

\$6.99 • ISSUE 148 • NOV/DEC 2021

# TEACH

EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

FROM CONCEPTS TO KICKS:  
**BRINGING ART TO LIFE**



KEEPING IT OLD SCHOOL:  
**THE RETRO  
ARCADE PROJECT**



# READ LEARN CODE







**BLACK FRIDAY**

# A HEAD START ON NEW POSSIBILITIES

EARLY ACCESS FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY ● DEALS START 11/15



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All things you.  
All at a glance, always a swipe away.



# NOTES

We know that the core educational competencies of reading, writing, and arithmetic are still with us. In fact, they have never left, despite generations of parents that bemoan the lack of emphasis on “the basics.” One of the most essential elements of reading and writing is grammar, but speak that term out loud in a classroom and the groans may be heard for miles. Associated with “drill and kill” classroom exercises, grammar instruction has gotten a very bad rap over the years. Without it, however, a child’s ability to communicate is severely hampered. Even with much of the ever-evolving slang and jargon that young people articulate, a lot of it wouldn’t make sense without grammatical rules and structures.

That is why we’re pleased to present our feature article, which takes a look at alternative strategies for grammar instruction. Some of those strategies include using mentor texts to demonstrate grammatical concepts, as well as ways to ensure grammar is relevant and reflective of the diversity found in classrooms today. We invite you to take a look at Adam Stone’s article as it explores this fundamental building block of language.

We are also fortunate to showcase two pieces by creative teachers who believe in collaborative and innovative approaches to classroom projects. John Burrows is a graphic design teacher who has organized many group projects between his class and other classes of different subjects—from health science to cosmetology. One of his latest ideas centred around building a fully-functional arcade cabinet. This was the most ambitious collaborative project Burrows had ever undertaken; by the time it was finished, five separate classes had come together to work on the build. At the end of the process, everyone gave positive feedback,

saying they enjoyed working with new classes and meeting students they otherwise might not have gotten a chance to interact with. Burrows has shown that collaboration fosters both engagement and learning.

Ben Salus is an elementary school art teacher who challenges his students to think critically about what they create. This past year, while looking for a way to motivate his students in the wake of the pandemic, Salus collaborated with Anthony Amos, a local artist who has built a career on designing customized sneakers. Together the two came up with a design contest—From Concept to Kicks—that gave students the chance to create their own original sneaker art. Four winners would be selected to receive the ultimate prize, a pair of sneakers each customized with their own design. By the end of the contest, over 300 designs were submitted. From Concepts to Kicks was such a success that it is now in the process of being implemented district-wide, with plans to cover a variety of themes and concepts. As Salus discovered, when kids are truly motivated, they can fully realize their potential.

Our Field Trips column gives you a glimpse into the world of concerts. From Carnegie Hall to the National Arts Centre, take students on a musical journey with the help of these virtual field trips. Webstuff provides a range of resources that are designed to act as an introduction to American Sign Language (ASL). Not only do these tools promote literacy, they can also make classrooms more inclusive by helping students to become fluent in ASL.

Until next time.

WILI LIBERMAN  
PUBLISHER



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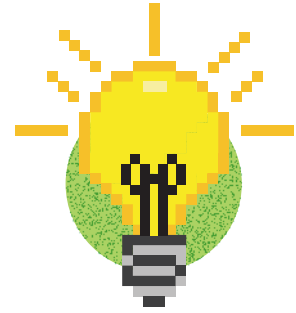
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# From Concepts to Kicks: Bringing Art to Life

By Ben Salus



As an elementary school art teacher, it is my job to engage my students and get them thinking critically about what and how they create. I believe that students' ideas and explorations with art-making are more important than their current technical skills. Because of this, I've often felt the art room to be an inappropriate place for competitions, which typically reward kids with artistic backgrounds and discourage others.

However, one of my strongest personal artistic influences is hip hop, which actively embraces competition. It's arguably the most important contemporary arts movement, and I love the idea and spirit of battling. No violence, no contact, yet it's personal and confrontational. Competitors become both adversaries and allies as they improve each other through challenges and pressure.

## COMPETITION IN THE CLASSROOM

Jesse White Learning Academy, the school where I work in Hazel Crest, IL, has had plenty of its own challenges this past year. After fluctuating between remote and in-person learning over the first several months, we finally settled into a hybrid approach, with half my students in the classroom and half attending remotely. Somehow I was supposed to teach them as if they were a unified class.

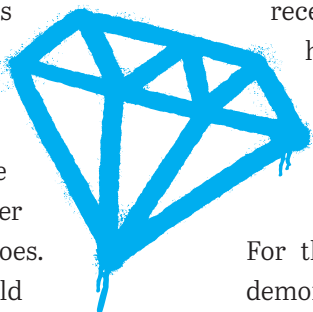
I began with weekly demonstrations for my “roomers”; they made zines, comics, memes, selfies, pixel art, and animations, while my “zoomers” had the opportunity to complete make-up work or have one-on-one meetings with me. But when I had to teach both cohorts at the same time, I felt lost. How could they engage each other or work together on projects when their locations, distractions, and supplies were unequal? Managing things this way could not last long and it kept the class divided.

