



BC Teachers' Federation May/June 2025

Teacher

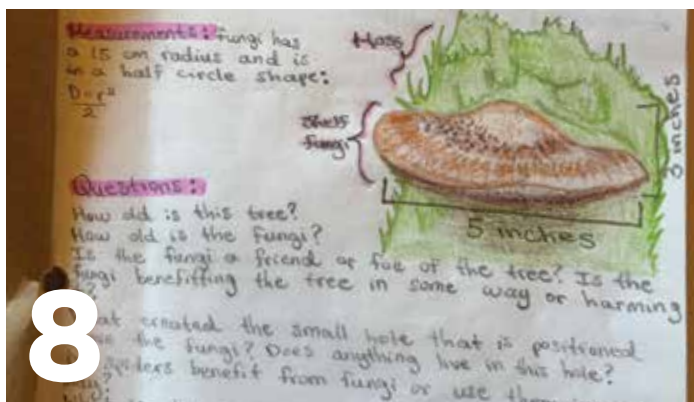
CELEBRATING PRIDE!

Read about how Gina Parkes (pictured right with wife Liz Parkes) started a rainbow club at her school in Chilliwack. See pages 20–35 for more features by 2SLGBTQIA+ members and allies.

Umbrella Tree Photography

BCTF
Kids Matter
Teachers Care

IN THIS ISSUE



Volume 37, Number 5—May/June 2025

- 6** BCTF and CUPE BC members meet with MLAs to discuss violence in classrooms
- 7** School counsellors head to the Legislature to lobby government
- 8** Real-world science: A solutions-based approach to environmental science
- 12** Period literacy: A powerful tool for dismantling stigma and shame
- 14** What teenagers taught me at a psychiatric centre
- 16** Math UNOversal: The ultimate math card game
- 18** Mentorship in inclusive education: Three keys to supporting early career teachers
- 20** History of Pride in Canada timeline
- 22** History of Pride in Canada lesson plan
- 23** Celebrating joy in elementary school rainbow clubs
- 24** SOGI zine-making: An act of resistance and hope
- 26** Celebrate Pride! Photos and poetry
- 28** Gender-inclusive French: A crash course
- 30** GSAs create safety and opportunity for self-discovery
- 31** Pride prom: Celebrating, affirming, and empowering
- 32** Why we leave, and how we stay: Navigating the teaching profession as queer educators
- 34** Celebrating Family Day in Kindergarten
- 35** Summer reading list: Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ authors

Regular features

- 4** President's message
- 5** Message de la présidence
- 37** Classifieds



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THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE



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Do you enjoy writing? Have a story to tell? Know of a project at your school or in your local you want to share with colleagues? Then consider writing for *Teacher*, the flagship publication of the BCTF! Submission guidelines are available at teachermag.ca.

We also welcome letters to the editor. Send your letter to teachermag@bctf.ca.

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Sunjum Jhaj photo.



CALM
Canadian Association
of Labour Media

CEPA
Canadian Educational
Press Association



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

DEAR COLLEAGUES,

Over the last few months and years, the word “unprecedented” has become a normal part of our lexicon. It is factually true that we are in an unprecedented time. The world we have become accustomed to is crumbling, or more accurately, is being torn apart.

Old alliances that provided a relative level of comfort and security in our country are gone. Geopolitical shifts are creating uncertainty and anxiety for everyone. And there is a concerted attack on the rights of marginalized people. Certainly, in Canada it is not as pronounced as in the United States, but we are not immune to the rise of racist, homophobic, and misogynistic views.

The work we do to educate students on how to be informed and engaged participants in our democracy is essential. Now and always, we need to remain vigilant in the defense of rights.

As I read this issue's Pride feature, I felt grateful to be part of an education system that is actively creating safety and community for students and staff. The benefits of successfully incorporating SOGI lessons, gender and sexuality alliances, and other intentional practices of inclusion in our schools are clear. It sends a message that all students and staff are welcome, accepted, and valued. I thank each of you who works to ensure students and colleagues at your school have a safe space to be their authentic selves.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to remember and honour all those who were injured or so shockingly killed in the tragedy that took place at the Lapu-Lapu Day celebrations on April 26. Our hearts go out to everyone in the Filipino Canadian community.



Clint Johnston
photo by
Sunjum Jhaj

“I am in awe of all the work teachers around BC are doing—whether it’s creating meaningful learning for students, advocating for their colleagues, standing up against hate, or building community. Your work in schools and local offices inspires me every day.”

One of the victims, Kira Salim, was a school counsellor, talented musician, and enthusiastic member of the New Westminster Pride community. My thoughts go out to those who worked closely with Kira at Fraser River Middle School and New Westminster Secondary School. The losses incurred from this incomprehensible tragedy are felt deeply by the New Westminster School District and the Filipino Canadian community.

This issue is the last in which I will be able to pass a message on to you as BCTF President. And while I would love to wax nostalgic on my years in office, ultimately, my thoughts centre on gratitude and awe. I am in awe of all the work teachers around BC are doing—whether it’s creating meaningful learning for students, advocating for their colleagues, standing up against hate, or building community. Your work in schools and local offices inspires me every day.

It has been a privilege to be your colleague and president.

In solidarity,



Clint Johnston
BCTF President

MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENCE

CHER-ÈRES COLLÈGUES,

Au cours des derniers mois et des dernières années, le mot « sans précédent » est devenu un élément normal de notre lexique. C’est vrai qu’on vit une période sans précédent. Le monde auquel on s’est habitué est en train de s’écrouler, ou plus exactement, est en train de se déchirer.

Les anciennes alliances qui assuraient un niveau relatif de confort et de sécurité dans notre pays ont disparu. Les changements géopolitiques créent de l’incertitude et de l’anxiété pour tout le monde. Et il y a une attaque concertée contre les droits des personnes marginalisées. Bien sûr, au Canada, ce n’est pas aussi prononcé qu’aux États-Unis, mais nous ne sommes pas à l’abri de la montée des opinions racistes, homophobes et misogynes.

Le travail que nous faisons pour éduquer les étudiants sur la manière d’être des participants informés et engagés dans notre démocratie est essentiel. Aujourd’hui et toujours, on doit rester vigilants dans la défense des droits.

En lisant l’article sur la fierté de ce numéro, je me suis senti reconnaissant de faire partie d’un système éducatif qui crée activement la sécurité et la communauté pour les étudiants et le personnel. Les avantages d’une intégration réussie des cours SOGI, des alliances de genre et de sexualité et d’autres pratiques intentionnelles d’inclusion dans nos écoles sont évidents. Cela envoie un message que tous les étudiants et le personnel sont les bienvenus, acceptés et valorisés. Je remercie chacun d’entre vous qui œuvrez pour vous assurer que les élèves et les collègues de votre école disposent d’un espace sécuritaire pour être eux-mêmes. J’aimerais aussi profiter de cette occasion pour rendre hommage à tous

ceux qui ont été blessés ou tués de façon choquante lors de la tragédie qui a eu lieu lors des célébrations de la Journée de Lapu-Lapu, le 26 avril. Nos pensées accompagnent tous les membres de la communauté philippino-canadienne. Une des victimes, Kira Salim, enseignant-e-conseiller-ère, musicien-ne talentueux-euse et membre enthousiaste de la communauté New Westminster Pride. Mes pensées accompagnent ceux qui ont travaillé en étroite collaboration avec Kira à l’école intermédiaire Fraser River et à l’école secondaire New Westminster. Les pertes subies à la suite de cette tragédie incompréhensible sont profondément ressenties par le district scolaire de New Westminster et la communauté philippino-canadienne.

Ce numéro est le dernier dans lequel je pourrai vous transmettre un message en tant que présidente de la BCTF. Et même si j’aimerais être nostalgique de mes années au pouvoir, mes pensées se concentrent en fin de compte sur la gratitude et l’émerveillement. Je suis impressionné par tout le travail que font les enseignants de la Colombie-Britannique. Qu’il s’agisse de créer un apprentissage significatif pour les étudiants, de défendre leurs collègues, de lutter contre la haine ou de bâtir une communauté. Votre travail dans les écoles et les bureaux locaux m’inspire chaque jour.

C’était un privilège d’être votre collègue et votre présidente.

En solidarité,



Clint Johnston
Présidence de la BCTF



BCTF and CUPE BC members meet with MLAs to discuss violence in classrooms

As I evacuated or interceded in yet another violence incident, I found myself saying, “You are safe; you are okay.” After reflecting on these words, I stopped saying this. I realized I was condoning violence and teaching my Kindergarten students the violence they were witnessing was acceptable. Now I say, “This is not okay; this child is still learning to be safe.” – Amy Read

THE ABOVE QUOTE is from a statement by teacher Amy Read at a lobbying event held in Victoria where BCTF and CUPE BC members came together to discuss violence in classrooms with MLAs and Premier David Eby.

Over the course of two days, four BCTF members and four CUPE BC members working as education assistants (EAs) met with 31 MLAs. Each teacher and EA shared a personal story of violence in classrooms to draw attention to the prevalence of this issue.

Teachers spoke eloquently about their students who, with all their complexities, have a right to an education and a right to learn. They spoke of being kicked, hit, punched, and bitten. They talked about stopping dysregulated children from running into oncoming traffic. They told stories of Kindergarten students biting through the winter coats of staff members until they drew blood, pulling out the hair of their classmates, and threatening horrific violence. They spoke about the lack of dignity for these students in being unable to articulate their needs, to be seen and served by the educators around them, and the deep frustration of teachers and EAs who are unable to properly support them.

“Students who exhibit violent behaviours need us more than ever. They need structure, stability, routine, and positive relationships with the people around them. There are too many needs and not enough people to support,” said teacher Michelle McNulty when reading her statement to MLAs.

In addition to personal stories, the members shared what is needed in BC’s public education system to better support all students and staff. They advocated for immediate action on the government’s commitment to ensuring every primary classroom has at least one EA and every school has a counsellor.

The collective demands also included ending the backlog of assessments for BC students, ensuring the hours and wages of careers in K–12 public education address recruitment and retention issues, and redistributing millions of dollars that are currently funding elite private schools into the public education system. BCTF President Clint Johnston and CUPE BC President Karen Ranalletta, who also attended, spoke of the need for immediate and impactful investment in public education.

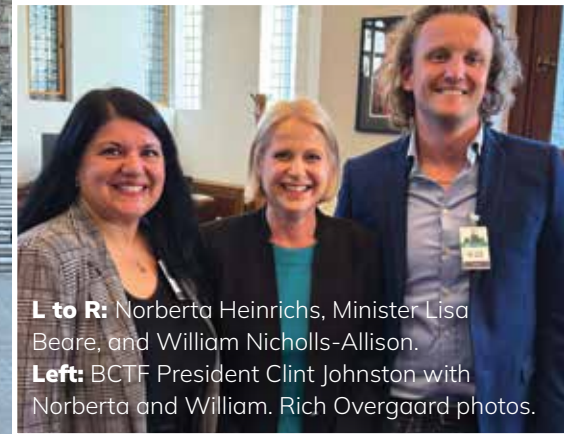
“Ultimately, every child deserves to feel safe in school, and every educator deserves to work in an environment where they can teach without fear of violence. We owe it to our students and staff to provide the support, resources, and the funding and staff support necessary to make our schools places of learning, not places of fear,” said teacher Raveena Kang.

This was the first joint lobbying effort from the BCTF and CUPE BC on violence in classrooms. Regan Rankin, one of the BCTF members who attended the meetings said the stories, while difficult to listen to, were incredibly impactful. “Throughout the discussions, the MLAs demonstrated genuine emotion and empathy, asking insightful questions,” said Regan. “Now, it will be in their hands to act on the information we provide.” •

Above: BCTF and CUPE BC members met with Members of the Legislative Assembly, including Minister Lisa Beare, in April 2025.

