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# TEACH

EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW



**WHEN LEARNING GETS ITCHY:  
EMBRACING THE LESSONS  
OF OUTDOOR TEACHING**

**EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES  
FOR NAVIGATING TOUGH  
PARENT CONVERSATIONS**

# NOTES

After a long and dreary winter, warmer weather is right around the corner, bringing with it a renewed desire to lace up those shoes (bye bye, boots!) and head outside. Spending time outdoors has been proven to [boost mental and physical health](#), while also improving our connection to the natural world. In the midst of a [global biodiversity crisis](#), it is more important than ever to recognize and appreciate the value of nature and the many ways it protects and sustains us. Unfortunately, as [urban green spaces disappear](#) and kids spend [less and less time outside](#), this is leading to a disconnect with nature. Throughout this issue, we aim to offer the first steps to remedy the situation and help students re-build that relationship.

But first, writer Fiona Tapp looks at another important relationship—the one between parents and teachers. In her article, “Effective Strategies for Navigating Tough Parent Conversations,” she emphasizes the importance of establishing a connection with parents early on. Delivering disappointing news at a parent-teacher meeting is a necessary task, but often an uncomfortable one. Starting from a strong foundation, however, can make things easier for everyone involved. Check out her article to find plenty of other useful tips as well.

Middle school science teacher Ronak Shah shares the story of a tough conversation he had with parents after an outdoor lesson left his students covered in rashes. Thankfully the reactions cleared up quickly, and rather than turning Shah away from outdoor education, the experience had the opposite effect. Now a fierce advocate of outdoor learning, Shah outlines its many benefits and what educators can do to make it meaningful in his article, “When Learning Gets Itchy.” “As teachers, we have the ability and the responsibility to find ways for students to engage with nature,” Shah notes.

Our Bookstuff column offers a way to keep that nature conversation going. It features a selection of books for elementary and middle-grade readers that address issues of water scarcity and pollution. Share them with students for World Water Day on March 22, or save them to celebrate Earth Day a month later.

If you’re looking for even more ways to celebrate Earth Day, you won’t want to miss this issue’s Field Trips, which looks at a unique outdoor experience for students: flower farms. These colourful trips teach students about plant biology, pollination, and the crucial role flowers play in preserving ecosystem health. Best of all, students will get to learn these lessons while creating floral arrangements, picking bouquets, or participating in other fun floricultural crafts!

In her Classroom Perspectives piece, elementary teacher Sara Shabir tells the story of her own crafting experience, and how she used the crochet skills she gained during COVID to make personalized dolls for each and every one of her students. Her spontaneous passion project took over 200 hours in total, but it was well worth it, she says, to see the smiles on her students’ faces. In her article, “Crafting Connections,” Shabir also offers advice for teachers interested in making heartfelt gifts for their own class.

Lastly, this issue’s Curricula uses a collection of picture books to build an awareness and understanding of residential schools and their long-term impacts on individuals and Canadian culture. Incorporate it into your lessons during June’s National Indigenous History Month, or bookmark it for September in order to get students ready for

the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

See you next time.

**KELSEY MCCALLUM**  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



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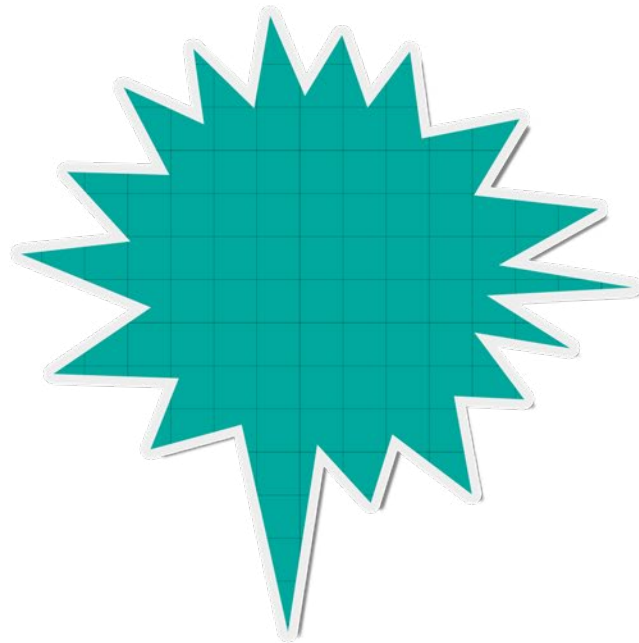
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# EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING TOUGH PARENT CONVERSATIONS

BY FIONA TAPP



A teacher's job is made easier through collaboration. This can be with school administration, other educators, and professionals like speech pathologists and psychologists. One of the most vital partnerships, however, is with parents. By fostering a strong home-school connection, parents can support homework and provide insights about their child, while teachers can share classroom strategies for success.

From time to time, teachers might meet a difficult parent who doesn't want to work with them or who may be combative or even violent. A recent survey of Alberta teachers found that [50% of teachers](#) (and 75% of school leaders) had experienced aggression in their work environment within the first three months of the school year.

This is a growing problem across the country: another study by the Canadian Teachers' Federation found between [41-90% of surveyed teachers](#), across different provinces, had experienced or witnessed violence against teachers from students or parents. The situation isn't much better in the States. A [report](#) from the American Psychological Association found that nearly 30% of teachers and over 40% of administrators experienced violence or aggressive behaviour from parents during the 2020/2021 school year.

In the face of these statistics, it's normal to feel a little apprehensive about meeting with parents, especially if you have to deliver disappointing news about a student's behaviour, schoolwork, or grades.