So I started trying new techniques, eventually coming across the game [letsdraw.it](https://letsdraw.it) to connect the students. Zoomers and roomers could simultaneously play/draw pictures and vote/comment on them as a class. The students had desperately needed those group interactions, but once that need was met I discovered something just as important was lacking: a sense of pressure.

Some students who were diligent with their work often needed the motivation of a deadline to turn things in quickly. Others, I was now learning, reveled in the pressure that came from friendly competitions against their classmates. At a time when students were facing plenty of obstacles and pressures outside of school, my original perception was that they needed less in the classroom. But I was wrong. My students didn't need less pressure, in fact they were yearning for more, and it was up to me to provide it.

## A TANGIBLE INCENTIVE

A few weeks later I was showcasing slides of local contemporary artists, like Rahmaan Barnes and [Czr Prz](#). When I presented a few pictures of art by [Anthony Amos](#), his work really caught the students' attention. Anthony is a sneaker artist who paints custom designs onto shoes. He began making sneaker art as a child



when his family couldn't afford to purchase the latest popular shoes, and has since turned his skills into a career.

Something about the sneakers resonated with my students; they liked the idea of owning shoes that would reflect their personality, of being able to express themselves through unique footwear. Soon everyone was talking excitedly about creating their very own custom pairs. All of that enthusiasm gave me an idea—here was the perfect way to provide students with some healthy competition.

I reached out to Anthony, who I'd actually partnered with in the past while working on a community mural. Together, we came up with the outline for a new project: From Concepts to Kicks. It would be a design contest with students competing for the chance to win sneakers professionally painted by Anthony. Any student, regardless of age or technical skill level, could enter. Four lucky winners would be chosen to receive a pair of Air Jordans customized with their own drawings.

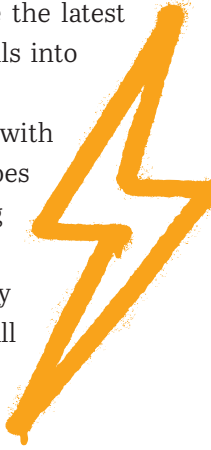
My students are from the South Chicago Metropolitan Area and are often overlooked while dealing with many grown-up struggles. Having spent a few months on active military duty helping to vaccinate the population, Anthony knew better than most what a challenging year it had been. So he wanted to help give the students something to look forward to, a way to end the school year on a high note.

When I approached the school with the proposal, they were very supportive. They added the request that Secretary Jesse White receive his own customized pair too, as the school is his namesake. In our area, Jesse White is an icon.

The school board agreed to cover around half of our budget for the project. We also won a grant from the Awesome Foundation's [Chicago chapter](#) and raised an additional \$1,000+ through a [Gofundme campaign](#). We received enough money to create the shoes and even had some left over to provide clay and paint kits for ten runners up.

## SNEAKER DESIGN CHALLENGE

For the competition, students were given templates, demonstration videos, links to related websites, and other





resources. For three weeks we covered important elements of design such as color themes, shapes, juxtaposition, mood, and elements of identity like sports teams, flags, and symbols. I made sure to emphasize that the best ideas, color schemes, and placement of images, along with the most well-communicated motivations for the artwork would be more important than who was the best at drawing.

Students were asked to consider the following elements when coming up with their design:

- Design Theme: what is it and why is that important to you or others?
- Color Schemes: how/why did you use and arrange your colors in the way you did?
- Form Fit: does your design make sense on a shoe? Consider the textures, curving, and overlapping.

At the end of the contest, students had submitted over 300 designs. Some of the most common themes included peace, Black Lives Matter, Among Us, and Fortnite, as well as favorite athletes and musicians.

Beyond anything else I did last year, students were constantly asking for updates about the sneaker project. They were thrilled with the results and the notoriety (From Concepts to Kicks was [featured](#) on the local news!) Most importantly, the competition not only helped them focus, but also gave students a sense of accomplishment by encouraging them to create something they could actually hold in their hands.

From Concepts to Kicks is a project that, just a year ago, would have felt counterproductive, based on some of my previous views about art contests. Now, we are looking to expand it into a district-wide annual event. In addition to sneakers, students can collaborate with other artists to turn their ideas into all sorts of things, like comics, T-shirts, puppets, etc. Common themes from their designs can even be made into public murals and mosaics. The possibilities are endless.

Too often students are told that the fruits of their labor will come in the form of higher education or a job, but their age and real world problems don't always permit them to think about the future. This project gave them a chance to earn tangible rewards for their efforts.

Anthony and I both enjoyed having the opportunity to help kids bring their artistic visions to life. Art education happens when we connect community, artists, and classrooms. By making students a part of that experience, with incentives that spark their interest, we can help them realize their fullest potential.







BEN SALUS is a teaching artist and author working and living in the south side of the Chicago Metropolitan Area. His work and curricula focus on exploration, meaning-making, and reflective consciousness.

ANTHONY AMOS is an entrepreneur in the arts/personal fashion world, a current active member of the U.S. Military, and a believer in the arts as a means to represent the individual. His company, [Sneakerfare Kicks](#), provides reflections of a person's heart and personality through customized products.