School counsellors head to the Legislature to lobby government

Children and youth deserve access to school counsellors when they need it and where they're at—which is at their own school.



L to R: Norberta Heinrichs, Minister Lisa Beare, and William Nicholls-Allison.
Left: BCTF President Clint Johnston with Norberta and William. Rich Overgaard photos.

IT WAS A BUSY first week of March in Victoria—the provincial government had just introduced the new budget and was contending with the threat of President Trump's tariffs. The BCTF was also in the capital with representatives of the BC School Counsellors' Association to meet with Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care, as well as her senior staff.

Over the course of the meeting, Norberta Heinrichs and William Nicholls-Allison spoke with passion about the services school counsellors provide to students and the support they're able to give to their fellow teachers within the school community. In the discussion that followed their presentation, the members were able to distill the role of the school counsellor for the Minister and build greater understanding; they even provided advice on how to bring existing counsellors back into the school system with more palatable and realistic assignments that would allow them to focus on therapeutic relationships in a more meaningful way.

The Minister was moved by the stories told by our members on how their work and interventions made lasting impacts on students. She asked relevant and important questions, she requested further information, and her Ministry, as well as the Ministry of Advanced Education, want to keep the dialogue going. This was a positive and important step in our continued advocacy to hold the BC NDP government accountable for their election promise of a school counsellor in every school.

PERSONAL STORIES MAKE THE CASE FOR BETTER RATIOS AND A COUNSELLOR IN EVERY SCHOOL

The delegation, which included BCTF President Clint Johnston, made the most of their time during the lobby session. It was the personal impact stories that really connected and helped the Ministry officials see the importance of school counselling.

Norberta told the story of a current student experiencing significant trauma in their home life, leading to a concerning level of absenteeism. They were on the verge of quitting school

altogether and at risk of bowing out of all peer and community connections. The youth didn't need medical intervention, they didn't need a behaviour plan, they needed a caring and qualified professional to connect with them, strategize with other teachers to support their passion projects, and be their one-on-one support network.

Because of the intervention of a school counsellor, the time Norberta was able to give them, and supportive staff, that student will walk across the stage this June as a proud and resilient graduate.

William shared another story of hope about a younger student who had fled war in their home country with their family. Through the trauma of that experience, and feeling isolated in school, the young child became mute. The family couldn't afford private counselling and there was little support available through immigration services. William was asked to see if he could help as the school counsellor.

He visited the student's classroom every day and drew pictures with them so they could begin to feel safe. In their art, the student always drew themselves very small. William also helped chaperone the class on field trips, ensuring this student knew that they always had a buddy and they weren't small or isolated. Then one day, the student ran up to Will and spoke to him for the first time, saying, "Thank you, Mr. Will." From there, the student blossomed.

This transformation didn't happen in a counselling centre—it happened by bringing the power of a therapeutic relationship built on safety and showing up every day into the rhythms of the student's school life.

This is why our students need better access to counsellors, and we're confident the Minister took the message to heart. •



Real-world science: A solutions-based approach to environmental science

"I TREAT MY CLASS as an environmental science research team," said Sara Peerless. Her approach to teaching high school environmental science includes a class-wide collaboration with scientists working on the Climate Adaptation Research Lab, nicknamed CARL.

Sara's students learn the elements of experimental design and expand their knowledge of ecology while contributing to real-world research in their community.

Sara, now a secondary science teacher on Salt Spring Island, grew up feeling as though she didn't fit in at school and had a hard time with classroom learning. "I loved to study ecology in the forest on my own, but I was not engaged in the classroom," said Sara.

She decided to leave her career as an interior architectural designer to pursue teaching after much encouragement from her partner and university advisors. They suggested that her lingering fears about school and formal education might work in her favour when it comes to creating safety, connection, and engaging learning opportunities for students who, like her, feel they don't belong in school.

While covering a maternity leave for a Science 9 teaching position, Sara began to dream up her ideal course to teach: one where she could combine outdoor education, hands-on science, ecology, and research.

"I fumbled around and tried to develop something that would be approachable," said Sara, after she was hired to teach one block of environmental science.

The course grew to include collaborations with community scientists and real-world research projects, and it generated enough student interest to warrant an additional block.

The environmental science students start the semester learning about experimental design. Students create their own classroom experiments related to their interests and learn through trial and error.


"I want students to come into this space and feel like they have what it takes right away," said Sara. "They are scientists!"

Once students develop an understanding of identifying inconsistencies in experimental design and showcasing their findings in appropriate ways, they begin collaborating with scientists from the CARL project.

The CARL project includes a team of scientists, led by Dr. Ruth Waldick, scientist in residence at Transition Salt Spring, working to restore the Mount Maxwell Watershed on Salt Spring Island. The watershed, once a diverse ecosystem, has grown out of balance after extensive logging. Now, it mostly consists of a dense canopy of coniferous trees all the same age, an understory lacking in diversity, and few birds. The CARL team is working to establish innovative forest restoration practices that, in a time of climate change, will help diversify the ecosystem, encourage water sequestration, and mitigate wildfire risks.



**Bottom left and right
photos by Grade 9 student
Finlay Repen**



“The kids get fired up.
They know this is
something the scientists
are going to use and
haven’t researched yet;
it’s real and it’s hands-on.”
– Sara Peerless

“The watershed restoration is a form of reciprocity, a chance for us to not only show gratitude for what our watershed offers the people and all beings within the ecosystem but also for us to give back for all that we receive,” said Sara. She references Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall’s two-eyed seeing as an approach that guides her course. Two-eyed seeing is a holistic approach to science that combines the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and western knowledge systems.

The class started out by taking on a whole-class soil study at the watershed, followed by a detailed soil microbiology and morphology analysis in the lab. Through this preliminary research project, students hypothesized which soil was from the watershed forest floor, which was from the Johnson-Su incinerator (a type of forest composter), and which would be most conducive to sustaining growth. Students learned how to present their findings to CARL scientists, back up their findings with evidence, and speak to scientific limitations in experimentation.

Then environmental science students got the opportunity to support the CARL project by carrying out preliminary studies that inform the work of the scientists. Students are divided into teams: for example, the terrestrial macroinvertebrate team, the aquatic macro-invertebrate team, native plants propagation team, bird survey team, bioswales team, and the hydrology team. Each team consults with the scientists to create and implement an experimental design that could be useful for the CARL project. They focus on researching something that the CARL scientists have not yet investigated, but that will be useful for the larger project.

“The kids get fired up. They know this is something the scientists are going to use and haven’t researched yet; it’s real and it’s hands-on,” said Sara.

The various research teams frequently consult each other about areas where their research overlaps and intersects. They carry out their research knowing they will be sharing their final reports and recommendations for further study with the CARL scientists and with next semester’s environmental science students. When next semester’s students start planning their research projects, they have the choice to build on the research conducted by previous students or use that research to inform an entirely new research project.

Throughout the semester, students keep detailed field journals in notebooks they made from paper bags, copy paper, and twine. They can include sketches, diagrams, data tables, notes, reflections, and any other mode of expression to make note of their learning and observations.

In addition to field journals, the students also keep novel study journals throughout the semester. Sara describes environmental science as interdisciplinary, saying, “Studying ecology includes developing a broad understanding of Earth’s elegant systems and how we interact with those systems.”

To deepen students’ understanding of human interaction with ecology, Sara has curated a list of books students can choose from throughout the semester (see page 11). Each book explores ecology and environmental science through a different lens. She makes physical copies and audio books available to students for accessibility.

Left: Students working with samples collected in the field.
Photos provided by Sara Peerless unless noted.



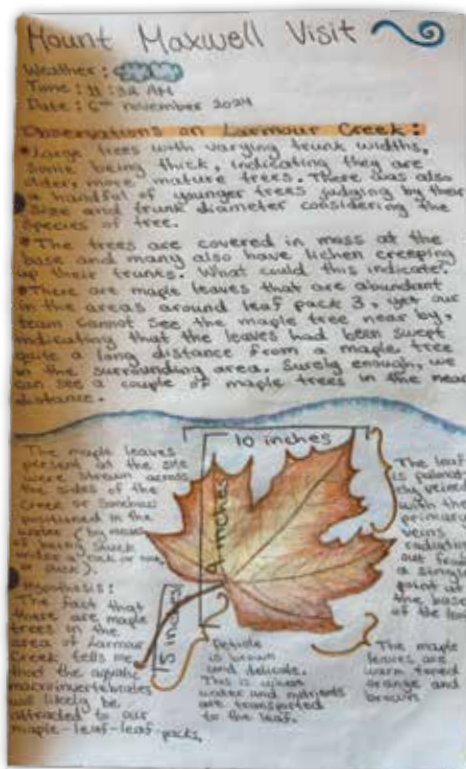
Students then get together in small groups once a week where they discuss a question or prompt through the lens of the author or character in their selected book. The groups consist of students who have selected different books so they can learn how different authors approach ecological topics and discuss how they relate to environmental science and their work in the lab and field.

The novel study journal is a place where students can make note of quotes or statements from the books that they find inspiring or significant.

At the end of the semester, students hand in their novel study journal, field journal, a personal written reflection, and their final research report, which is presented at a science round table that includes CARL scientists.

Sara's approach to environmental science creates real-world research opportunities rooted in action-based solutions. Students leave the course knowing they've contributed to the larger body of environmental science and have deepened their understanding of what it means to live in balance with nature. •

Photos this page: Pages from students' field journals and novel studies.



SARA'S BOOK LIST

Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults
by Robin Wall Kimmerer

The Hidden Life of Trees
by Peter Wohlleben

Entangled Life
by Merlin Sheldrake

The Once and Future World
by J.B. MacKinnon

The End of Food
by Thomas Pawlick

Silent Spring
by Rachel Carson

Gathering Moss
by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Stronghold
by Tucker Malarkey

Plastic Ocean: How a Sea Captain's Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans
by Charles Moore

The Soul of an Octopus
By Sy Montgomery

The Sixth Extinction
by Elizabeth Kolbert

NOVEL STUDY PROMPT

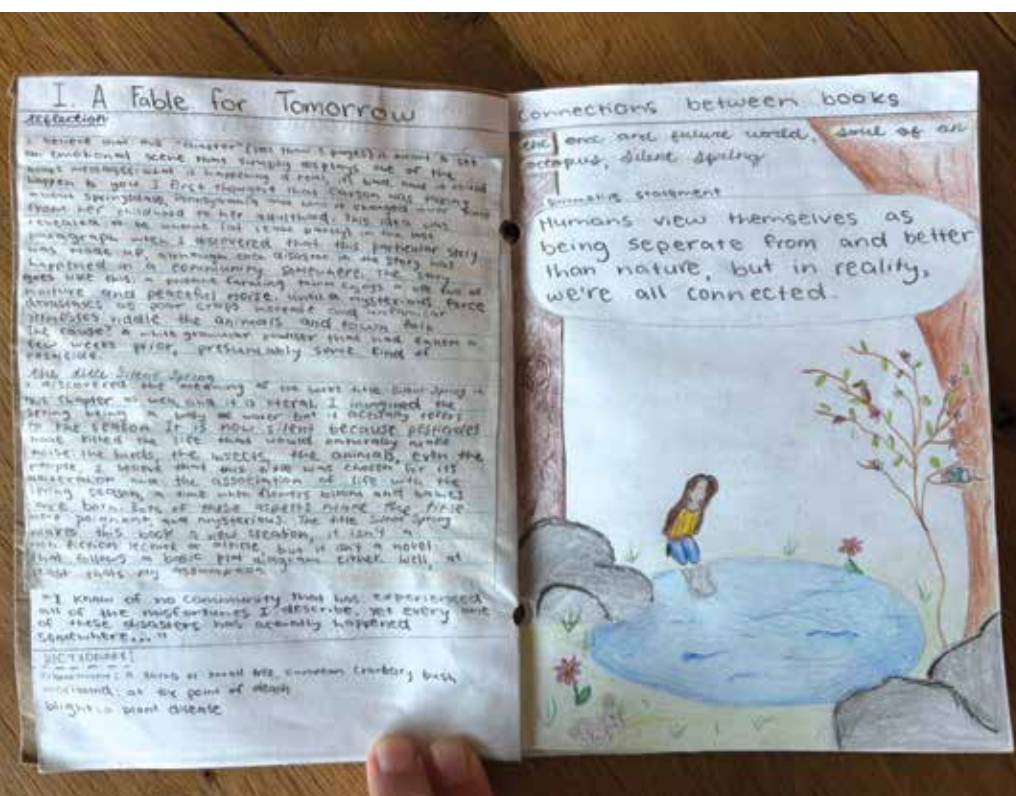
Example prompt: How can we go beyond a culture of gratitude to a culture of reciprocity? (Inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*.)