## TIPS FOR MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS

Thankfully, there are many proven strategies for diffusing tense situations. Read on for expert-backed advice and tips on how to have difficult conversations with parents and resolve conflict in your classroom peacefully.

### ESTABLISH AN OPEN LINE OF COMMUNICATION EARLY ON

The best way to manage tricky conversations with parents is to start from a strong foundation. “Planting seeds right from the start and throughout the year is helpful,” says [Dr. Caroline Buzanko](#), a Calgary-based psychologist and assistant professor at Athabasca University who specializes in helping children and teens with anxiety and ADHD. “The stronger the working alliance, the easier it is to have these tough conversations.”

Keep the lines of communication open and regularly share news from the classroom, including rules and expectations, projects the students are working on, and small wins along the way.

### PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

Come ready to the meeting with all your notes, test results, examples of work, and any incident reports, but be sure to also prepare yourself by taking some deep breaths or expending some pent-up energy by running on the spot or doing a few jumping jacks.

Buzanko says that it’s normal for educators to feel apprehensive about a potentially difficult meeting and that preparation can make all the difference. “If we think of the upcoming conversation as a challenge [instead of a threat],” she explains, “our brain will release more energizing hormones (e.g. adrenaline) to help us prepare, versus stress hormones (e.g. cortisol). Just acknowledging this shift can help.”

### FOCUS ON FACTS AND SOLUTIONS

Parents are bound to feel defensive about receiving any criticism of their child—even if that criticism is fair—so Buzanko highlights the importance of stating objective facts rather than opinions. “Take note of specific examples of the concern you would like to raise,” she advises. “Write them down so you can make sure you anchor the conversation and address the key points (and not get caught up in emotion).”

Clearly describe the issues you are seeing in school without emotion or judgment, for example:

“I’ve realized that your child has missed several assignments over the past month, which has impacted their overall grade.”

“I’ve noticed that your child struggles to stay focused during group activities.”

“I’ve seen that your child tends to interrupt during class discussions.”

Using “I” language is important in expressing your thoughts and feelings without sounding accusatory or confrontational. Instead of placing blame, it encourages open and constructive dialogue. For example, instead of saying: “Your child is always disruptive in class,” try: “I’ve noticed that your child sometimes has trouble staying focused during lessons, and I’m concerned about how it affects their learning. I’d love to work together to find strategies that help.”

### STAY CALM AND PROFESSIONAL

[Shelly Qualtieri](#) is a Canadian registered social worker with expertise in providing therapy for issues like conflict

resolution, anxiety, depression, trauma, and more. She explains that what may seem like difficult behaviour from parents is often rooted in anxiety, frustration, or a strong commitment to advocate for their child. “Recognizing this can help teachers approach conversations with empathy rather than being defensive,” she says.

Keep the conversation brief, Buzanko advises: “The killer to effective communication is talking, so we want to minimize how much we talk. It’s easy to get stuck on the challenges but we want the meeting to be productive, so always keep the conversation going towards where you’d like to go.”

If things do become heated, be careful not to match the energy you receive or to mirror back parents’ emotions. “Stress is contagious!” Buzanko notes. “If you need to step out for a quick break to help create some time or space, do so. No matter what, stay calm and maintain professionalism.”

Involve a senior teacher or administrator if needed and keep detailed written documentation of interactions for accountability.

### LISTEN ACTIVELY AND VALIDATE CONCERNS

Qualtieri says it’s important to make sure you are actively listening during meetings. “Acknowledging concerns without immediately countering them can de-escalate situations,” she explains. “Simple phrases like ‘I hear your concerns,’ and ‘I want to work together to find a solution’ can shift the conversation from confrontation to collaboration.”

Ask the parents if they have experienced these same behaviours/attitudes/issues at home. For example:

“Have you noticed similar behaviours or attitudes at home?”

“How does your family handle situations like this outside of school?”

While children may behave differently at school and at home, parents often have valuable strategies that work in their environment, and their insights can offer helpful solutions that might not be immediately apparent in the classroom.

Parents may also share information that you didn’t know about, such as incidents of bullying or health issues, so be prepared to pivot and focus on solutions. Remember that parents are experts on their children.

### KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE STUDENT

“There is a good chance everyone is bracing themselves for a battle. So, we want to always come to the conversation from a strengths-based perspective,” Buzanok says. “Identify where the student does well ... and add what you appreciate most about them—that little note can really help set a nice tone.”

This preamble helps bring parents onside and shows that you haven’t just turned up with a list of complaints. It is also important for educators to remind themselves consciously of the student’s positive traits. Don’t focus so much on “solving the problem” that you lose sight of the student as a whole—someone with strengths and challenges who is deeply valued by their family.

### FOLLOW UP WITH AN ACTION PLAN

End the meeting with a clear plan of action, outlining what the student will work on, what you as the teacher will do to support them, and what the parents can do at home to reinforce progress. Set a specific timeline for follow-up so parents aren’t left hanging. This collaborative approach ensures everyone is aligned and committed to helping the student succeed.

Here’s an example of what this kind of action plan could look like:

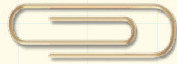
**Student’s Responsibility:** The student will complete their late assignment by the end of the week.

**Teacher’s Responsibility:** The teacher will provide additional support during class.

**Parent’s Responsibility:** Parents will help create a quiet, focused space at home for study time.

**Follow-up:** A follow-up meeting will be scheduled in two weeks to assess progress and adjust strategies as needed.

Afterward, especially if the meeting was tense or difficult, allow parents time to digest the information and then follow up with your agreed-upon action plan. Remind them that you are all on the same side—you all want to best support the student's learning.