# Global Issues: Climate Change

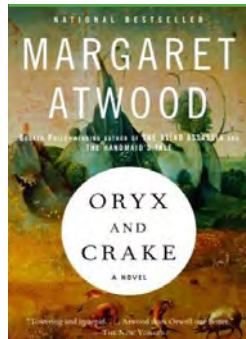
By Carlo Fusco

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

**THEME:**  
GLOBAL ISSUES

**SUB-THEMES:**  
CLIMATE CHANGE

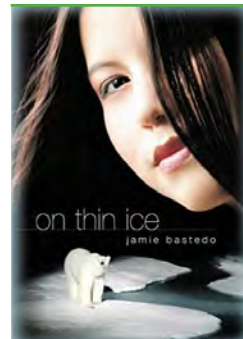
## FEATURED BOOKS



*Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood (McClelland and Stewart, 2003)



*The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood (McClelland and Stewart, 2009)



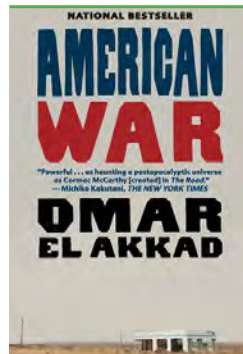
*On Thin Ice* by Jamie Bastedo (Red Deer Press, 2006)



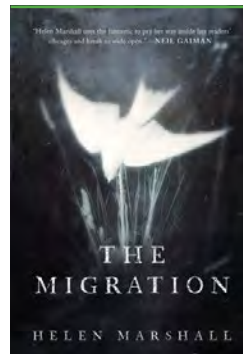
*The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (Cormorant Books, 2017)



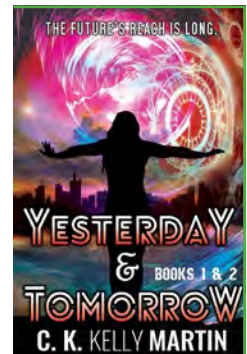
*Walkaway* by Cory Doctorow (Tor Books, 2017)



*American War* by Omar El Akkad (Alfred A. Knopf, 2017)



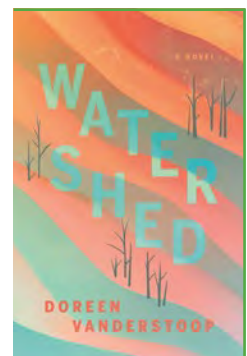
*The Migration* by Helen Marshall (Random House Canada, 2019)



*Yesterday & Tomorrow* by C.K. Kelly Martin (CreateSpace, 2016)



*Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice (ECW Press, 2018)



*Watershed* by Doreen Vanderstoop (Freehand Books, 2020)



## LEARNING FOCUS

Climate change is an existential crisis that is challenging everyone and has generated a new genre called “Cli-Fi.” Using climate change as a focus, authors delve into many other global issues such as, genetics, disease, equity and social order, just to name a few. Our learning focus will be to use the climate crisis in works of fiction to explore a speculative future founded in today’s environmental/social/political issues.

## LEARNING EXPERIENCE

### MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Some say that today’s youth will inherit the earth and they will pay for the excess of the generation before them. Depending on the subject area you may provoke students with:

- Canadian policy documents ([The Next Generation of Emerging Global Challenges](#))
- TV news ([Here’s how climate change will impact the region where you live](#))
- Digital media ([Climate Change In Canada: 3 Crucial Stories To Watch Out For In 2021](#))
- TED Talks ([5 questions about climate change](#))
- Documentaries ([I Am Greta](#))
- YouTube ([David and Greta in Conversation: The Planetary Crisis | Wildscreen Festival 2020](#))

After encouraging students to think about the impact of climate change, take time to help them focus on the topic. Many students will have misconceptions and bias from a variety of sources. A teacher-led classroom discussion is a great way to get ideas out into the open and to address the misconceptions. As a whole class or in small groups, student thoughts and ideas can be recorded in a variety of formats: Mind map ([free tools](#)), Wordle ([free tools](#)), [Jamboard](#), etc.

In a class discussion, teachers can debrief students on misconceptions as they go along. In the case of small groups, teachers may wish to have each group share with the class to provide an opportunity to debrief students on possible science misconceptions such as:

- [Misconceptions as Barriers to Understanding Science](#)
- [Science Misconceptions | Common Misconceptions in Science](#)
- [An exploration of common student misconceptions in science](#)

This could also be extended into media literacy and critical thinking.

### READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Students are to select a book appropriate for their reading level and interest.

While reading the book, students are to record the following information in table format or other thought-organizing tools ([free tools](#)):





- Identify the impacts of climate change as they are represented in the book.
- How was life on the planet influenced by those impacts?
- Identify possible causes of climate change either implicitly or explicitly implied in the novel.
- Suggest real world changes to reduce/eliminate the cause of the impacts.
- How did the characters deal with the impacts during everyday events?

Extension: Many of the suggested novels also have an Indigenous author/character/theme that can be further explored.

### MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Provide an opportunity for students to be creative in the expression of their learning. The learning should reflect what knowledge they gained about climate change, the impact of climate change and steps to reduce/eliminate the impact of climate change.