Excerpts from students' collaborative group responses:

Humanity has an obligation to come up with solutions to problems we have brought to Earth.

Responsibility and accountability must come from large corporations.

Better knowledge of ecosystems is required to understand what can effectively and responsibly be taken and given in exchange.





THE ENDOMETRIOSIS NETWORK CANADA

The Endometriosis Network Canada is a national, registered charity dedicated to raising endo awareness, providing support, and educational resources.

Their work to develop this resource is funded by the Health Canada Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund.

Period literacy: A powerful tool for dismantling stigma and shame

Teaching students about menstruation is essential. Period.

By **Allison Nichol Longtin** (she/her), educator and curriculum developer, The Endometriosis Network Canada

MANY OF US who are teaching sexual health education to today's youth grew up in a time when having a period was shrouded in mystery. Those of us who got a period likely concealed our pads and tampons on the way to the bathroom like a dirty secret. School washrooms often lacked period products and waste bins in toilet stalls. And painful periods were just that: normalized, something to get through.

Thankfully, some of these things are changing for the better. There are more options out there for people who get a period now, including sustainable options, like menstrual cups and period underwear. Inclusive menstrual health programs like The Endometriosis Network Canada's peer and physician-reviewed **What you need to know. Period.** program are designed to educate young people about normal and abnormal period pain to help reduce the delay to diagnosis of period-related health issues like endometriosis.

And, while more and more young people may be talking about periods than when we were in school, there's still more work to be done to increase period literacy among youth.

When young people are left to learn about periods on their own, misinformation and disinformation abound; taboos, stigma, and shame around periods are perpetuated; and health issues like endometriosis go undiagnosed.

To support educators to integrate menstrual health education into their existing curriculum, The Endometriosis Network Canada developed the What you need to know. Period. program. The free period literacy program for youth was

created in consultation with youth and educator advisory committees and includes accurate, trauma-informed lesson plans, as well as facilitator training to prepare educators to deliver the content to students. The program is designed for a wide range of youth (ages ~8–18) of all genders, identities, and sexual orientations.

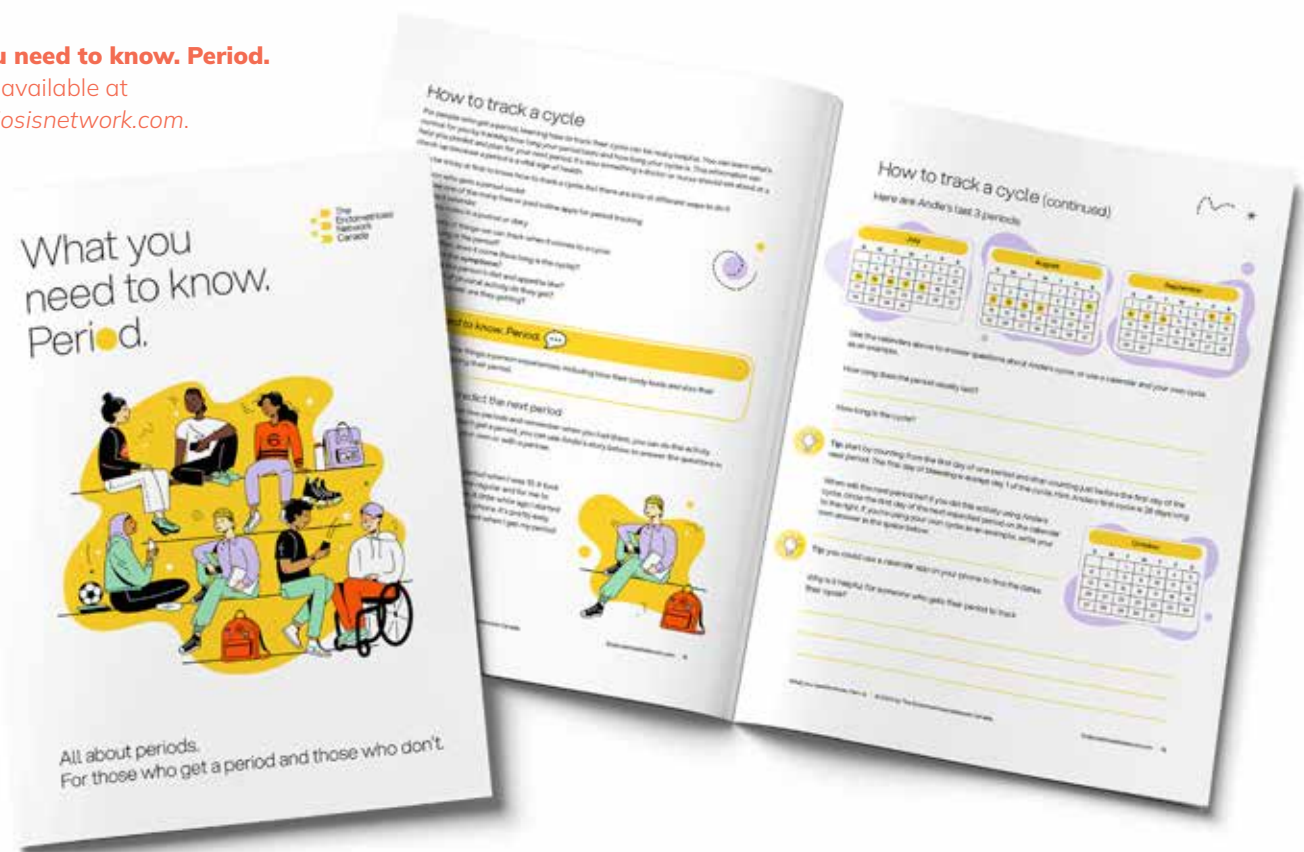
Because you can't always tell if someone gets a period just by looking at them, we've used inclusive language in the development of this program, intentionally avoiding gendered terminology. We recommend delivering the program to all of your students, not just those who get, or may eventually get a period. Teaching all students may help destigmatize menstruation at a societal level.

Taboos about menstruation and lack of menstrual health awareness are key contributors to poor understanding of menstrual health. Teens and youth who worry about their period often conceal their symptoms out of shame, feel uncomfortable discussing their period with peers or trusted adults, or believe their symptoms are normal. When young people do disclose their concerns, peers and trusted adults may reinforce feelings of shame and inaccurate beliefs about menstrual health. The consequence is a culture of poor period health literacy.

The range of experiences of having a period can be drastically different, even in a small group of people who get a period. Teaching period literacy will help your students build confidence in their ability to recognize when something might be wrong and to know where to get help.

What you need to know. Period.

resources available at
endometriosisnetwork.com.



Endometriosis (or endo) is a prevalent period-related health issue:

- At least 1 in 10 girls, women, and unmeasured numbers of Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people live with endo. Nearly two million Canadians have endometriosis.
- Endo can be very painful and can prevent people from living a full life.
- 6 in 10 teens and youth with endo face challenges in school because of pain.
- 4 in 10 people with endo have difficulty reaching their educational goals.

The What you need to know. Period. program, and teaching young people about periods, may help reduce the five-year average delay to diagnosis for people with endo by educating young people about normal and abnormal period pain.

The University of British Columbia studied students in Grades 8–12 who took a 60-minute program about menstrual health.¹

Upon attending the program, the students:

- understood that getting really painful cramps that make you miss activities during your period is not normal.
- knew that a person with really painful periods should talk to someone they trust, like a parent, teacher, elder, or health care provider, about their symptoms.
- felt more confident in their menstrual health knowledge and were more comfortable discussing menstrual health.
- agreed that the program taught them something new and that people like themselves would benefit from learning about menstrual health.

The research tells us that teaching youth about periods increases their knowledge and instills more positive beliefs about menstrual health.

Your efforts to increase period literacy among your students have the power and the potential to break down taboos and to improve the quality of life for youth with endometriosis by reducing the delay to diagnosis. The What you need to know. Period. program can support you in having important conversations with young people about menstrual health. You may not have grown up speaking openly about periods, you may not have learned about them in school among your peers, you may not get a period, but you can create positive change for the students you teach. •

1 [www.jogc.com/article/S1701-2163\(24\)00406-7/fulltext](http://www.jogc.com/article/S1701-2163(24)00406-7/fulltext)

RESOURCES

Visit **The Endometriosis Network Canada** website at endometriosisnetwork.com for more information, including the What you need to know. Period. resources and to learn about facilitator training.

Health Canada Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund:
www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/funding/sexual-reproductive-health-fund.html

YouTube video by EndoACT:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYTSLKEUxk8



What teenagers taught me at a psychiatric centre

By **Suzanne Simpson** (she/her), teacher and podcaster, North Vancouver

“WHAT DID YOU NEED from teachers as your mental health deteriorated and substance use increased?”

I asked my students this question to learn what could be improved upon for some of the most at-risk youth in our education system. During my doctoral research, I was teaching in a small classroom at an inpatient unit for psychiatric patients diagnosed with concurrent disorders. Their mental health and substance use challenges meant that these youth, statistically, were some of the most at-risk kids in the country; people with a dual diagnosis of mental health and substance use have the highest death rates for each age group across Canada, given the complexities and adverse outcomes of their trauma, substance use, and emotional challenges.¹

I lost eight students—and counting—during my nearly six years here.

What the students said is transformative to our educational practices. Though, what struck me most is what they did not say. When I specifically asked about programs or classroom activities that helped them feel better about themselves, most responded, “What do you mean?” No one listed our social-emotional learning frameworks and worksheets, no one responded with a “don’t-do-drugs” program, and not a single participant gave me mindfulness activities.

How do we support youth mental health? The kids just want support, understanding, and care.

Bruce Perry writes that “people, not programs, change people.”² In a world longing for connection, if we can dive deep into the context and application of support, understanding, and care, we will connect. And when we connect, kids respond.

SUPPORT

When students say they need “support,” we often think of academics; however, the reason for the critical nature of academic support shocked me. I asked (through a youth care worker) what the best part of my classroom was. I expected youth to say it was the quiet space, Nespresso coffee, or treats I brought in from a nearby coffee shop. No one gave these answers. Instead, each of the 25 students said the best part of my classroom was success, in some form or another:

“I saw I could do math.”

“I was able to read a paragraph.”

“I completed an assignment.”

“I handed something in.”

1 S. Rees, A. Watkins, J. Keauffling, & A. John, “Incidence, mortality and survival in young people with co-occurring mental disorders and substance use: A retrospective linked routine data study in Wales,” *Clinical Epidemiology*, 14, 21–38, 2022: <https://doi.org/10.2147/CLEP.S325235>

2 B.D. Perry & M. Szalavitz, *The boy who was raised as a dog: And other stories from a child psychiatrist’s notebook—What traumatized children can teach us about loss, love, and healing*, Hachette, UK.