As part of caring for your own emotional well-being, Qualtieri encourages teachers to remember that “Dealing with difficult interactions can be emotionally draining. Seeking peer support, setting firm boundaries, and focusing on positive relationships with other parents can help maintain balance.”

Handling difficult conversations with parents can be an opportunity to strengthen relationships and support student success. Remaining calm and listening actively can help keep conversations productive, allowing both sides to focus on solutions rather than conflict. Set clear expectations, follow up as needed, and document key points to ensure everyone—including parents, students, fellow educators, and school administration—is all on the same page. By setting a positive tone and working collaboratively, you can turn tough conversations into productive partnerships.



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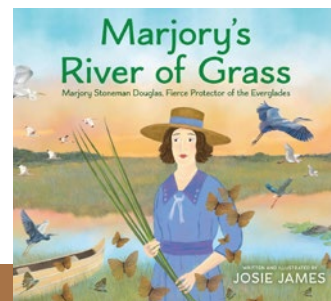
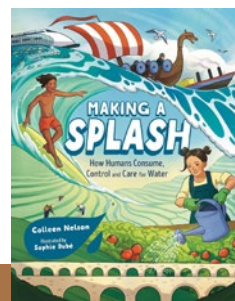
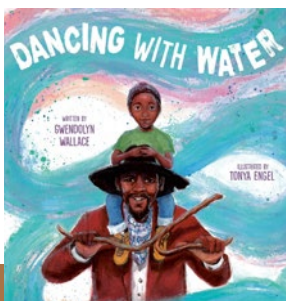
**FIONA TAPP** is a former teacher and school administrator of 13 years. She writes about education, parenting, and travel for a variety of publications including *National Geographic*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Sunday Times*, and many more.





# 9 BOOKS TO READ FOR WORLD WATER DAY AND BEYOND

World Water Day is celebrated annually on March 22, in an effort to raise awareness of water scarcity and the global water crisis. Often many of us take water availability for granted—just a turn of the tap and it's right at our fingertips. But did you know that [more than one quarter](#) of the world's population lacks access to safe water (including a number of communities in both [Canada](#) and the [United States](#))? Remedying this issue is one of the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) to achieve by the year 2030. To get your students thinking about the value of water, we've handpicked a collection of new children's books that will surely make a splash in your classroom or library this World Water Day—and every day after that, inspiring them to make every drop count!



## 1 DANCING WITH WATER

BY GWENDOLYN WALLACE,  
ILLUSTRATED BY TONYA ENGEL  
.....

*Kokila (August 2025)*

**Grade Level: K-2**

This picture book tells the intergenerational story of a nonbinary child who is taught the tradition of well digging from their grandfather. Young readers who follow along will learn about the importance of clean water and why it must be protected.

## 2 MAGIC IN A DROP OF WATER

BY JULIE WINTERBOTTOM,  
ILLUSTRATED BY SUSAN  
REAGAN  
.....

*Rocky Pond Books*

*(March 2025)*

**Grade Level: K-3**

This STEM picture book illustrates the life and research of ecologist Ruth Patrick, who made a breakthrough discovery about river ecosystems that forever changed how scientists view the problem of pollution.

## 3 MAKING A SPLASH: HOW HUMANS

**CONSUME, CONTROL AND CARE FOR WATER** BY COLLEEN NELSON,  
ILLUSTRATED BY SOPHIE DUBÉ  
.....

*Orca Book Publishers (May 2025)*

**Grade Level: 4-7**

Students can learn more about the important role water has played throughout history and what its future looks like by reading this middle-grade non-fiction text. They'll also be introduced to a variety of inventions that are improving equity and access to water, as well as the people around the world who are fighting to protect it.







**4 MARJORY'S RIVER OF GRASS**

BY JOSIE JAMES

.....

*Christy Ottaviano Books (April 2025)*

**Grade Level: K-3**

Through this picture book biography, young readers will discover how Marjory Stoneman Douglas, environmental journalist and conservationist, fought to preserve the Florida Everglades—a diverse wetland system that was once regarded as a useless swamp. Backmatter includes inspiring quotes from Marjory, along with actions that readers can take to help protect our world's most precious resource: water.

**5 RIVERKEEPER: PROTECTING AN AMERICAN RIVER**

BY NANCY F. CASTALDO

.....

*Holiday House (April 2025)*

**Grade Level: 5-7**

This middle-grade resource introduces readers to a group of environmental activists who founded the organization Riverkeeper in order to clean up the polluted Hudson River. Nancy Castaldo's informative text offers both a history of one of America's first environmental movements, and a guide for how individuals and groups can conserve and clean up their own local waterways.

**6 TALLULAH THE MERMAID AND THE GREAT LAKES PLEDGE**

BY DENISE BRENNAN-NELSON,

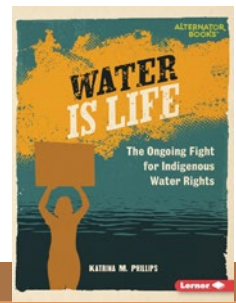
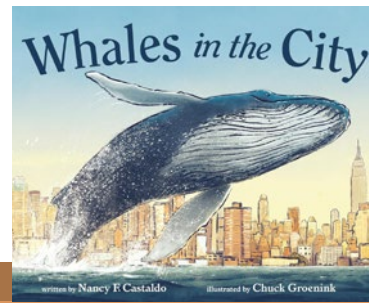
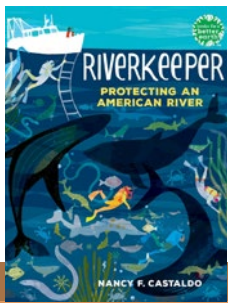
ILLUSTRATED BY BROOKE O'NEILL

.....