Sample creative expressions of learning that go beyond the essay or poster:

- Artwork
- Poetry
- Video
- Podcast (interview or commentary) – [How-To](#)
- Public service announcement (adapt from the podcast How-To)
- Letter to elected official
- Letter to the local newspaper (letter to editor/op-ed)

It is important for students to produce a product that is more than just an assignment for a teacher. Create a website or other online sharing resources to showcase and publish student work (Google Sites, Wordpress, etc.). Here are some [Creative Tools for Making and Sharing](#). Remember to review and follow school board policy on publishing student work and the use of third-party online resources that are not part of your school online learning environment.



### REFLECT AND CONNECT

#### LEARNING SHOWCASE

Provide students with the time and opportunity to discuss and look at the products produced by other students.

#### THE BIG THINK

The culminating activity should be one where students reflect on their learning and their personal role in climate change.

Students should write a short exposition to illustrate their reflections with the following prompts:

- What did you learn about climate change?
- What can you do to reduce/eliminate the impact of climate change?
- What will you share with others about what you learned about climate change?





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

Physical and/or digital copies of the novels. Audiobook versions should also be made available for students with special needs.

Climate Change Fiction (Cli-Fi) has generated a lot of interest over the past decade. Traditional media sources have generated a number of book lists that can be found below:

- [What is Cli-Fi? A Beginner's Guide to Climate Fiction](#) (Book Riot)
- [10 Cli-Fi Novels for the Dark Days Ahead](#) (Book Marks)
- [Discover the genre of cli-fi with these 6 books](#) (CBC News)
- [So You Want to Read Cli-Fi: Here's Where to Start](#) (Penguin Random House)
- [How Climate-Change Fiction, or 'Cli-Fi,' Forces Us to Confront the Incipient Death of the Planet](#) (The New Yorker)
- [CliFi: The hottest reading trend](#) (Sierra)
- ['Cli-Fi' May Be No Stranger than Reality](#) (United Nations University)
- [These Cli-Fi Classics Are Cautionary Tales For Today](#) (NPR)
- [Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre](#) (Dissent Magazine)
- [Climate Fiction: Can Books Save the Planet?](#) (The Atlantic)



## ADAPTATIONS FOR THIS LESSON

This lesson can be adapted to online learning environments by creating a KBC (Knowledge Building Center). This is a sample of a KBC on [climate change](#). Here is another example explained in this blog post [Inquiry Untethered](#) by Anita Brooks Kirkland.



## MORE RESOURCES

Teachers can find a variety of resources online to help them develop their own understanding of climate change. Here are a few to get you started:

- [Useful Links for Environmental Education](#) (OTF)
- [Climate Change Resources For Teachers](#) (Learning for a Sustainable Future)
- [Climate Change Resources for Students and Teachers](#) (Common Sense Media)

Many school boards have databases that contain a significant number of publications and resources about climate change:

- [Gale in Context: Global Issues](#)
- [Gale in Context: Environmental Studies](#)
- EBSCO's [Explora](#)
- [Learn360](#)
- [Curio.ca](#) from CBC



# Virtual Field Trips: Music and Concerts

Music education has been shown to improve memory and focus, literacy skills, creativity, and empathy, as well as overall academic achievement. And what better way to get students interested in learning to play an instrument than by letting them see those instruments in action? These virtual concerts, workshops, and accompanying resources are great opportunities to show students all the joys and wonders that music can bring.

## CARNEGIE HALL

New York, NY

### *Grade level: K-12*

Introduce students to music from around the world with the help of these digital programs. Each K-5 program includes videos, audio tracks, lessons, and activities, while the 6-12 courses are more student-led for independent learning. Be sure to take a look at the toolbox of additional resources for music educators as well.

## LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

New York, NY

### *Grade level: K-6*

The Lincoln Center's at-home series, #ConcertsForKids, was designed to provide diverse musical performances to kids and families. Several of the concerts also include activity guides, which can easily be adapted for use in the classroom: check out Music from the Sole, Soul Science Kids, Nobuntu, 123 Andrés, as well as many others.





### NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE

Ottawa, ON

#### **Grade level: K-12**

The National Arts Centre is offering a variety of virtual music workshops and performances. Students can learn about Cree music and culture, explore beat-making and lyric-writing, discover different types of body percussion, and more! Additional free music [resources](#) are also available.

### NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

New York, NY

#### **Grade level: K-12**

Educators can browse through a video library of pre-recorded concerts and instructional videos on the New York Philharmonic's Learning @ Home page. This digital collection also includes educator resources, curriculum guides, and activities to help students explore their own musical creativity.

### VANCOUVER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Vancouver, BC

#### **Grade level: K-7**

By subscribing to the Music Room, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's virtual learning platform, educators can gain access to all kinds of music education content. Send students on a journey through Spanish rhythms and culture with *España!*, or take a walk on the wild side and watch animals come to life through *Carnival of the Animals*. With plenty of interactive musical experiences to choose from, there's no shortage of fun to be had!

# Living Language: A New Vision for Teaching Grammar

By Adam Stone

In the K-12 setting, grammar instruction can be tedious and demoralizing. Rather than elevating students and celebrating their successes, it too often becomes an exercise in red-lining their mistakes.