3 J.B. Wallace, *Never enough: When achievement culture becomes toxic—and what we can do about it*, Penguin, 2023.

4 S. Simpson (Host), “Healing from a suicide attempt: A survivor’s journey with David Woods Bartley,” audio podcast episode In Encountering with Dr. Suzanne Simpson, Apple Podcasts, 2025, January 27: <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/encountering-with-dr-suzanne-simpson/id1724652932?i=1000685755361>

5 N. Noddings, Forward in L. G. Beck, *Reclaiming educational administration as a caring profession* (pp. ix-x), Teachers College Press, 1994.

“My students at the psychiatric unit shifted my teaching philosophy by reminding me what really matters in the classroom.

We remember how a teacher made us feel more than what they taught us.”

For youth who struggle with mental health or academic challenges, sorting out a concept or assignment builds self-worth. It's not about concept attainment; it's about how that concept attainment makes students feel about themselves. Academic support helps foster students' perception that they are capable; this

has the potential to bring meaning and purpose that are carried for a lifetime.

Support also entails building our students' wellness in multiple ways. For example, helping navigate conflict, getting kids together to foster connection, or ensuring that no one is left out. Feeling supported builds trust. If we want to support students, we need to pause, lean in to offer support, and be present.

UNDERSTANDING

My students suggested that to be understood, they must not feel judged. If we assume or interpret a situation in the worst possible way, we are engaging in judgment, and we immediately obliterate any potential dialogue or resolution. Kids shut down.

We also must recognize the neurology of a developing brain. Research shows that the teenage brain gravitates to the negative.³ Even though we may feel we are responding positively, the teenage brain can interpret facial expressions, tone, and vocabulary as judgment. We must be acutely aware of facial expressions, body stance, or tone of voice that can suggest judgment. And we must ask more questions such as “What's up?” or “What?” rather than “Why?” In our podcast interview, David Woods Bartley told me this:

*We'll arrive at understanding if we use a “what” question. Because “why” is about justification. I don't want to justify myself. But... [ask] me a “what” question, you've invited me to share. Well, of course I want to share.*⁴

After asking the right questions, we need to understand students' responses. To do this, we must listen authentically. This means not listening for the sake of listening, or to confirm my assumptions, or to plan my next response. Instead, allowing ourselves to be open to the students before us. To understand, I need to remove myself from the equation.

CARE

While being supportive and understanding are things we do, caring is how we are. Nel Noddings summarizes the nature of this care:

*When we genuinely care, we want to do our very best to effect worthwhile results for the recipients of our care. This means that caring is more than an attitude, much more than a warm, cuddly feeling. It is an orientation of deep concern that carries us out of ourselves and into the lives, despairs, struggles, and hopes of others. To care is to respond.*⁵

Kids spot care a mile away. They sense it when we do it. I've had many discussions with students who talk about an educator who “cared,” simply based on initiative and effort. I believe that when we truly care about the well-being and success of students, we become more attentive. Caring requires presence; you can't be caring if you don't notice what needs to be cared for.

CONCLUSION

My students at the psychiatric unit shifted my teaching philosophy by reminding me what really matters in the classroom. We remember how a teacher made us feel more than what they taught us. When we make support, understanding, and care the very foundation of our practice, all the curricular teaching and assessment will happen in more effective and meaningful ways. With such a paradigm shift, our support, understanding, and care empower us to both create spaces the kids need and fill our own cups with such a purpose. •



About the author

Dr. Suzanne Simpson is a teacher, mother, wife, speaker, and podcaster. She taught French immersion for two decades in BC classrooms as well as two years in Amman, Jordan. She worked for nearly six years at an inpatient youth psychiatric unit where she supported adapted learning

and advocated for school success. Her practice and research focus on fostering connections and securely attached relationships. Suzanne facilitates workshops and produces a weekly podcast called “Encountering” about mental health, wellness, and support. Learn more at www.drsuzannesimpson.com.

Math UNOversal: The ultimate math card game

By **Nelli Kim Sia Acejo**, BC-certified teacher,
currently working as a public school teacher
in San Jose, California

PLAYING UNO has always been one of my favourite pastimes with family and friends, so I wanted to bring that same excitement and engagement into my classroom. To make practising equations more interactive, I designed a math activity inspired by the classic UNO card game.¹ Instead of numbers and action cards, each card contains either an equation or its corresponding solution. Students work through the game by matching equations with their correct answers, reinforcing their problem-solving skills in a fun and collaborative way.

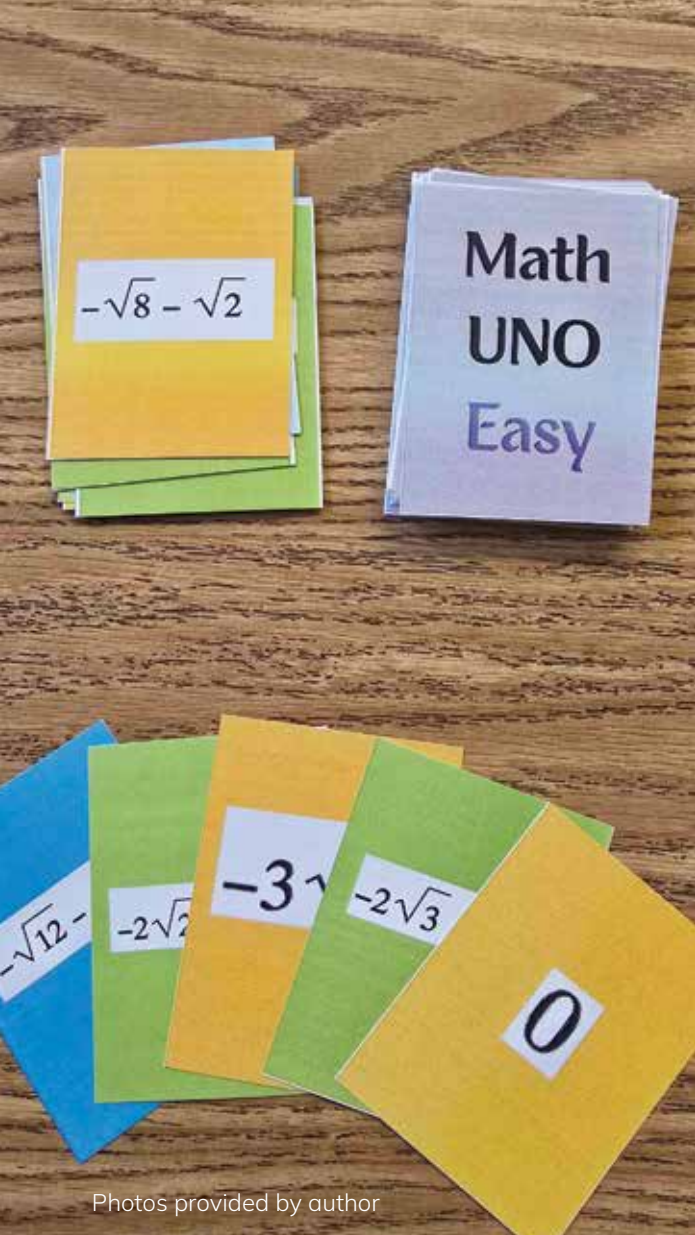
To support their learning, students are given separate sheets of paper where they can show their work as they solve for the correct answers. The game is structured into three levels: one-step, two-step, and multi-step equations, allowing students to progress at their own pace while building confidence in their algebraic reasoning. By blending a familiar game with essential math concepts, this activity not only makes learning equations enjoyable but also encourages critical thinking, teamwork, and engagement in the classroom.

BRINGING UNO TO THE MATH CLASSROOM: HOW STUDENTS PLAY AND LEARN

I created the game cards by printing equations and solutions on UNO card templates. Once the students have their UNO-style equation cards, it's time to put their problem-solving skills to the test. The game is structured to be both engaging and academically enriching, ensuring that students actively solve equations while playing. Here's how the activity unfolds in the classroom:

GAME SET-UP

- 1. Distribute cards:** Each student receives a set of UNO-style equation cards, shuffled and divided evenly among the players. Each card contains either an algebraic equation or its corresponding solution.
- 2. Prepare workspaces:** Every student has a separate sheet of paper to show their work as they solve equations throughout the game. This ensures they are actively working through each problem instead of guessing.
- 3. Establish levels:** The game is divided into three levels: one-step, two-step, and multi-step equations. Students begin with the easiest level and progress as they gain confidence.



Photos provided by author



HOW TO PLAY

- 1. Start the game:** The first player draws a card from their set and reads the equation aloud to the group.
- 2. Solving and matching:**
 - The player writes the equation on their paper and solves it.
 - If they find the correct answer on one of their own cards, they place both the equation and solution card in the discard pile. The goal is to get rid of all their cards.
 - If they do not have the answer, they must hold onto the equation and wait for another opportunity.
- 3. Turn rotation:** Play moves clockwise, with the next student drawing and solving an equation. Players must keep solving and matching until all their cards are played.
- 4. Winning the game:** The first student to correctly solve and match all their equation cards wins the round. If time allows, the game resets, and students can try the next level of difficulty.

LEARNING IN ACTION

Throughout the game, students remain actively engaged in solving problems rather than simply memorizing answers. The need to show their work on paper ensures that they practise step-by-step problem-solving, reinforcing their understanding of algebraic concepts. Additionally, the competitive yet supportive environment encourages peer collaboration, as students can discuss strategies and help each other refine their math skills.

By blending a classic game with structured problem-solving, this activity transforms equation-solving into an exciting and meaningful learning experience.

Integrating game-based learning into mathematics has proven to be a powerful tool for engaging students in problem-solving activities. To be successful, gamification must do the following:

- attract students' attention
- build motivation and competence
- foster confidence
- be interactive to develop reasoning skills and problem-solving abilities.²

The competitive and strategic elements of the game encouraged students to think critically about their solutions, reinforcing algebraic concepts in a way that traditional worksheets often fail to do. Additionally, the tiered levels—one-step, two-step, and multi-step equations—allowed students to progress at their own pace, fostering a sense of accomplishment.

One of the most valuable aspects of this activity was how it encouraged collaboration and discussion. Students were motivated to check each other's work, explain their reasoning, and develop confidence in their problem-solving abilities. The excitement of playing a game, combined with the necessity

Throughout the game, students remain actively engaged in solving problems rather than simply memorizing answers. ... the competitive yet supportive environment encourages peer collaboration, as students can discuss strategies and help each other ..."

of solving equations correctly, created an environment where learning was both fun and meaningful. Students feel satisfied when they successfully complete their assignments,³ and this satisfaction was evident as they celebrated their progress throughout the game.

EXPANDING THE UNO-INSPIRED MATH GAME

Building on the success of this UNO-inspired game for solving equations, I plan to expand its application to inequalities, including both simple and compound inequalities. In this version, students will match inequalities with their corresponding solution sets, reinforcing their understanding of inequality notation and graphing solutions while maintaining the same engaging gameplay format. This adaptation will allow students to analyze and compare different solution sets collaboratively.

Additionally, this game-based approach could be used in elementary and middle school math classrooms. For middle school, the game can be adapted for topics such as multiples of a number, greatest common factor (GCF), and fractions. Instead of solving equations, students would match equivalent fractions, common multiples, or GCF values to continue gameplay. At the elementary level, the game could focus on the four basic operations—addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division—where students match problems with their correct answers.

By sharing this activity with educators across different grade levels, I aim to provide an engaging and collaborative approach to mathematics that fosters problem-solving skills and active learning.

