leaving the school where I was teaching at the time was bittersweet. I would miss the collegial relationships-turned-

friendships, the families who took me in as one of their own, and the many connections I had made there. I would even miss the drive, or at least, parts of it: thirty minutes of rural highway with a beautiful view of snow-covered mountains and sunrises that just can't be beat! Most of all, I would miss my principal. He had been my mentor through my admin program and I had learned so much from him.

But I knew it was the right time to move on.

That didn't mean I wasn't anxious, though. Starting at a new school is nerve-wracking enough, but switching from primary to middle school was a huge leap! I had zero experience with middle schoolers. I didn't know if my teaching strategies would work, I wasn't sure how to connect with the kids, and I was worried how the parents would receive me.

Turns out, I had nothing to be nervous about. The kids were the same, just in bigger bodies! I quickly realized that my students enjoyed morning meetings, sharing about their lives, playing silent ball, and going outside for free time. They were a little hesitant to use some of my collaboration strategies, such as four corners and jigsaws, but it didn't take them long to realize that these methods could be much more entertaining than the traditional lecture-style way of teaching.

Now I have a classroom wall covered with student artwork, exemplifying the fact that these kids still want to share what they are proud of with me. I've had countless hugs from students, I've dried tears, and I've encouraged kids in ways I didn't think happened at the middle school level.

### THE MANY BENEFITS

So what is it that I enjoy about teaching middle school? For one thing, instead of prepping for *every* subject, *every* day, I only have two subjects to prep for. Also, I no longer have to walk a class anywhere. Now the students come to me. Aside from this giving me more prep time, I find that I have more energy, since I'm not spending my days corralling students



from one class to the next. Not to mention, kids switching classes throughout the day makes it more manageable if there is an especially challenging student.

I love how independent middle schoolers are as well. Of course, they still need support and reminders, but they are able to walk into my classroom and know exactly what they need to be doing, just by reading the directions on the board or by knowing what day it is.

Best of all, I've been able to offer more choice at the middle school level than I ever did with primary. I recently had a final project where students could choose a way to exemplify the theme of a book we read. One of my students was very creative and artistic, but she was always so hesitant to share her artwork. I encouraged her to make a new cover for the book and, despite how nervous she was at first, by the time she turned it in she was so proud of herself! I've seen the intense insecurities that middle schoolers face, and I am honored to be able to walk alongside them as they find their strengths.

When I finished my first year of teaching middle school, I figured that was that and it was on to my next batch of students. However, this has not been the case. We have four-minute passing periods and almost daily I still have students from the previous year that will come and see me during that time. Sometimes they want to "spill the tea," sometimes they want a hug, sometimes they simply want a familiar face instead of navigating through the halls. Regardless of the reason, I'm beyond thrilled that they haven't disappeared now that I'm no longer their teacher. That kind of relationship building just wasn't important to primary students.

A few years ago, I often used to go home with headaches, and, while crying out of frustration was not regular, it was certainly not uncommon. But in the year and a half since I've started teaching middle school, I've ended the day with a headache only twice, and in tears maybe once. I'm not saying that my middle schoolers don't frustrate me, because they do, but they turn it around so much quicker! They are better able to redirect their emotions, and the heart-to-heart chats I have with them often have an impact—probably because their impulse control is a bit better than when they were little.

If I had made the leap from primary to middle school sooner, I might have saved myself a lot of grief. These days my work and home life feel balanced and I actually look forward to teaching.

The first year in my new role was incredibly busy, but now I'm more settled and am excited to take on additional responsibilities outside of the classroom, such as coordinating extracurricular activities like dances and talent shows. I don't know what else the future may bring, but I do know that right now I'm happy and I can't wait to see what comes next.



**MEGAN HARDING** is in her 16th year of education. She resides in Central Oregon with her family and when she isn't teaching or planning school activities, she can be found spending time with family, reading, or playing board games.