*Sleeping Bear Press (March 2025)*

**Grade Level: K-3**

Tallulah is the first official mermaid of the Great Lakes. She's ready to get to work taking care of the creatures who live in its waters and keeping the lakes safe and clean, but it's a big job to handle all by herself. She could certainly use some help! Backmatter includes information about how readers can become honorary mermaids and do their part to protect the Great Lakes too.



**7 THE GIRL WHO TESTED THE WATERS: ELLEN SWALLOW, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST**

BY PATRICIA DANIELE,

ILLUSTRATED BY JUNYI WU

.....

*MIT Kids Press (February 2025)*

**Grade Level: K-2**

This eye-opening biography tells the story of Ellen Swallow, the first female student at MIT. A fierce advocate for healthy environments and a pioneer of the field of ecology, Ellen studied Boston's polluted water systems and made a discovery that would drastically change how we think about clean water today.

**8 WHALES IN THE CITY**

BY NANCY F. CASTALDO, ILLUSTRATED

BY CHUCK GROENINK

.....

*Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books for Young Readers (March 2025)*

**Grade Level: K-2**

*Whales in the City* illustrates the history of whales in New York Harbor: from their prevalence during pre-colonization, to their disappearance due to overfishing and pollution, to their eventual return thanks to a group of concerned citizens who were able to clean up the harbour. This environmental success story is sure to uplift budding activists, conservationists, and marine biologists alike.

**9 WATER IS LIFE: THE ONGOING FIGHT FOR INDIGENOUS WATER RIGHTS**

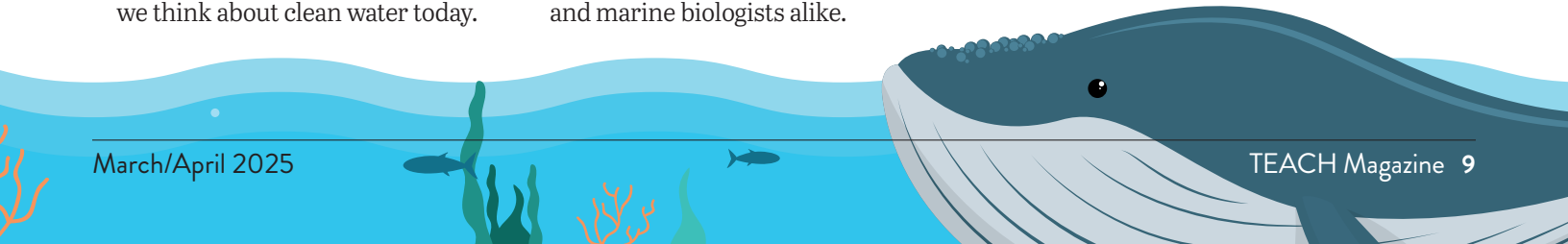
BY KATRINA M. PHILLIPS

.....

*Lerner Publications (January 2025)*

**Grade Level: 3-6**

Many Indigenous peoples across America have to fight for access to clean water, all because of a history of relocation and resettlement that forced them from their ancestral homelands and sacred water sources. This non-fiction text introduces middle-grade readers to that history, while also exploring the ways Indigenous peoples are standing up for their water rights today.



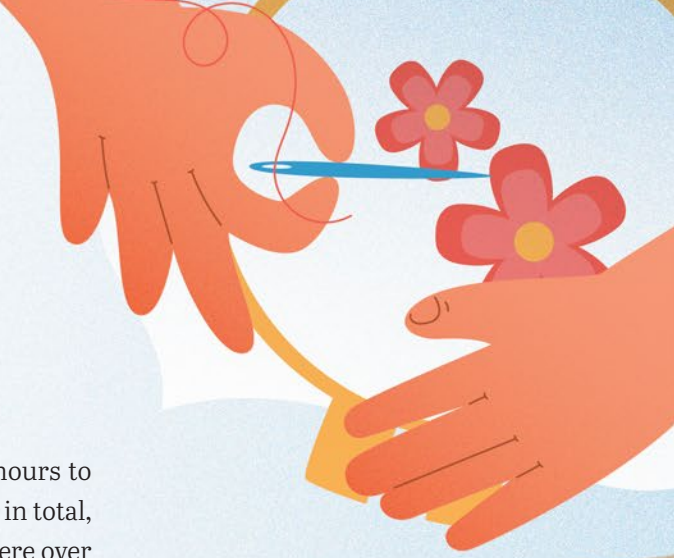
# CRAFTING CONNECTIONS: A TEACHER'S HEARTFELT GIFT

BY SARA SHABIR

*We often hear about students surprising their teachers with end-of-year gifts, but we recently spoke with a U.K. educator whose creativity gave that tradition a delightful twist. She decided to share her hidden talent for crocheting by creating unique handmade gifts for all of her students. Each one was personalized, reflecting her dedication to making her students feel special as they wrapped up the school year. Curious as to her inspiration, we asked her to share some more details about the process.*

I am a primary school teacher from East Oxford, and last year I crocheted a “mini-me” of each child in my class as an end-of-year gift. The idea started on a whim. I taught myself to crochet during the COVID lockdown and have been finding ways to push myself further and build my skills ever since. But once I actually got to work, it turned into a bit of a passion project. I adored my class and really wanted to do something exciting and special for them.





There were 30 children in my class, and each doll took about 8 hours to make. My little passion project ended up taking me around 240 hours in total, but it was worth every second to see the children's reactions. They were over the moon when they received their dolls! All of them were very thankful and appreciative, and they actually walked around the school with their dolls for the rest of the day!