Leveraging gamified strategies allows educators to enhance student motivation, improve problem-solving skills, and create a classroom atmosphere that fosters both enjoyment and academic growth. This activity serves as a reminder that innovative teaching methods can make even the most challenging math concepts accessible and enjoyable for all learners. •

1 UNO Rules, (n.d.), "How to Play UNO: Official Game Rules," www.unorules.com

2 S. Atin, R.A. Syakuran, & I. Afrianto, "Implementation of Gamification in Mathematics m-Learning Application to Creating Student Engagement," Universitas Komputer Indonesia: *repository.unikom.ac.id/70697/1/FULL%20ARTIKEL.pdf*

3 *ibid.*



Mentorship in inclusive education: Three keys to supporting early career teachers

By **Marcus Lau** (he/him), inclusive education teacher and UBC lecturer, Vancouver

AS AN EARLY CAREER TEACHER, I quickly discovered that mentorship is about much more than just finding answers. When I began teaching, I imagined that my mentor would have solutions to every challenge. But I soon learned that effective mentorship isn't about having all the answers—it is about opening doors to resources, strategies, and relationships that help beginning teachers become more aware of the network of support around them. Mentorship helps us recognize our role within the school-based team so we can make more informed decisions and grow into more confident educators.

In my first year, the start of September felt like a whirlwind. Despite years of preparation through my teacher education program and graduate studies in inclusive education, I still felt like I was stepping into the unknown. I was standing in front of a diverse classroom of learners and working alongside a team of education assistants (EAs) for the first time. It was overwhelming. In the context of BC's ongoing teacher shortage and increasing complexity in classrooms, mentorship is recognized as a critical support to help new teachers succeed and stay in the profession.¹

Fortunately, I was matched with a mentor, Kathy Heikkila, through a district mentorship program—an experienced inclusive educator with over 10 years in the field. Kathy's guidance didn't just help me survive the school year; it helped me find my footing and empowered me to seek out resources and connections on my own. Reflecting on this journey, I want to share three key insights for mentors supporting early career teachers—especially those stepping into inclusive education.

1 MENTORS ARE GUIDES

One of the most valuable lessons I've learned is that mentors don't need to have all the answers. I've come to think of mentors as guides—people who hand us a map to a treasure chest of keys. Each key unlocks a different resource, strategy, or perspective that helps us build our own teaching toolkit.

For instance, early in the year, I faced the daunting task of selecting programs and supports for students with a range of learning needs and individual education plans. What I craved in that moment was a clear answer—a go-to list. But my mentor didn't hand me a ready-made solution. Instead, they encouraged me to reach out to district learning support teachers, consult with my EA team, and connect with families to learn more about students' previous learning experiences. Through this process, I made better-informed decisions and developed meaningful relationships with the people around me.

ADVICE FOR MENTORS

- Help mentees see you as part of a broader network of support.
- Share your own decision-making process and the people you turn to when facing challenges.
- Encourage a problem-solving mindset by asking reflective questions like, "What other approaches could you try?" or "Who else in the school might offer insight on this?"

“... effective mentorship isn’t about having all the answers ...”

2 SUPPORT EARLY CAREER TEACHERS IN CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Building relationships with families is a cornerstone of inclusive education—and one of the most intimidating aspects for many new teachers. I remember the anxiety of receiving emails and phone calls from families I hadn’t yet met. I knew home-school collaboration was important, but I didn’t know how to start.

My mentor helped me see that effective communication needs to be family-centred. The first step, they suggested, was asking families about their preferred communication methods. My mentor encouraged me to introduce myself through a short email and include a questionnaire to learn how each family wanted to receive updates.

Some families preferred daily communication sheets; others liked weekly emails or occasional phone calls. With input from my mentor, EAs, and colleagues, I explored various tools and adapted them based on family needs. Most importantly, I learned that asking families what works for them is the first step toward building trust.

ADVICE FOR MENTORS

- Support mentees in developing communication tools that reflect their classroom community.
- Share strategies for building trust, like introductory emails or family preference surveys.
- Encourage mentees to think from the family’s perspective: “If you were the caregiver, what kind of communication would make you feel informed and supported?”

3 GUIDE TEACHERS IN COLLABORATING WITH EDUCATION ASSISTANTS

Education assistants are essential partners in inclusive classrooms. They bring deep knowledge and work closely with students, yet many early career teachers feel unsure about how to lead and collaborate with them effectively. I know I did—especially when I learned I’d be working with a team of six EAs.

At first, I was overwhelmed by the systems already in place. Some approaches were working well, while others needed revisiting. My mentor encouraged me to adopt a team mindset and to recognize that collaboration is central to our work.

I began meeting regularly with my EA team—starting with simple check-ins and one-on-one conversations. I asked questions like these:

- “What’s been working well for you?”
- “What’s one thing you’d like us to consider as a team?”
- “How can I help make your role more effective in supporting students?”

These kinds of informal, relational moments often led to the most honest and helpful conversations. As Joseph² notes, the most impactful mentoring often happens outside of formal meetings—in casual chats that allow trust and collaboration to grow naturally. This approach helped me understand the strengths of the EAs I work with, and it encouraged open communication as we worked together to support students.

ADVICE FOR MENTORS

- Encourage mentees to approach EAs as team members with valuable expertise.
- Suggest setting up regular meetings to check in and share ideas.
- Promote open-ended questions that foster mutual respect and shared ownership of student learning.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Mentorship plays a powerful role in shaping early career inclusive education teachers. When mentors act as guides, they help new educators build confidence, develop collaborative relationships, and access the wide web of support available in our schools.

As I reflect on my own journey, I am grateful for the mentors who have helped me find my way. Their guidance has taught me that mentorship isn’t about handing over a single key but about providing a map to countless doors of opportunity. As the co-chairs of Teacher Mentors of BC remind us, “mentoring is an extension of the support network” that helps early career teachers feel “supported, challenged, and connected to their professional vision.”³ For mentors supporting new teachers, your impact is profound—not only on the educators you guide but also on the students and communities they serve. •

About the author

Marcus Lau is a secondary inclusive education teacher with the Vancouver School Board, where he teaches a life skills program and supports diverse learners. He is also a sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia, where he works with teacher candidates to develop inclusive and student-centred teaching practices. Marcus holds a Master of Education in Inclusive Education and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at UBC, with a research focus on inclusive education and universal design for learning in both K–12 and higher education settings.

Photo opposite: Marcus Lau (right) with his mentor Kathy Heikkila. Photo provided by author.

1 A. Hales, “Empowering Teachers through Mentorship: Lessons from British Columbia,” British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, 2024: bctf.ca/news-and-opportunities/news-details/2024/10/31/new-bctf-research-report-highlights-teacher-mentorship-in-bc-schools

2 M.X. Joseph, “Tips for mentoring new teachers,” Edutopia, October 31, 2024: www.edutopia.org/article/mentoring-new-teachers/

3 B. Wilson, J. MacDonald, & T. Sengotta, “Mentoring: Working together, learning forward,” BCTF Teacher magazine: bctf.ca/news-and-opportunities/news-details/2021/01/30/mentoring-working-together-learning-forward



1969

HOMOSEXUALITY DECRIMINALIZED

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in Canada faced harsh discrimination, criminalization, and marginalization. The *Criminal Code* of Canada criminalized homosexuality until June 27, 1969, when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government decriminalized homosexuality between consenting adults, marking a pivotal moment in 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in Canada.

1971

CANADA'S FIRST GAY RIGHTS PROTEST

About 100 people gathered on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on August 28, 1971, in a protest known as We Demand. They presented a petition demanding equal rights and protections for gay people. Another group simultaneously gathered in Robson Square in Vancouver.

Photo above:

We Demand demonstrators. Photographer: Jearld Frederick Moldenhauer.



1978

FIRST VANCOUVER PRIDE MARCH

Vancouver's first Pride march took place on June 30, 1978, though the first "official" Pride parade wasn't until 1981. Pride events began in major Canadian cities, including Toronto and Montréal. Simultaneously, raids were taking place in this decade in Montréal, Toronto, and other Canadian cities.

Photo above:

Vancouver Pride 1982. City of Vancouver Archives. Item No. 2018-020.7467.



1988

FIRST OPENLY GAY MP

On February 29, 1988, Svend Robinson, who served as a Member of Parliament from 1979 to 2004, became the first openly gay Member of Parliament. His colleague Libby Davies, also from BC, became the first out woman in Parliament in 2001.

Photo above:

Pride 2000 [Libby Davies and Svend Robinson]. City of Vancouver Archives. Item No. 2018-020.8405.



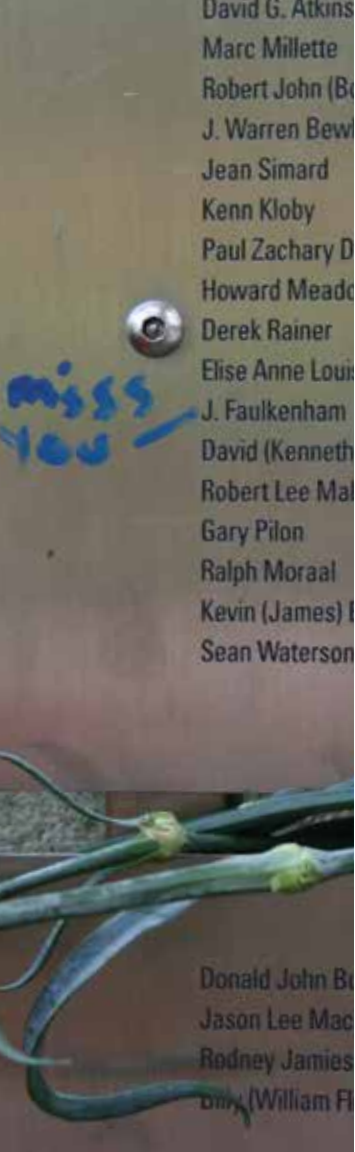
1980s–90s

THE AIDS CRISIS

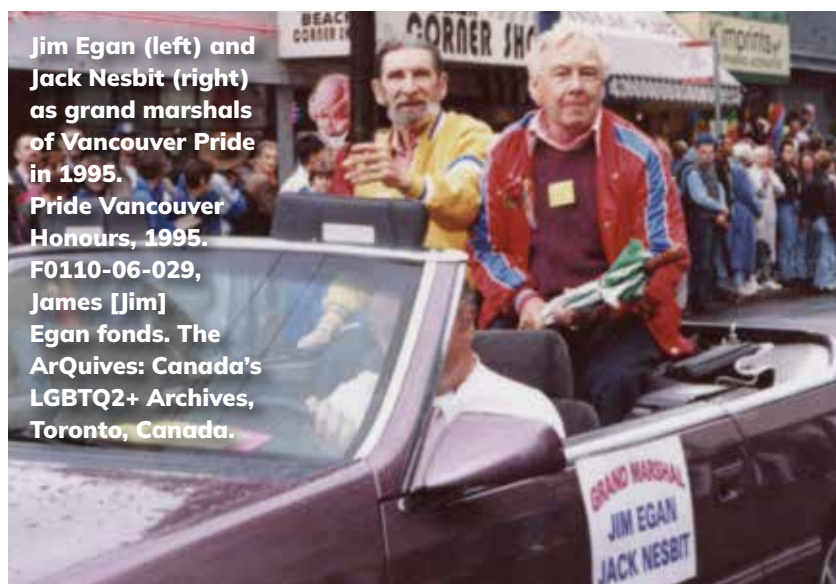
The 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Canada, like elsewhere, was deeply impacted by the AIDS epidemic. This led to increased activism and the founding of organizations like the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT).