## INDIGENOUS VOICES:

## Seven Sacred Teachings

By Kim Kirk

 FEATURED BOOK


*Seven Sacred Teachings* by David Bouchard and Dr. Joseph Martin, illustrated by Kristy Cameron (More Than Words Publishing, 2009)

Republished as an *audio enhanced read-along edition* featuring the voice and flutes of David Bouchard (Crow Cottage Publishing, 2016)



**GRADE LEVEL:**  
MIDDLE (7-10)

**THEME:**  
INDIGENOUS VOICES

**SUB-THEMES:**  
CHARACTER EDUCATION,  
MEDICINE WHEEL,  
PERSONAL STRENGTHS,  
SACRED MEDICINES

 LEARNING FOCUS

Students will be introduced to the legends of the Seven Grandfather Teachings (also known as the Seven Sacred Teachings) and learn how each teaching honours one of the basic virtues that are necessary for a full and healthy life. Students will explore how in these sacred teachings, animals, man, and the environment are all connected.

 LEARNING EXPERIENCE
**MINDS ON PROVOCATION**

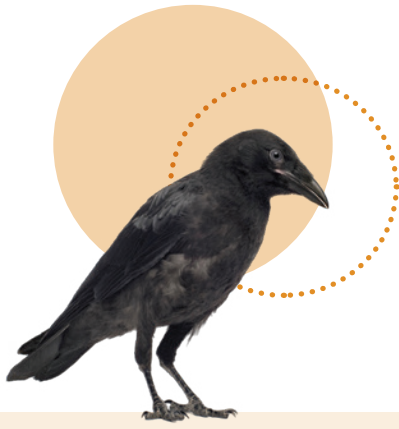
Begin by watching the linked [video](#). Continue a dialogue about the Seven Grandfather Teachings: Truth, Humility, Respect, Honesty, Love, Bravery/Courage, Wisdom. Which one resonates with students the most? Is there an example of a time when they have shown one of the teachings?

Explore more information about the [Seven Grandfather Teachings](#).

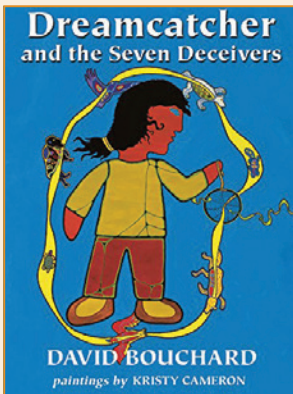
**READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE****First Read:**

Read through the featured book, *Seven Sacred Teachings*, stopping after each teaching to discuss the animals and their traits. Create a list of each teaching and the animal and their traits.

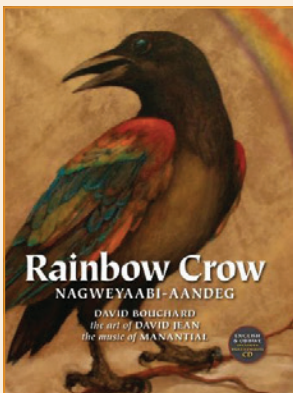




**ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME**



*Dreamcatcher and the Seven Deceivers* by David Bouchard, illustrated by Kristy Cameron (Crow Cottage Publishing, 2016)



*Rainbow Crow* by David Bouchard, illustrated by David Jean (Red Deer Press, 2012)

You can find many printable Seven Grandfather Teachings colour sheets online that students can fill in, colour, or paint.

**Second Read:**

Take note of the direction, seasons and medicines that link with each teaching. Have students work in groups (seven groups—one for each teaching) and record the other content from the story.

Excellent resources for your classroom can be ordered [here](#).

**Third Read:**

Create a Medicine Wheel and include all of the teachings from the story in the wheel.



**MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY**

Students may demonstrate their understanding of the Seven Grandfather Teachings in a variety of ways:

- Choose one of the seven teachings and create a story using the animal, direction, season, medicine, and teaching.
- Choose a teaching and create a wordle using their knowledge about that word.
- Create an image that represents what one of the teachings means to them.
- Use [Micro:Bit](#) to create an interactive poster (see [here](#) for the lesson).
- Use playdough/clay to design the animals of the Seven Sacred Teachings.



**REFLECT AND CONNECT**

How can you use the seven teachings to live a better life?

 **BOOK LISTS**

- [Indigenous History Month: K-12 Books](#) (49th Kids)
- [Indigenous History Booklist](#) (The Canadian Children's Book Centre)
- [Just Call Me Lucille](#) (SayITFirst)

 **ADAPTATIONS FOR THIS LESSON**

Focus on one teaching per month. Deep dive into the teaching to create a kind and caring classroom focused on the Seven Sacred Teachings.