“When people think about grammar, they’re usually thinking about really technical things, with a major emphasis on correction,” says Sean Runday, co-president of the Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Experts say it is time to shift that model. As editor of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation*, Runday is among those advocating for a change. Kids still need to learn grammar, they need to understand the mechanics of how language works. But teachers can find better and more effective ways to communicate this vital information.

## WHY GRAMMAR?

Before we look at how best to teach grammar, it’s important to make the case for why it is even necessary to parse out the correct use of punctuation and prepositions.

“Study after study shows the importance of syntactic awareness—understanding the way in which words are combined into these larger phrasal units,” says Amanda Goodwin, co-editor of *Reading Research Quarterly* and an associate professor at Vanderbilt University. “It is incredibly important for kids’ reading comprehension, as well as for their writing.”

It’s important, the experts say, because grammar describes the rules of the road. It offers a map for good communications.

“Grammar is what helps us construct meaning in our reading, writing, and in speaking,” says Melissa Mayville, a reading specialist and senior policy/program analyst for the National Education Association. Simply put: “It is critical that [students] have an understanding of how language works so they can comprehend what they’re [reading and] so that they can be understood.”

A solid grounding in grammar empowers students, giving them tools they need to utilize language effectively.

“Using a strong verb to clearly convey an action, or a prepositional phrase to add some detail, or a subordinate clause to provide some context—it’s important that they can do that in their writing, so they can create nuanced and descriptive communications,” Ruday explains.

Too often, though, the standard approach to sharing this critical information doesn’t reach students where they live.

## WHAT ISN’T WORKING

Teachers typically will leverage worksheets in a drill-and-skill approach to grammar for students. Goodwin likens it to basketball practice: have them fire at the hoop over and over until the ball goes in. But this approach doesn’t work in language the way it works in sport.

“We can teach these rules, we can say: ‘This is a verb, this is a compound sentence.’ But [students] don’t shoot it exactly accurately. They learn it on the worksheet or in the intervention, but they don’t then transfer it to their own writing and reading,” Goodwin says. “We’re good at teaching rules. The challenge is in having that transfer to real outcomes.”

Research bears this out. Studies show that practice on worksheets “makes students really good at doing worksheets, but the material really doesn’t get conveyed to them,” notes Ruday. Worse still, the basis of the

worksheet—constant correction—can be profoundly demoralizing. “Those worksheet-based approaches will typically lead to student disengagement.”

Clearly, a better strategy is needed.

## AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

As students mature in their use of language, they’re going to make mistakes. They’ll construct more complex sentences and, in doing so, they’ll misplace the occasional comma. Rather than penalize such efforts, teachers who shift away from the corrective mode can find new ways to support their students’ evolving skills.

By combining grammar instruction with practical usage, educators can help students to craft communications that are more complex and ultimately more effective.

One way to get there is through “mentor texts,” reading examples that help bring the grammatical concepts to life.

“Mentor texts are examples of good writing. They’re frequently pulled from published works, and they demonstrate how these authors are using these concepts,” Ruday explains.

“Maybe we’re talking about prepositional phrases and how they add detail,” he says. “First you talk with students in a general sense about what a prepositional phrase is, you orient them to that concept. Then you show them how that looks in its natural habitat, with authentic examples of how it’s used in literature.”

Mentor texts help to demonstrate the relevance of a grammatical skill, taking it from abstract concept to practical application.

“When kids see it in authentic texts, then you can have a conversation,” says Goodwin. “Why do authors actually use this? Why do we have compound sentences? Mentor texts show the power of the skill that you’re teaching.”

The next step is to then apply that concept to the students’ own writing. Grammar comes alive when students have the opportunity to connect the dots directly between what they’ve learned and how it can support their own communications.

“It gets students excited when we take these concepts that we’re focused on and apply them,” Ruday says. “I will say to them: ‘We’ve talked about prepositional phrases and how they add detail. Now let’s think about how you might add some detail to this writing, and whether a prepositional phrase would be a good tool for that.’”





Students can do that either while they're composing or while they're revising. "They can look back at what they've written and say: 'Hey, maybe this part needs a little more detail,'" he adds. "Then there's that authentic connection, that authentic application to their own work—which is exactly what is missing in a worksheet-based approach."

This strategy helps to address what Mayville refers to as the Matthew Effect, a social phenomenon based on the Biblical maxim that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

"When kids fail early at reading and writing, they begin to dislike reading, and then they read less than their classmates who are stronger readers," she says. "It's the same way with grammar. When students have the opportunity to practice their skills, they're going to get better at them."

Beyond the basics of reading and writing, Mayville points to other classroom strategies that teachers can use to build up students' grammar skills.

## FORMS OF FEEDBACK



Rather than learn grammar solely from classroom instruction (and correction), students can sharpen their linguistic chops by collaborating with their peers. The point of language, after all, is to communicate. In that case, the litmus test of success is the effectiveness of that communication.

"As a student, my assignment might be to write a piece [that] explains something to my classmates," says Mayville. "My teacher can work with me and say: 'Well, I didn't

understand what you've meant here, how can you rewrite?' But more importantly, the children in the classroom can give feedback. They can ask questions, and that helps the child to construct their own knowledge about grammar. It helps them to better construct meaning, using those grammatical principles."