Photo above:

"I miss you" written on an AIDS memorial plaque. AIDS Committee of Toronto fonds. Box 84. The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, Toronto, Canada.



Jim Egan (left) and Jack Nesbit (right) met in 1948 and were partners until Jim's death in 2000. Jack died three months later. Jim Egan and Jack Nesbit First Meet, 1948. F0110-06-022, James [Jim] Egan fonds. The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, Toronto, Canada.



Jim Egan (left) and Jack Nesbit (right) as grand marshals of Vancouver Pride in 1995. Pride Vancouver Honours, 1995. F0110-06-029, James [Jim] Egan fonds. The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, Toronto, Canada.



1992

SEXUAL ORIENTATION ADDED TO CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

On August 6, 1992, the Ontario Court of Appeal "read" the term sexual orientation into the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. This meant that whenever someone read the section, they had to understand that "sexual orientation" was also covered under the Act. (Codified on June 20, 1996.)

1995

GAY COUPLES DENIED SPOUSAL BENEFITS

In *Egan vs. Canada*, May 25, 1995, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Jim Egan on the issue of spousal benefits, which he and his partner of over 40 years, Jack Nesbit, had applied for and been denied. The court found that the restriction of such benefits to heterosexual couples was a justified infringement (because the purpose of such benefits was to provide financial support to women who had spent their lives raising children rather than in paid employment). This wasn't won until July 15, 2018.

However, in 1995 the court also found that Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* should include sexual orientation. To recognize this achievement and their decades of advocacy, Jim Egan and Jack Nesbit were made grand marshals of Vancouver and Toronto Pride.

2005

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE LEGALIZED IN CANADA

Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide on July 20, 2005.

2017

GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION ARE PROTECTED HUMAN RIGHTS

The legalization of gender identity and gender expression as protected human rights in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* occurred on June 29, 2017.

Photo above:

Priyanka, Canadian drag queen and winner of Canada's Drag Race Season 1. Photographer: DVSROSS.

[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RuPaul_DragCon_2022_\(52073264723\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RuPaul_DragCon_2022_(52073264723).jpg)

HISTORY OF PRIDE IN CANADA

LESSON PLAN **By Robyn Ladner** (she/her), teacher, Vernon

THIS LESSON PLAN explores the rich and transformative history of Pride in Canada. From the early days of activism and struggle for legal recognition to the vibrant Pride events and cultural milestones of today, the plan examines the challenges faced by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the progress they have achieved. This lesson highlights the historical context, key events, influential figures, and social movements that have shaped the ongoing fight for equality and inclusivity. Students will have a deeper understanding of the significance of the Pride movement and the important role the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has in fostering acceptance and diversity in Canadian society.

Grade level: Grades 7–12

Subject: Social studies/history

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Objectives

- Understand the history of the 2SLGBTQIA+ rights movement in Canada.
- Recognize significant events and figures in Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ history.
- Reflect on the progress made and challenges faced in the fight for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in Canada.
- Engage in discussions about the importance of Pride in Canada and the ongoing struggles for equality.

INTRODUCTION (10 minutes)

1. Set purpose

- “Today, we will explore the history of Pride in Canada, including the key moments, people, and achievements that shaped the 2SLGBTQIA+ rights movement.”

2. Hook/engagement

- Ask students, “What do you know about Pride month and 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in Canada?”
- Show the rainbow Pride flag and discuss the symbolism behind it, focusing on how Pride is celebrated across Canada.¹
- Canada is home to approximately 1.3 million people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.

3. Define key terms

- Explain key terms: 2SLGBTQIA+, Pride, activism, equality, inclusivity, Two-Spirit (the 2S in 2SLGBTQIA+, for Indigenous people), and other terms as necessary.
- Introduce Pride in Canada as both a celebration and an ongoing call for social change.

LESSON CONTENT

(35 minutes or multiple classes if extending)

1. Key milestones of the Pride movement in Canada

- The timeline on the previous page highlights some historical milestones in Canada. Students can also explore a more detailed timeline at queerevents.ca/canada/pride/history.

2. Trans rights

- Discuss the fight for gender-inclusive health care and the role of the trans community in the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ rights movement.

3. Indigenous Two-Spirit and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities

- Two-Spirit people: In Indigenous cultures across Canada, Two-Spirit people—individuals who embody both masculine and feminine qualities—have been respected and held important roles in their communities. Discuss the importance of recognizing Indigenous Two-Spirit identities within the broader Pride movement in Canada.
- Articles from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights² and the Indigenous Foundation³ provide an overview of the history of Two-Spirit folks.

4. Pride today in Canada

- Discuss how Pride parades and events in Canada have evolved from protests to celebrations of identity and inclusion, while still maintaining a strong activist message for rights and equality.
- Major Pride events: Toronto Pride, Vancouver Pride, Montréal Pride, and/or local Pride celebrations.
- Interactive activity: Have students explore specific Pride events in different Canadian cities and compare their history, significance, and impact on local communities.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

(15 minutes—or expansion topics for further investigation)

1. Class discussion

- What role does Pride play today in Canada? Why is it still important to celebrate 2SLGBTQIA+ rights?
- How do the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in Canada compare with those of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in other countries?
- Why is it important to include Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ voices and experiences in the history of Pride?
- What progress have you seen in your lifetime regarding 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, and what challenges do you think remain?

WRAP-UP AND ASSESSMENT (10 minutes)

1. Exit ticket

- Have students write a short response (two to three sentences) answering, “What is one significant event in the history of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in Canada, and why is it important?”

2. Closing thoughts

- Highlight that Pride is not just a celebration of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals but a call for justice, equality, and recognition in Canada.
- Encourage students to reflect on how the 2SLGBTQIA+ community continues to shape Canadian society and how they can be supportive allies. •

1 www.queerevents.ca/queer-corner/blog/queer-community-flags

2 www.humanrights.ca/story/what-two-spirit-part-one-origins

3 www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/the-history-of-two-spirit-folks

For extension activities and assessment notes, visit a more detailed version of this lesson plan at teacheromag.ca.

Celebrating joy in elementary school rainbow clubs

By **Gina Parkes** (she/her),
teacher, Chilliwack



MOMENTS OF QUEER JOY are magical. I experienced one such moment on October 4, 2024. This was the day of our first Rainbow Club meeting at Vedder Elementary, the first of its kind in Chilliwack. This day was full of anticipation, anxiety, fear, excitement, and pure joy. To my astonishment, we had 25–30 students show up for this first meeting. At the time, this seemed unimaginable: 25+ students showing up to celebrate our colours through acceptance, respect, kindness, inclusion, and pride in diversity. To say this meeting brought me peace and happiness is true, but the impact goes far beyond that.

We are the first elementary school to host a Rainbow Club in Chilliwack, creating a space where the kids can see a queer adult (myself), and a straight cisgender ally (my colleague, Debbie Chand) coming together to create a safe space. In this context, a safe space is an environment where 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals are not only welcomed but also able to express their authentic selves without fear of judgment, harassment, or physical and emotional harm. To me, a true safe space goes beyond inclusion—it embraces representation and actively celebrates the intersectional identities that make each person unique. Additionally, allies should feel empowered to demonstrate their support without fear of being treated differently, fostering a culture of mutual respect and kindness.

As the year progressed, we all shared countless moments of joy, from reading stories with 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, creating Pride-themed pottery ornaments during the holiday season, designing and creating pins with our button-making machine, dancing to holiday songs in December, creating crafts, sharing stories, and being ourselves in a safe space.

At one point, I asked a member of the club to design a rainbow bear logo that we could use to represent our Vedder Bears Rainbow Club. My wife Liz was able to use her graphic design skills to recreate the logo in digital form (pictured above). We are going to sell pins with the new logo with the hopes of raising money to fund our upcoming field trip to The Book Man in Chilliwack!

A stand-out moment of joy occurred on Friday, October 11, which was National Coming Out Day and happened to be my birthday. As a special surprise, my wife Liz brought me a coffee during Rainbow Club, and the kids all got to meet her when I introduced her as my wife. The vibe in Rainbow Club was so energetic that day with lots of curiosity leading to questions and inquiries about me and Liz, and our little dog. Some students wanted a picture with us, and then they sat and chatted with my wife.

I had to pause here and reflect on the impact this would have had on me as a young kid growing up in Chilliwack. I did not

know that a woman could marry a woman, and once I did know, I knew that it was not something people did in Chilliwack. My hope for being so transparent at school is to give the kids someone to look up to. To see a happy, successful, and safe queer person in their school community.

After two months of running Rainbow Club, I asked the students what our Rainbow Club has meant to them, here are a few responses:

“Rainbow Club makes me feel comfortable.”

“Rainbow Club is inclusive.”

“Rainbow Club helped me identify my sexuality.”

“Rainbow Club is somewhere I can support my friends.”

These words speak for themselves. Imagine a world where everyone could be a part of a space that made them feel seen, validated, supported, and safe. These words brought tears to my eyes, signifying yet another moment of joy.

The last moment of queer joy that I want to share was when a friend of mine, Stacey Chomiak, who is a queer author and illustrator, came to join us for Rainbow Club one Friday afternoon. I invited our district's SOGI lead to join us, who is also a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Chilliwack. As I sat and watched my friend present her books and art to the Rainbow Club, I once again felt frozen in time and space. I reflected on the impact of having three members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in the room. Even if there was only one student in that room who needed to see themselves in us, it was worth it. I could not help but to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. For the young kids in our Rainbow Club to be sitting in a room with three successful queer people meant the world to me. I will finish with a haiku I wrote earlier this year:

**I am the safe adult
That I longed for in my youth
Making differences and saving lives**



COUNTERING HATE

A GUIDE TO QUEER AND TRANS ALLYSHIP IN OUR CLASSROOMS

A RESOURCE BY TEACHERS FOR TEACHERS



SOGL zine-making: An act of resistance and hope



How members of the VSTA
2SLGBTQIA+ Committee
find community and
encouragement in trying times

Countering Hate: A Guide to Queer and Trans Allyship in Our Classrooms is available at vsta.ca or by scanning the QR code.

By **Irving Lau** (he/him) and
Abby Palmer (she/her),
teachers, Vancouver

THE VANCOUVER SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (VSTA)

2SLGBTQIA+ Committee is often a space for joy—to see our community members around us when we miss them in our regular teaching days. At times, it is a place for commiseration. On September 20, 2023, it was more a day of fear for our community. Our first committee meeting of the year just happened to coincide with the various loud and troubling anti-SOGI protests occurring that day in almost all parts of the province (and indeed, the nation).

The mood in the meeting was sombre and members who were out and open with their identities voiced their frustrations at having to work and deliver curriculum while feeling attacked and unsupported. Other colleagues spoke to their shock at how many people were so public with their homophobia and transphobia. The committee as a whole was also worried about our colleagues in Surrey, where reports showed the protestors had surrounded and besieged the Surrey Teachers' Association building.

We know that our colleagues understand the importance of SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) education and preventing bullying in our schools. We also know that queer teachers take a disproportionate amount of responsibility regarding queer education, allyship, and countering hate. Our goal with creating our new zine, *Countering Hate: A Guide to Queer and Trans Allyship in the Classroom*, is to empower teachers to be active allies, equipped not only with knowledge but also with responses, strategies, and resources to include 2SLGBTQIA+ content in their curriculum and combat hate or misinformation about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Our local table-officers directed us to a BCTF Union Mentorship 2SLGBTQIA+ Grant through which we received funding to allow 10 teachers who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to have

a release day to work together on this project. Empowered through the grant, we spent a day together brainstorming, writing, and designing a zine. On that day, we had representation from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and gender-fluid community and used our lived experience as a catalyst to locate, create, and share meaningful resources with our colleagues.