Looking to make a craft or small gift for your own students? Here are some tips:

- ✂ Utilise your skills and hobbies. Pottery, sewing, origami, woodwork, etc.
- ✂ Start creating early in the year, to make sure that you'll have enough time.
- ✂ Consider how the child might use the item. Will it be something they can keep for a long time? Is it purposeful?
- ✂ Make them feel special and show how well you know them by personalising the item.
- ✂ Handwrite any cards/messages and add a specific memory you have of that child. This will make them feel valued.



**SARA SHABIR** is a primary school teacher in Oxford. She taught herself to crochet during the COVID lockdown.



# WHEN LEARNING GETS ITCHY: EMBRACING THE LESSONS OF OUTDOOR TEACHING

BY RONAK SHAH


*An outdoor lesson made my students sick.  
It changed the way I teach.*



**H**ere in Indiana, we only get a few weeks of nice weather between the spring showers and the swampy summer, so I try to squeeze in as many outdoor lessons with my middle school science class as I can. Unfortunately, the school I worked at a few years ago had little greenspace beyond playgrounds and a field. There was a treeline at the edge of the property that could pass for a forest, however, so I decided to take students there for a taxonomy lesson.

Rocks, flowers, and branches carry such variety that students can write essays, take measurements, and make inferences with just a single object. For this lesson, I asked students to find a leaf, make a rubbing, categorize its form, and identify the plant it came from. Simple tasks like these can generate surprising insights, and I was eager to see what they would come up with.

Before beginning the lesson, I showed students a map of the search area, gave a timeframe for each step, and



identified a gathering point to meet once time was up. After checking for understanding, we marched outside and students fanned out to bushes and trees. It was incredible to watch them locate leaves and realize how diverse they were—the giant fronds of burdock, the narrow stalk of a spring onion, and everything between.

Three classes went by without any issues. But just ten minutes into my fourth, to my horror, I heard the words every teacher dreads:

“Mr. Shah, I’m getting really itchy.”

I had combed the area ahead of time for poison ivy and found none, and since it was just one student, I hoped it was in their head. “Try not to scratch. It’ll pass!” I assured them.

But all too soon, one voice became two, then six. Arms reddening, legs covered in hives, middle school faces transformed from fascination into frustrated discomfort.

I had to act fast. I rushed my class inside, wet some paper towels, and had students cover their rashes to cool them. I contacted parents, flagged my principal, and got consent to try an antihistamine lotion—but the nurse didn’t have any. So I found someone to watch over my class, then hustled to the nearest pharmacy and back, Caladryl in tow.

The kids slathered it on, and then...we waited. Minutes felt like hours, but it worked. The rashes began to fade.

I slept tensely that night, faulting myself and anxious that the hives would return. Thankfully the next day, my students were back at school, rash-free. They didn’t blame me, and they begged me to take them outside again.

But I was wracked with guilt. What did I miss? I sifted again through the area where we were working, looking for anything that could trigger an allergic reaction. Stinging nettle? Brambles? Nothing.


I noticed something else, though. Virtually every species growing was invasive. Amur honeysuckle, white mulberry, garlic mustard. I came to the realization that the culprit was likely an invasive pollen my students had never come into contact with before.

Climate change drives the [migration of invasive plants](#), whose pollen [triggers stronger allergies](#) than native pollen we are exposed to generationally. The [most welcoming soil](#) for invasives is the asphalt deserts near where my school was located. It’s no coincidence that half of my students had [some form of asthma](#) or environmental allergies.

You’d think that after this experience, I’d be done teaching outside. But I came to the opposite conclusion. Students

need to be allowed outside *more* often, and beyond just the playground—especially in areas where schools are the only greenspace.

Here are some steps that teachers can take to support outdoor learning across the educational landscape.



## 1. GET OUTSIDE

The first step is guaranteeing a minimum amount of time outdoors. Early exposure to nature is not only [good teaching](#), but makes students [healthier](#) and more confident. Playing in mud and being exposed to biodiverse pollen makes for much [stronger immune systems](#).

In fact, the CDC recommends all schools offer at least [20 minutes](#) of recess a day. But only [ten states](#) actually require this, usually just for [elementary grades](#). Kids spend [less time outside](#) than they used to, with harmful impacts on [physical and mental health](#).



But teachers can still get kids outside without changing our scope and sequence. Students are great readers under a tree, and a clipboard is all you need to write in the garden or practice math on the lawn. Find a place outside that you can hear clearly and see well. Select an already established routine and pick a day in the week that has predictably good weather. Then, explain to your students that you’re going to try that part of the lesson outside, and set guidelines together. Treat the first time like practice, with ample feedback about how they’re meeting your expectations.

When I first started outdoor education, it was challenging, and felt unstructured. I had to internalize that being outside was a right, not a privilege. After I did it once, however, I was able to ratchet the frequency and duration to my comfort level, and adjust my procedures as needed. You can do the same.

## 2. GIVE IT MEANING

Second, we should collaborate to make outdoor learning purposeful. I took my students outside again a week after the hives incident. This time, I planned an archaeology lesson with our social studies teacher, tying in the geological concept of superposition.

We dug through a debris pile of old bricks where construction workers were going to lay turf, and after ten minutes, brought our evidence inside. We then analyzed old maps of the area. Students were amazed to discover that our staff parking lot used to be a road that crossed a canal we didn't even know was still there.

Outdoor instruction can address many learning goals. Consider introducing “author’s purpose”—what an author wants the reader to understand—by analyzing traffic signs, teaching angles by creating sundials, or transcribing birdsong in music class.



## 3. TAKE A STAND

Even at schools with quality greenspaces, however, teachers are unsure where to start, and administrators often discourage outdoor instruction. My previous school was no exception—the following year, my administration prohibited outdoor lessons without prior approval, and when my colleagues asked, they were denied. At the same time, many schools have cut recess in favor of indoor academic instruction, particularly at lower-income schools.