Basic instruction still plays a key role: students should be taught the grammatical terms. Once they've got the fundamentals, though, real-time reaction is key to bringing those lessons to life.

"As we're doing these productive learning tasks, students are taking in that information and exploring how it works—not just how sentence structure is organized, but how it helps them to communicate," Mayville explains. To close the loop and drive the lesson home, "they need timely and explicit feedback. The explicit instruction and the feedback need to go hand in hand."

This in turn helps to support another pedagogic tool that Mayville refers to as "engaged learning," the idea that kids learn by doing. "When they are engaged—when they are writing and speaking and getting feedback on that, they are using different parts of their brain," she adds.

And it's worth noting that "feedback," while it may carry the suggestion of critique, does not have to be grounded in criticism. Feedback can be a positive, energetic, and even fun experience.

"If I'm working with small children on reading, we would do something called reader's theater," Mayville says. "Kids read the same thing over and over, like they're practicing a play. When they make a mistake, their peers can correct them. 'No, no, there's a comma there, you're supposed to pause.' The child integrates that, and now they're engaged in the learning, they're giggling."

## MULTICULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

In considering K-12 grammar, there's a current strain of thought that says teachers need to take into account the multicultural nature of their classrooms. By acknowledging the diversity of language as it's used in real life, they honor the children's lived experiences.

"We need to think about the child who was raised in a different linguistic structure, as we try to translate that to learning grammar in English," Mayville explains.

We're not just talking about those learning English as a second language. Mayville herself is Southern and prone

to the occasional “y’all”—grammatically incorrect, but effective in her social milieu. She says there’s room for that in the classroom, just as there ought to be room for the grammatical variations among kids who come from other strong linguistic traditions.

Goodwin acknowledges this point can be controversial. Some might see it as giving kids free rein to use whatever “alternate grammar” strikes their fancy, when the point of school is to teach them the “right” way to do it. But in fact, she says, acknowledging the variations simply recognizes the reality on the ground, and it helps to forge the kind of mutually respectful relationship that empowers kids to acquire a range of skills.

“In this time of racial-injustice reckoning, we need to ask: ‘Whose grammar are we holding up, and whose grammar are we teaching in schools?’” Goodwin says. “We don’t want to say: ‘This is the only grammar that works.’ We want to say that for this *particular purpose*, we’re going to be using this grammar. But we can talk about it along with all the various linguistic resources that kids bring to school.”

What does this look like in practice? Much of it has to do with conversations about context.

“For example, we can say: ‘This is the grammar that we use in this particular writing activity.’ But we can also point to authors like Zora Neale Hurston who bring in dialects as part of their really beautiful storytelling,” Goodwin suggests.

Rather than insist on schoolbook grammar as the only way forward, it can be valid and even helpful to acknowledge that there isn’t just one type of grammar in our society. Rather, there is grammar *for a purpose*.

“If you listen to music, even if you read books, you’ll see various grammars really elevated and celebrated,” says Goodwin. “We can also elevate and celebrate those multiple grammars, those multiple linguistic resources, within our schools. One way of opening kids up to learning grammar is by first honoring what they bring.”

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**ADAM STONE** is a seasoned journalist with 20+ years’ experience. He covers education, technology, government and the military, along with diverse other topics.



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# Sign Language Apps

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## [THE ASL APP](#)

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Learn conversational ASL with this easy-to-use app. It comes with tons of signs and phrases, all of which are accompanied by videos that can be slowed down for easier viewing. The ASL alphabet, numbers, and basic phrases are available for free. Users can purchase additional bundles for \$1.39 each or purchase the entire pack for \$13.99, giving them access to over 1600 signs. Be sure to also check out the kids' version: [ASL with Care Bears](#).





### ASL KIDS

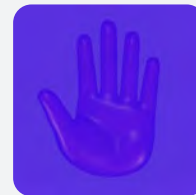
Free – iOS, Android, Website



This app functions primarily as a sign language dictionary, designed to teach children how to sign a variety of kid-friendly words and phrases. Kids can browse through 6 categories of sign language words, such as Animals, Emotions, and Family, or even take a quiz to test their knowledge of different signs. The ASL Kids app also shows the handshapes for each letter of the ASL alphabet, a technique known as “fingerspelling.”

### FINGERSPELLING

Free – Website



Fingerspelling is an online app developed by the American Society for Deaf Children to help kids and their parents learn the ASL alphabet. The app uses a computer’s webcam to track hand movements, giving a user instant feedback on their fingerspelling techniques as they work through each of the app’s four different levels.

### HANDS ON ASL

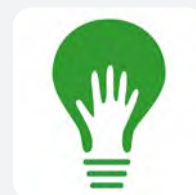
Free – iOS, Android



Students can learn to fingerspell with the help of this app’s interactive ASL alphabet. Hands On ASL utilizes a 3D model that can be rotated or magnified to show all angles of a handshape. Users can then practice their fingerspelling by trying out several quizzes, which range in difficulty from Easy to Extreme.