When creating the zine in community, the despondency we felt amidst the protests and hate was replaced with radical queer joy. In that room, each of us felt valued and heard. We located resources that had been thoughtfully created by people like us across the country; we split into working partnerships that evolved into friendships; we reflected on the hateful words we heard in our classrooms and found the responses we had wished we had ready and put them to paper. We realized that everything we needed was already all around us, and we only needed the dedicated time, resources, and physical spaces to find it.

When communities can get together and feel supported, there is no limit to what we can achieve. When our classrooms and schools honour the principles of SOGI 123 as well as teach the rich history and lived experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples, we create meaningful learning spaces, strengthen an incredible BC-made public education system, and foster a union of true solidarity. •

RESPONDING TO HATE



You may want to move on from hard conversations quickly, but how you respond can be lifesaving for the 2SLGBTQIA+ students in your classroom. By responding in a thoughtful, affirmative, and firm way, you will step-in as an ally for these students.

Allyship is a verb - action is required.

RECOMMENDED STEPS FOR ADDRESSING HATE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

1. Immediate intervention

- "Those words are very hurtful" / "Those words make this space unsafe." / We don't use those words here."

2. Name the behaviour

- "Calling somebody _____, even if they are a friend, is an act of transphobia/homophobia/racism."
- "This statement reinforces ideas that are harmful to our community."

3. Reaffirm classroom norms

- Refer to your classroom community agreements.
- "We agreed to create a safe space where all people can feel valued. A space where harmful speech is acceptable is not a safe space."

4. Provide support

- To affected students (you may not know who those students are): "Any students who are part of the affected group are welcome to step out to regulate or talk to a counsellor if they would like."
- To the person who committed the offence: "After this, let's still have a quick chat."

STEPS FOR KNOWLEDGABLE ALLIES, OR FOR AFTER TALKING TO AN ALLY

5. Redirect the focus

- Move towards a constructive discussions about why the action was harmful.
- "Transphobia/homophobia have historically and presently affected people in our community. We don't want to, even accidentally, hurt our community."
- "If you are feeling angry toward a friend, what is a better way to express yourself?"

6. Ask questions

- "Where did you hear this term?"
- "What was your intention when you said _____?"

7. Correct misinformation and terminology

- Re-state definitions (don't be afraid to use google or a youtube explanation).

8. Restate expectations

- Refer to your classroom community agreements.
- If still resistant (religious reasons, etc): refer to district policies and human rights code.
- For repeated behaviours, discuss next steps privately (calling home, talking to the principal for a behavior contract).

9. Document the incident

- Write down details for yourself.
- For repeated behaviours, then email principal/counsellors/home.

10. Follow up

- Check-in with the class the next day: "Does anybody have anything they feel we missed in the conversation yesterday?"
- "I want to reiterate that we are all responsible for making a safe community and that hatred/language/etc cannot be included in a safe community."


WHAT VANCOUVER STUDENTS ARE SAYING

SOGI education is important to me as a student because when I first arrive here I knew nothing about it and it now helped me understand and be more inclusive.

SOGI inclusion has empowered me to become my true self



Pages and images from Countering Hate: A Guide to Queer and Trans Allyship in Our Classrooms.



BCTF
members
sent in
photos and
poetry to

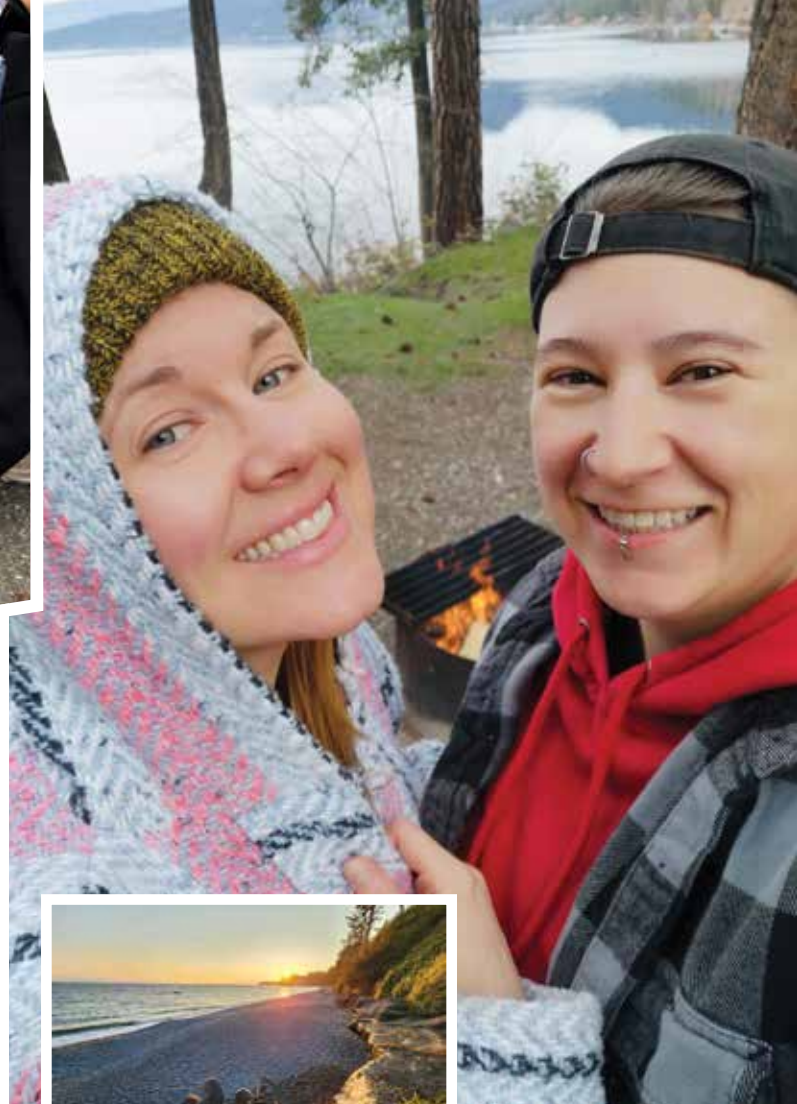
CELEBRATE PRIDE!

**Poem by
Trevana Spilchen**

(they/them),
teacher, Delta

Hope is all we have
Our Pride our joy
Is a circumstance
We are ever-evolving
Solving puzzles in
Our bodies our love
Beginning ending or
Becoming one with
Hope, it's all we have





PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: Emily MacPherson, Peace River North; Pride hopscotch in Mission; Bria Jupe, Sooke (left) and partner Crys Hunter (right) camping in Fintry Provincial Park; Bria and Crys enjoying the sunset at Sandcut Beach in Sooke; Heather Kelley, BCTF staff (right) with her family; Gina Parkes, Chilliwack; BCTF Pride umbrellas; Daryl Lo, Comox, at Comox Valley Pride; a Pride walkway in Mission. Mission photos by Krysta Hamm; BCTF umbrellas by Gina Parkes; remaining photos provided by members pictured.



Gender-inclusive French: A crash course

By Amanda Culver
(they/them/iel), teacher, Sooke



THE FRENCH LANGUAGE is heavily gendered: we have gendered nouns, masculine and feminine adjective agreements, and vocabulary with roots in misogyny. Within this clearly defined gender binary, there is a prevalence of masculine over feminine. We see this when a group of 1,000 women (*elles*) suddenly becomes the masculine *ils* when one man enters the group. Similarly, we've seen career vocabulary reserved for men: *la présidente* was once the wife of a president and not a female president. It took until 2019 for l'Académie Française to consider language feminization a possibility. (L'Académie Française is the council set up to promote and protect the French language.) When changes to the language are presented, they determine what is permissible and what is not. Under their "power," the masculine has been declared "gender neutral" and inclusive writing undermines the democracy of the language. Despite what any governing body decides, gender-diverse people exist and have always existed. Languages evolve and change, regardless of what a council says. So, how do we make space for gender diversity within a language defined by two genders?

As a French immersion teacher and someone who lives outside the gender binary, I'm excited to share my learning with you, recognizing that I'm still learning and language is still changing. No matter your stage of language-learning and no matter the gender identity or gender expression of the students in your room or colleagues down the hall, you have permission to play with the language. The following sections outline some ways you can begin to make your French more gender inclusive.

Les épïcènes

This is an easy place to start. Using epicenes is an inclusive practice because these words are written the same, regardless of gender. You already know some!

- *Ex, enfant, personne, parent, rapide, calme*
- *As-tu vu la personne?*
- *Je vois ton adulte!*
- *Tu es fantastique!*

Alternating between masculine and feminine

How a person might indicate this: *J'utilise les accords au masculin et féminin*. They might ask you to use both equally or might have a preference for one more than the other. You can ask!

A great time to practise alternating between the two is when you are talking to your students. How this may sound:

- *Amanda est gentil.*
- *Iel est heureuse et fort.*
- *Les élèves sont intelligentes et gentils.*

RIGHT: (L to R) Amanda Culver, Robin Stevenson, and Robin Low. Photo provided by author and taken during author Robin Stevenson's visit to École Millstream Elementary.



La féminisation

La féminisation pushes back on the idea that “masculine is gender neutral.” What is growing in popularity is the use of midpoints (·) in writing; they are used between masculine and feminine endings.

- *Ex, étudiant·e, gentil·le, allé·e, heureux·euse*
- *Man froeur est allé·e à l'école.*
- to type *le point médian* ·
 - on a Mac use option + shift + 9
 - on Windows use alt + 1083.

Note: In addition to median points, people use *les traits* (-), *les points* (.), and *les majuscules*. Here, parentheses are avoided because it implies a lack of importance or an afterthought.

La féminisation par doublet

Another form of *féminisation* is using *les doublets*, which are a combination of masculine and feminine.

- *Ex, Le joueur - La joueuse - Lia jouereuse*
- *Ex, frère - soeur - froeur*
- *Ex, mon - ma - man*
- *Man froeur est allé·e à l'école.*

Le genre neutre (selon alpheratz.fr)

How a person might indicate this: *J'utilise les accords au genre neutre*. When writing, *le genre neutre* is quite evident. When speaking, however, it may sound masculine, as “x” and “z” endings are not pronounced. Here are some examples:

- *certain - certaine - certan*
- *ami - amie - amix*
- *principal - principale - principalx*
- *Français - Française - Françaix*
- *nouveau - nouvelle - nouval*
- *heureux - heureuse - heureuz*
- *le - la - lu*
- *un - une - an*
- *lui - elle - al*
- *tous - toute - toutx*
- *Amanda est gentilx.*
- *lel est heureuz et forx.*

Le genre inclusif (selon divergenres.org)

According to *divergenres.org*, *le genre neutre* is used by non-binary folx and uses “s” and “m,” while *le genre inclusif* is meant to include all gender identities and uses “x,” but also uses *la féminisation par doublet*.

- *Ex, directeur (masc)*
- *directrice (fém)*
- *directeus (neutre)*
- *directeureuse (inclusif).*

Summit—A poem

This poem was co-created by participants in the BCTF 2024 2SLGBTQIA+ Summit. Participants wrote about their experiences at the summit, highlighted some key words/phrases from their writing, and then wove their words together to create this poem.

Summit

Time lost
 Wondering if queer enough
 Has lovely with folk
 Slowly community-built
 The most who understand,
 Re-energized
 Level
 Definitions
 Artistic space
 To have intersectional queer joy
 A Friday, come serious, flowed freely.
 Out.
 Playful.
 You are queer enough.

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about gender-inclusive French, visit divergenres.org.