Educators must advocate for the instructional power of outdoor lessons in our schools. And we should elevate students to join us in this advocacy. As teachers, we expose them to observations, curate informative texts, task them to draw inferences, and cultivate the strength of their voice through writing and feedback.

When my school moved to prohibit outdoor learning, my students were devastated, but we found a way to make an academic case. I worked with the math teacher to develop a project where student teams would compete for a build contract to design a garden shed. The project integrated many challenging math standards—calculating surface area, scaling fractions, creating models, and budgeting materials. But students engaged with each challenge willingly because the task was worthwhile. They also regularly spoke to school leaders about how excited they would be to authentically implement their plans. Thanks to their advocacy, we were permitted to take our learning outside once more.

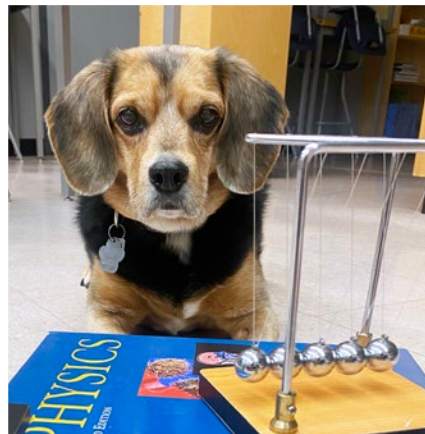
Every student learns better with an encounter than a worksheet. It's thrilling, enriching, and fun. As teachers, we have the ability and the responsibility to find ways for students to engage with nature. It may be a bit scary, but I promise it's well worth the courage.



**RONAK SHAH** is a middle school science teacher in Indianapolis, and has been for twelve years. He is also a Senior Writing Fellow with Teach Plus. His writing has been published in *Education Week*, *Indianapolis Business Journal*, *Chalkbeat*, *IndyStar*, and *The Hechinger Report*. His instruction has been featured in *The Washington Post* and in the documentary *Food First*.

# MEET THE LATEST TEACHER'S PET!

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



**Layla** | 15y | Beagle Cross  
Location: British Columbia, Canada  
Parent: Corrie W.

*Intelligent, Soft, Ruled by her nose and stomach*



**Mardi & Lundi** | 1y | American Shorthair  
Location: Louisiana, USA  
Parent: Chelsea C.

*Overactive, Endearing, Affectionate*



**Emma** | 9y | Schnauzer/Poodle Mix  
Location: Texas, USA  
Parent: Maryanne S.

*Precious, Gentle, Loving*



**Sugar** | 2y  
Syrian Hamster  
Location: Ontario, Canada  
Parent: Marilena M.

*Washes her hands before she eats, Picks up any food from the floor of her cage and puts it back in the bowl before eating*



# FLOWER FARMS AND GARDENS

Embark on an enchanting adventure this spring by taking your students to a local floral haven. These floriculture-based field trips present a perfect opportunity for children to delve into the marvels of nature, exploring plant biology, pollination, and ecosystems through the vibrant language of flowers. Each experience also uncovers the vital role that flowers play in preserving biodiversity and ecosystem health. As a bonus, kids get to learn these lessons while creating unique bouquets or participating in other fun floral activities. Check out the following list of farms, gardens, and conservatories across Canada and the United States that are sure to have your students blooming with excitement!

## BIRCHWOOD MEADOWS

Sturgeon County, AB

Workshops at Birchwood Meadows will be starting up again soon. From mid-June through to December, students can participate in a number of unforgettable experiences at this bustling flower farm. Whether they're immersing themselves in the magic of stunning scenery with a guided tour, or diving into an educational and interactive workshop, there's plenty of excitement to be had! Depending on the season, you and your class could be creating lush flower arrangements, terrariums, wreaths, or planter inserts. Get ready for a day filled with flower picking, creative arranging, hands-on planting, and delightful crafting while learning all about plant care.

## THE DIRTY BEE FLOWER FARM

West Kelowna, BC

The Dirty Bee is a beautiful place filled with vibrant blooms and blossoms. They offer field trips and class visits for educators and students of all ages, designed to nurture children's love for the environment. Students get to learn about plant life cycles and pollination, while exploring the colours, textures, and fragrances of flowers. The farm can also bring their expertise to your classes, leading interactive lessons and activities tailored to your curriculum and learning objectives.





## **THE FLOWER FIELDS**

**Carlsbad, CA**

If you're seeking a bundle of enriching adventures amidst breathtaking floral landscapes, you're in the right place. Flower Fields offers an array of fun and educational programs from mid-March to early May. Activities range from planting vibrant sunflowers to exploring the fascinating world of bugs and their vital role in the plant lifecycle. Students can also learn about composting, flower dissection, the magic of pollination, and more. Plus, each visit includes a thrilling tractor wagon ride that is sure to captivate every young explorer!

## **REGINA FLORAL CONSERVATORY**

**Regina, SK**

Regina's only indoor tropical garden and floral conservatory offers a learning program for preschool to Grade 8 that closely follows the science curriculum and is tailored to the age and ability of student visitors. Each session is led by a friendly Regina Garden Associate member. The best part? During the one-and-a-half-hour program, students get to explore the wonders of plants, take a tour of the beautiful conservatory, and even choose their own plant cutting to bring home. Teachers are encouraged to book early to ensure their classes can take advantage of this special hands-on gardening experience.