### SIGNSCHOOL

Free – iOS, Android, Website



Through video-based learning material and interactive exercises, users can learn ASL at their own pace with the help of this innovative resource. The SignSchool app includes an extensive dictionary, as well as pictures of the ASL alphabet and basic numbers. Users can also browse through a wide variety of topics, from Food, Geography, and Sports, to School and Health Care. The website includes additional resources, such as lessons to practice ASL comprehension, guides on how to pair signs with facial expressions, and even games to help users improve their fingerspelling skills. Note that SignSchool is available for [classrooms](#) as well.



# Keeping It Old School: The Retro Arcade Project

By John Burrows

PLAY





ver the course of my sixteen years of teaching, I've taught classes in art, photography, and AV. For the last three years I've been running the graphic design courses at JB Hensler College and Career Academy (JBH) in Texas. I often assign projects to my students that involve designing logos, t-shirts, and stickers; illustrating scenes from books; or using posters to tell stories of their favorite vacations. While those can be lots of fun, one of my favourite things to do is collaborate with other teachers and classes, especially of different subjects. I've always found that collaborating with multiple classes allows students from diverse backgrounds and varied skill sets to contribute as equals towards a meaningful and common goal.

In the past, I have organized projects with construction, cosmetology, and barbering classes, as well as with health science and vet tech students. Sometimes those projects were based around student-to-student partnerships, other times they involved collaboration between entire classes. Students have worked together to create skateboards, marketing materials and business branding, and even customized scrubs. Some of those projects were successes and some of them were not, as occasionally collaborative projects can end up being driven by one dominant group. But they were all learning experiences and I always look forward to the next one.

Using what I had learned, I wanted to design a new project that could be more about classes working together, communicating, and listening to each other. It needed to be

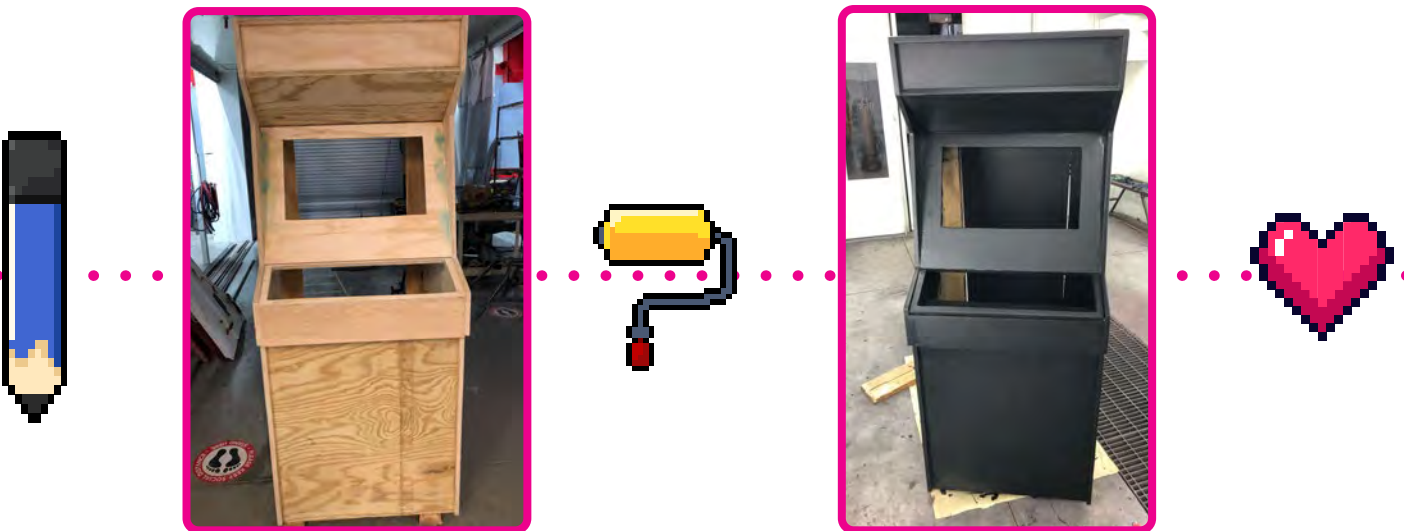
a project that couldn't be dictated by any one class. Around that time, I'd been considering building a personal arcade cabinet for my own home. When I started researching what was involved—required hardware, construction logistics, exterior design, etc.—I realized that all of the skills needed to pull this off could be found within the different subjects of study at JBH. The idea for my next collaborative (and ambitious) project was born.

### GETTING STARTED

I began by presenting my plan to the school's principal during a casual conversation. JBH focuses on teaching our students hands-on skills so he was very enthusiastic and supportive about the project.

The next step was determining what classes should be included besides my own, graphic design. We needed to build the cabinet, so that integrated the construction class. When I shared the idea with our construction teachers, they were intrigued but needed a little more information. However, after I showed them some examples and explained their part of the project, they were all on board. I did the same thing with our computer IT teacher, knowing the computer students would be needed to do the programming for the cabinet, and it was a done deal.

Those three classes formed the base group for the project, but as things progressed we soon needed more help. That's when we added collision repair to do the wood







finishes and painting, as well as the legal studies class to make sure we were proceeding correctly. None of these classes had actively worked together on anything before but the teachers were all determined to make it happen.