 **MORE RESOURCES**

- [Waking Up Ojibwe](#): through a series of programs and partnerships this Anishinaabemodaa initiative is focused on providing Anishinaabemowin instruction from preschool through to post-secondary.
- [The Seven Teachings Stories Series](#) (Portage and Main Press)
- [Seven Sacred Teachings](#): the resources found on this site were developed by Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPD) as a result of grants from Alberta Education to support implementation.



# PHONICS AND DECODABLES

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20  
TITLES

## Marlin Readers

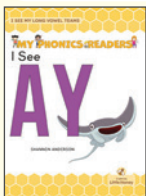


Blue Marlin  
Reading & Interest  
Level: Gr. 2-6

25  
TITLES

Uses  
Dyslexia  
font.

## My Phonics Readers



Reading & Interest  
Level: Gr. PreK-2

64  
TITLES



Nonfiction  
Reading & Interest  
Level: Gr. K-2

18  
TITLES



White Marlin  
Reading & Interest  
Level: Gr. 2-6


6  
TITLES

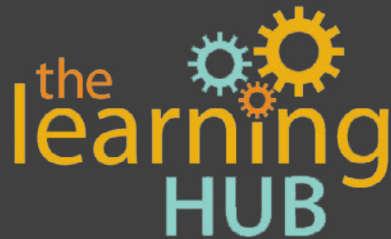


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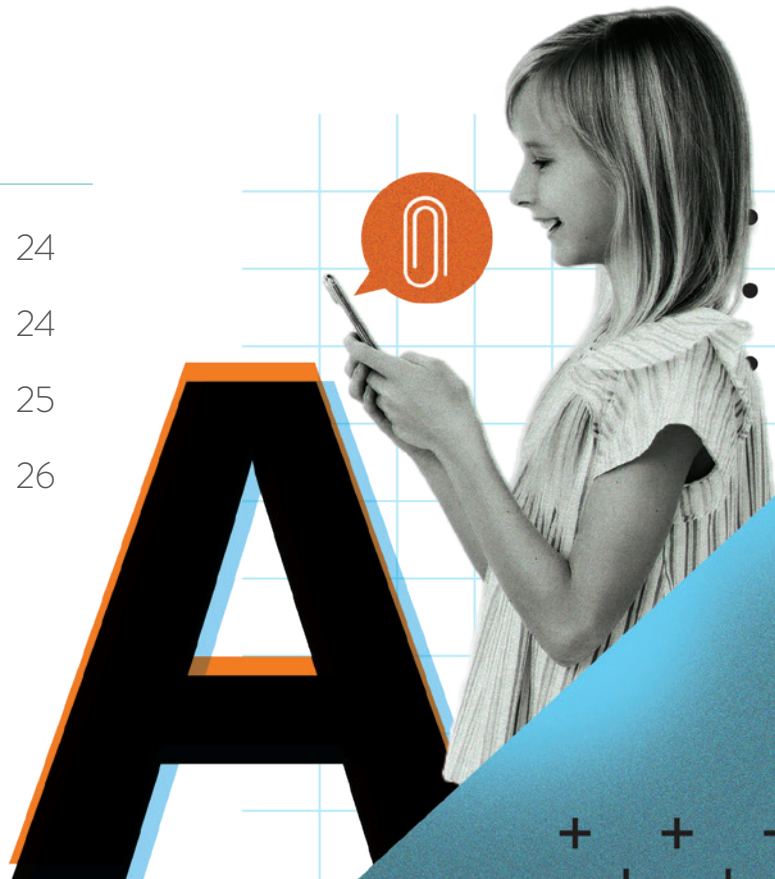
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# KOREA

## THE FORGOTTEN WAR

Often dubbed the “Forgotten War,” the Korean War is a pivotal chapter in history. This educational resource seeks to rekindle interest and awareness of Canada’s role in the conflict, offering a fresh perspective for educators and students.

A dynamic blend of videos and lesson plans bring to life the bravery and sacrifices made by Canadians, ensuring that their legacy is honoured and remembered, while also exploring the lasting impacts of the conflict.