## **UNITED STATES BOTANIC GARDEN**

**Washington, DC**

The U.S. Botanic Garden offers a wide variety of free field trips. You can choose between self-guided exploration, instructor-led lessons, and virtual tours for students of all grade levels. One such lesson focuses on understanding the purpose of flowers and their relationship with pollinators, while another involves using microscopes to see how plants make their own food. Also, don't forget to explore the garden's extensive list of [teacher resources](#)!

## **HORTON'S FLOWER FARM**

**Riverhead, NY**

Horton's offers a unique flower farming experience for young learners by combining creative arts with scientific observation. Through guided field trips led by knowledgeable staff, children can gain insights into the daily operations of a working flower farm and the types of flowers that are grown. Kids will also get to explore the diverse ecosystems within a flower farm, learn about pollinator interactions, and discover plant life cycles. Additionally, they can take part in hands-on activities such as flower arranging, planting seeds, and soil health workshops. Each trip takes between two to three hours and can be customized based on curriculum needs and the ages of the students.

## **VANDUSEN BOTANICAL GARDEN**

**Vancouver, BC**

VanDusen Botanical Garden offers plenty of fun and interactive learning experiences—like the “Fantastic Flowers” program. It teaches kids how to examine the different parts of a flower and understand each part's role in pollination, all while exploring the relationship between pollinators, plants, and food production. Best of all, students get to appreciate the beauty and fragrance of flowers all around VanDusen while learning. They can also observe pollinators in action and gain insight into their essential role in the life cycle of flowering plants by visiting several active beehives.



# INDIGENOUS VOICES:

# Impact of Residential Schools

By Monica Berra



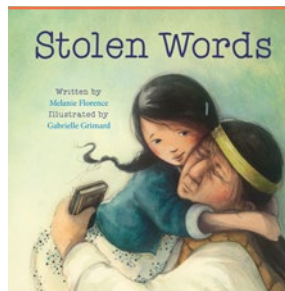
**GRADE LEVEL:**  
MIDDLE (7-10)

**THEME:**  
INDIGENOUS VOICES

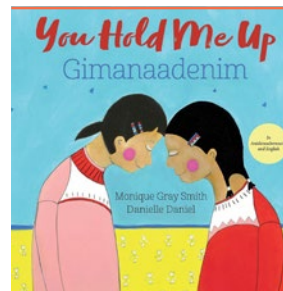
**SUB-THEME:**  
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

NOTE: the choice of books in this lesson allow for differentiation of reading level

## FEATURED BOOKS



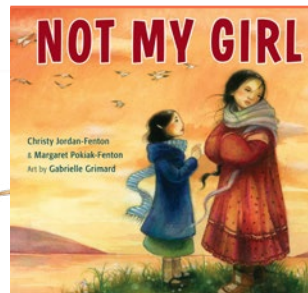
*Stolen Words* by Melanie Florence, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard (Second Story Press, 2017)



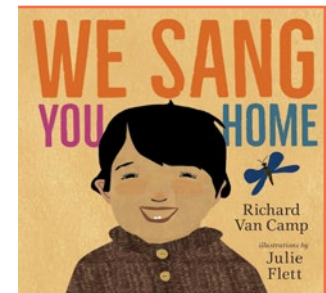
*You Hold Me Up* by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Danielle Daniel (Orca Book Publishers, 2017)



*My Heart Fills With Happiness* by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Julie Flett, translated by Mary Cardinal Collins (Orca Book Publishers, 2021)



*Not My Girl* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard (Annick Press, 2014)



*We Sang You Home* by Richard Van Camp, illustrated by Julie Flett, translated by Mary Cardinal Collins (Orca Book Publishers, 2018)



*The Orange Shirt Story* by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by Brock Nicol (Medicine Wheel Education, 2018)



*Phyllis's Orange Shirt* by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by Brock Nicol (Medicine Wheel Education, 2019)



## LEARNING FOCUS

“Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story” ([First Peoples Principles of Learning](#)). Stories tell us about human nature, motivation, and experience, and often reflect a personal journey or strengthen a sense of identity. They may also be considered the embodiment of collective wisdom.

## LEARNING EXPERIENCE

### MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Share the following quotation with your students:

“The residential school system established for Canada’s Indigenous population in the nineteenth century is one of the darkest, most troubling chapters in our nation’s history.”

*Justice Murray Sinclair, The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 1*

As a whole class work out a definition of the word “value”:

#### **Noun**

1. The principles that help you decide what is right and wrong and how to act in various situations
2. A person’s principles or standards of behaviour, one’s judgement of what is important in life

#### **Verb**

1. To consider or rate highly
2. To rate in usefulness, importance or general worth

Discuss the concept of values. As a class have the students come up with personal and common values that represent their families, school, heritage, community, team, and Canada.

In groups of three or four:

- Encourage students to share how and when they have participated in Orange Shirt Day. Those who have not participated will learn from their peers about this annual event that began in 2013. Connect this conversation back to Justice Murray Sinclair’s quote to put this lesson in a national context.
- On chart paper have students list everything they know about residential schools. This list is open to all prior knowledge. Allow time for reflection and discussion while circulating and asking probing questions. Some students may have opinions like “unfair” and “mean” and these can be added but ask them probing questions to support underlying values to these feelings.



- Analyze and evaluate the list and identify three values. This will take consensus of the group. Students may edit the list at any time. Circle the three values. Students may identify fewer than three values but not more for this lesson. The values may not be clearly articulated at this time but encourage them to find three. Clarity will be developed in the lesson. Have the groups share their three values with the class.

### READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Begin by providing the following statement to learners:



Through storytelling, authors are building awareness and understanding of residential schools and the long-term consequences for individuals and Canadian culture. As an older student, you are mature, and have developed critical thinking skills that allow you to read and reflect and understand that there were values in Canadian culture during the time of residential schools that do not reflect our country's culture today. Your group has identified three values, possibly all about the policies of the Canadian government, or the values of the children and families who went to residential school.