### THE PROCESS

Each of us presented the idea to our students and then immediately started planning. We determined what materials we needed and how much everything was going to cost. Luckily, we had almost everything that would be required onsite already. Construction had the wood, IT had the raspberry pi (a micro-sized computer used to teach programming), and graphic design had the vinyl we were going to use. But we still had to buy several items, like the arcade buttons, wheels, memory card, and paint.

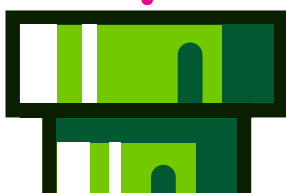
My class started discussing design ideas for the cabinet right away, and one of the initial questions that came up involved what images we could use in our designs that wouldn't violate copyright laws. This naturally raised even more questions about what games we could legally add to the machine. Already we'd hit our first major hang-up.

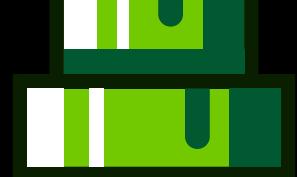
Thankfully, the legal studies program at school was happy to get involved. I don't know if you've ever looked into copyright law, but it is a massive subject and the students in the legal studies class jumped right into the deep end. They reached out to each group and got the build plans, what equipment the information technology class was using, and what potential designs my class was working on. And while graphic design was working with the law students, IT began meeting with the construction students to talk about the specific components of the arcade unit, to make sure that everything would fit together properly.

In one form or another, the classes talked with each other almost daily about the project, checking in, offering positive support, and working together to solve any issues that came up. Some of those issues included: how to move the cabinet, how to preserve the wood finish, and the reality that only a small selection of old games could be put on the cabinet due to legal constraints.

But once most of the problems had been addressed, the rest of the project was all about students using the skills they had been learning throughout the year to create something they were proud of. Construction built it, collision repair finished it, graphic design decorated it, and IT installed their hardware on it.

All of the classes were really pleased with the final product, and had a fun time taking pictures with the cabinet, playing its retro-style games, and taking it around the school so other classes could try it out as well. As for us teachers, we were thrilled to see our students' hard work pay off in such a complete way.



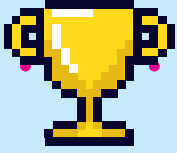


What's next for this project? The students are excited to try different arcade cabinet designs (they've already talked about trying to create a car and a table top version). And next year another school will be creating games in their computer programming class that will go on the machines we make.

## REFLECTION

As part of our own work after the arcade cabinet was completed, the teachers interviewed students from each program to see what they thought about the project, from beginning to end. The students had nothing but positive reactions. One statement that really stuck with me came from one of the IT students: "I loved completing this project. When they told us about the idea, I was super excited but I thought it was going to be another cool project that we start but never finish, like so many other school projects." Another student said they really enjoyed working with students from different classes that they'd never met before and would otherwise never have gotten to interact with.





In the “real world” people from a variety of skillsets often collaborate together on projects. But in schools, students don’t usually have that opportunity. I’m so proud to have been able to offer that interdisciplinary experience for our students. Not only did they create an incredible final product, but they demonstrated the true power of collaboration and how it can harness the unique creativity of each individual student. Although chaotic at times, all of the time and energy invested by the teachers and students really paid off and has encouraged me to continue creating these collaborative activities in the future.

JOHN BURROWS has been teaching for 16 years and is always looking for new ways to get students engaged. He strongly encourages his students to explore their own creativity and find their voice.



This project would not have been possible without help from the following people. Thank you for your hard work to bring this collaborative experience to life: Principal Kyle Kettler, Construction teachers Larry Salinas & Sergio Cantu, IT teacher Mark Maulding, Collision Repair teacher Scott Pollard, and Legal Studies teacher Jeffrey Morrison.







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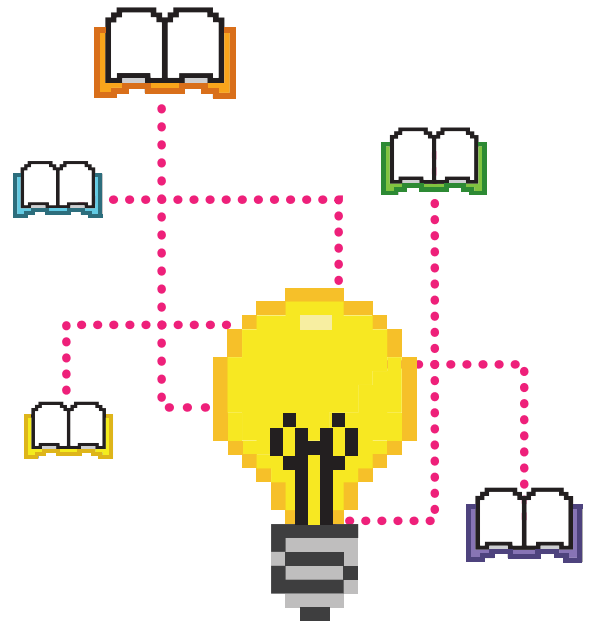


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This is not easily achieved, says Cassie Tabrizi, CEO of educational consultancy, Create-abilities. "It can be incredibly easy to treat lesson planning like a checklist. Objective check. Standards check. Activity check," she says. Education experts 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 Rosanna 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 37 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 tie-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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