Begin to read *The Orange Shirt Story*. As the story is being read, ask students to look for the three values their group identified. As you read, stop and share your thinking as you identify the values the students listed. This may be the first of two lessons.

Inform students that in groups they are going to read a selection of books that a younger student may read (choose from any of the featured texts). The students will look for one or all three of the values their group identified. The value won't jump off the page—they will have to read each page carefully and discuss how the illustrations support the story. Students should place a sticky note on the page that identifies one of their three values. Notice that the author has thought about values.

### MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Discussion provocations for groups after they have read one of the featured texts:

- If you were to read this story to a younger student, what would you like them to know before reading?
- The story may not mention residential schools but it is about the children who attended. Can you identify the values the author has woven into this story? As the reader can you add further values that are relevant?
- Would you be comfortable reading this story to a younger student?
- Would you recommend this book to a K-3 teacher and what would you want them to know about the values being discussed in the story?

#### **Writing Activity:**

- Recognizing Collective Values (post a class list)
- Send a letter to one of the authors asking questions, describing your feelings, and expressing gratitude for sharing.
- Create a poster for any of the books, identifying values as the focus.





## REFLECT AND CONNECT

Continue to discuss values as the year progresses. What we value we become, so it is important to identify what we value.



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

- [“K-3 Indigenous Literature for Classroom Use”](#) (Empowering the Spirit)
- [“10 Beautiful Indigenous Children’s Books To Add To Your Library”](#) (CBC Parents)



## ADAPTATIONS FOR THIS LESSON

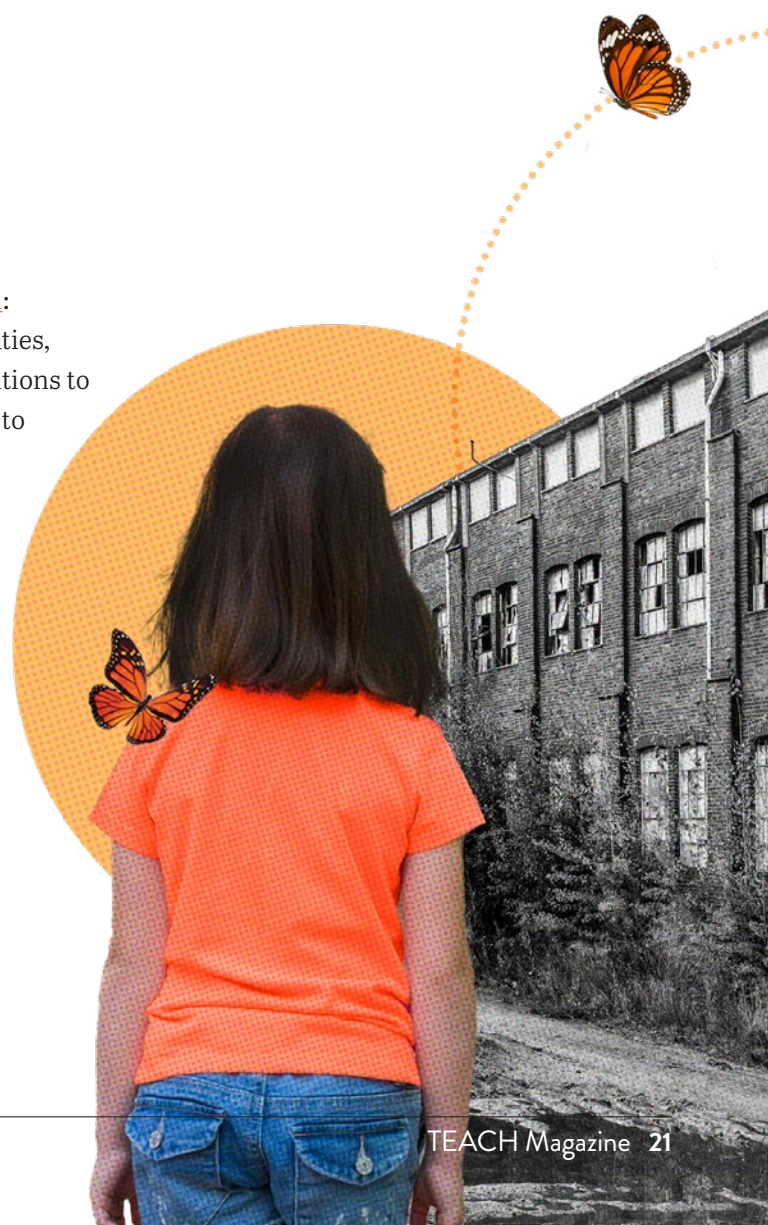
More learning goals for this lesson:

- Recognizing personal values and identifying personal strengths and abilities
- Valuing diversity and building relationships
- Well-being
- Analyzing and critiquing
- Evaluating and reflecting



## MORE RESOURCES

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s [Call to Action 62.i](#): “Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.”
- [Orange Shirt Day](#) organization
- [Teacher’s guide](#) for *Stolen Words* by Melanie Florence
- [First Peoples Principles of Learning](#)





# RIDING THROUGH HISTORY

## THE RCMP FROM THEN TO NOW

The RCMP has played a significant role in Canadian history for over 150 years, and has contributed to shaping our country into what it is today.

Our new digital resource offers a deeper look into the organization’s past, while encouraging students to consider what it could look like in the future. This resource can also serve as a great starting point for introducing students to the RCMP’s impact on cultures and communities across Canada.



ACCESS IT FOR  
FREE TODAY!