The **“Guide de grammaire neutre et inclusive”** is more widely shared within Canada and includes additional examples from *la nouvelle grammaire* (*articles, déterminants, prépositions, adjectifs*).

alpheratz.fr—This guide to gender-neutral French includes pronunciation notes.

noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca—This website has lots of resources that give hope that change is coming!

GSAs create safety and opportunity for self-discovery

By Yasmine Nijjar (she/her), outreach worker, Surrey

I AM THE FIRST of many generations in my family to complete high school and attend post-secondary. My participation in my school's gender and sexuality alliance (GSA) was the reason. As an at-risk racialized youth navigating the foster care system, I was in desperate need for safety, direction, and community care. I got all of those things and more through my time with the GSA.

When I joined the gender and sexuality alliance it consisted of less than 10 people. Throughout my time as one of the club's leaders, I got to watch the GSA grow in numbers and influence. We went from a club of a few queer students to a diverse community of queer folks and allies that influenced the culture of an entire school.

We started with the goal of creating safety for our GSA members in club spaces. Overtime, we created a safe environment for the whole school. We had the senior boys' basketball team set up an Ivan Coyote assembly, we saw straight-identifying students sing their hearts out to Kehlani at Surrey Pride Prom, and we had non-queer students in regular weekly attendance at club meetings. There was an understanding amongst allies that allyship was not simply tolerance. The work of the GSA had an impact beyond safety for queer students. It gave youth the opportunity to safely engage in self-discovery. This allowed our work to expand outside of the queer community. The school as a whole became a more inclusive space. Not only was there an effort to minimize homophobia in the hallways, but also racism and sexism. The GSA and its sponsor teacher were important factors in shifting that culture.

I was a part of the leadership team for the club and was given various leadership development opportunities. From speaking at district professional development days about queer youths' experience in schools to running education workshops on allyship in classrooms. Each of us found our own pockets of society to be a voice for. The first organizing experience I had was speaking at a SOGI education rally in Burnaby on a GSA field trip. I then went on to collaborate with organizations like The Elizabeth Fry Society advocating for the rights of kids in care.

Exposure to 2SLGBTQIA+ culture was one of my favourite parts of the club. Our GSA was lucky enough to experience Hayley Kiyoko live multiple times, along with Halsey. We regularly had movie nights where we watched queer films from the past and present. Knowing these pieces of queer culture made it easier for me to find my community as an adult. Many queer youth spend their lives surviving and only get to start living authentically in adulthood, but we had a safe space to get an early start. Our GSA teacher sponsor introduced us to queer

"The work of the GSA had an impact beyond safety for queer students. ... The school as a whole became a more inclusive space. Not only was there an effort to minimize homophobia in the hallways, but also racism and sexism."

music, films, art, TV shows, books, and even local restaurants. We created posts about these pieces of culture to share with a network of queer students across the district.

In some ways the GSA dynamic reflected that of a sports team, all the way down to our matching GSA hoodies. As a proud collaborator on those hoodies, I will continue to rep mine into adulthood because I carry many things from that time with me even now. In general, I found a sense of purpose and hope because of this club. For the first time ever I felt like I was exactly where I needed to be and wanted to be nowhere else. My nervous system felt safe in that room and that was, unfortunately, not a familiar feeling. It allowed me to embark on a journey of self-discovery, a journey that otherwise would not have occurred because the only safe space in my life to be queer was the club. This was a shared experience for most of our members. Because we had so much in common the GSA built friendships for me that have continued into adulthood.

I strive to create a safe space like this for my students now. I practise the skills I learned in the GSA every day now as an outreach worker in the district I grew up in. As a former at-risk youth, having a safe space like that was my saving grace in completing high school and breaking generational cycles. That space helped me learn who I was, why I was here, and why I needed to stay. •

Below: (L to R) Gunreet Sethi, Victoria Goldin, Yasmine Nijjar at The Birdhouse in Vancouver. The Birdhouse is a space for 2SLGBTQIA+ folks and allies. Photo provided by author.



Pride prom: Celebrating, affirming, and empowering

By Heather Kelley (she/her), BCTF staff

ON JUNE 20, 2016, Guildford Park Secondary School in North Surrey was alive with energy as 30 queer youth and their friends worked to put the finishing touches on MasQUEERade, the first district-wide queer school event in British Columbia. The atmosphere was electric: queer music blasted as the DJ checked sound equipment, the scent of rainbow cupcakes and pizza wafted through the air, tables overflowed with prizes, flags, buttons, and stickers. A projector was casting real-time Instagram posts of support and love from folks across the country (the furthest was from Australia).

The event drew more than 100 students from schools across the Surrey School District. We even had a few students ask to attend from Langley, Delta, Coquitlam, and Burnaby. It was a wild success that embodied queer joy.

Pride proms are more than just celebrations; they are acts of resistance, healing, and joy. For queer youth, these events serve as affirming spaces where they can show up as their full selves, free from the pressures and constraints of heteronormative traditions and expectations. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ students still face exclusion, invisibility, or hostility, and Pride prom offers a powerful and necessary alternative, a place where they are not only welcome but are celebrated.

The importance of these events goes beyond decoration and dancing. At their core Pride proms are about belonging. Too many queer youth still grow up believing that there is no place for them in spaces meant to mark rites of passage—like proms. Traditional proms are often riddled with silent or explicit rules about who can attend, what they can wear, and who they can dance with. Pride proms break down these barriers. They create a space where folks can come as they are, bring who they love, and wear what makes them feel alive.

All of the Surrey Pride proms were held in school gyms, not in a rented hall or community centre. This choice was intentional, a way to reclaim schools as places where queerness belongs. We wanted the event to be a visible, undeniable part of the school. For some students this was the first time they felt fully seen in an educational setting. It wasn't just about the glitter or the music.

I am no longer in the classroom, but since I have stopped organizing and hosting Pride prom in Surrey I have been able to witness something magical. Part of my current role is supporting folks across the province on social justice events and initiatives; one of those ways is through the Ed May Social Justice Grant. In my years at the BC Teachers' Federation, I have been excited and thrilled to see applications for grants to host Pride proms come in from all over British Columbia. I know dances for queer youth have happened in Burnaby, Chilliwack,



Above: The top two images are posters from Surrey Pride proms. The third image is a photo from Surrey's first Pride prom in 2016. Images provided by author.


Delta, Comox Valley, Nanaimo, North Vancouver, and Nechako Lakes. There are also countless other Pride events happening across the province in school districts from the Coast to the Interior and the North. From Pride parades, rainbow days, Pride weeks, queer and trans panels, and SOGI summits, there is a lot of work being done in communities large and small to support queer folks.

I feel profoundly lucky that I get to meet queer teachers through various events hosted at the Federation, like the 2SLGBTQIA+ Summit, the Think Tank on Homophobia and Transphobia, and at other conferences and events. I get to hear about the amazing work queer and straight teachers are doing to support queer students and about all the ways queer teachers are finding and creating community for themselves. As a queer teacher planning Pride prom in 2016, despite how amazing and meaningful it was, I sometimes felt alone and lonely. I wish my younger self could know all the ways that folks are doing amazing work, quietly and loudly, in their classrooms and school districts for kids and for queer teachers because it is nothing short of wonderful. There is a lot of work still to do, but we need to celebrate and find joy where we can, and there is a lot to celebrate. •

WHY WE LEAVE, AND HOW WE STAY

Navigating the teaching profession as queer educators in BC

By Christina Billingham (she/they), teacher, Chilliwack

A portrait of Christina Billingham, a person with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a black turtleneck and a patterned cardigan. The portrait is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the text.

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, teaching is often framed as a calling—an act of service and care that shapes the next generation. But for many queer educators, staying in the profession is an act of resistance. While we bring passion and dedication to our classrooms, we also navigate systemic barriers, homophobia, transphobia, and the weight of politicized identities. For context, I am a queer person, I use she/they pronouns, and am of Cree-Métis descent. I want to speak to what I have witnessed in my time as a classroom teacher, a district SOGI lead, and now as the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Co-ordinator in the Chilliwack School District. In these roles, I have seen first-hand both the progress queer educators have made and the persistent challenges we face. Looking beyond the reasons we leave, we must also ask, “How do we stay?”

WHY WE LEAVE

I think it is important to be honest. Many queer teachers experience both overt and covert discrimination, not only from those we might expect it from, but also from our colleagues, supervisors, and even those who claim to be allies.

As a BCTF facilitator, I have the privilege of traveling to different districts and meeting teachers who are deeply committed to equity and inclusion. Colleagues from every corner of the province have shared stories of hurt, harm, and resistance.

Sometimes the harm comes from those who publicly support equity initiatives: they still misgender us, exclude us from leadership opportunities, or subtly undermine our contributions. For trans and non-binary teachers in particular, systemic barriers—such as the lack of inclusive washrooms, administrative resistance to name and pronoun changes, and employment discrimination—create an environment where isolation and harm are commonplace.

The pushback against SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) resources in education in BC has placed many teachers under scrutiny. Social media harassment, school board protests, and co-ordinated attacks on queer educators make it clear that simply existing openly as a 2SLGBTQIA+ teacher is seen as a political act. Some teachers, particularly those in conservative districts, face pressure to remain closeted or to leave for their own safety. The need for constant advocacy wears down even the most committed educators.

Many queer teachers take on the role of supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students, often unofficially, without additional resources or recognition. The emotional labour required to create safe spaces, counter misinformation, and defend inclusive policies contributes to burnout and, ultimately, attrition.

“From what I have witnessed, teachers who stay often do so by becoming engaged in this work, transforming personal struggles into systemic change.”

of 2SLGBTQIA+ educators. Without our voices in the room, meaningful progress remains out of reach.

HOW WE STAY

Despite the systemic barriers, discrimination, and emotional toll, many queer educators choose to remain in the profession—not just for themselves, but for their students, their colleagues, and the future of public education. Staying is not an act of passive endurance but one of active resistance, strategy, and care. So, for those who brave the pitchforks, I offer this as an invitation to reflect, connect, and imagine new ways forward:

BUILD COMMUNITY

Finding allies—both within and beyond the profession—makes a critical difference. Groups like the BCTF’s 2SLGBTQIA+ Caucus, local GSAs and community Pride clubs, and intersectional advocacy groups provide spaces for queer teachers to connect, share experiences, and strategize for collective action.

PUSH FOR POLICY

If you can get in the room, and get a seat at the table, push for better policy. Strengthening and enforcing policies that explicitly protect queer educators is essential. This includes advocating for better implementation of SOGI policies, stronger union protections, and mandatory anti-discrimination training for all school and district staff. From what I have witnessed, teachers who stay often do so by becoming engaged in this work, transforming personal struggles into systemic change.

BE RADICAL AND TAKE CARE

Radical self-care and boundaries are key ingredients for sustainability in this field. For queer teachers to remain in the profession, prioritizing mental health is non-negotiable. Seeking regular, affirming counselling, setting firm boundaries around emotional labour, and finding ways to disconnect from the toxicity of online and in-person attacks are crucial survival strategies.

While the phrase “nothing about us, without us” is frequently invoked in equity work, in practice, queer teachers are not always involved in decision-making processes, professional development initiatives, and policy discussions. This leads to policies and practices that fail to reflect the lived realities

VISIBILITY IS VITAL

While visibility is not always safe, many queer educators remain in teaching because they recognize the profound impact of representation. Seeing openly queer, trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit teachers provides students with a roadmap for their own futures and counters narratives of shame and invisibility. The presence of queer educators in schools sends a powerful message to 2SLGBTQIA+ students—that they belong, that their identities are valued, and that they have a bright and sparkly future. Many queer youth experience isolation, bullying, and rejection, both at school and at home. When they see themselves reflected in teachers and people in positions of power, it fosters a sense of possibility and resilience. Representation not only affirms students’ identities but also helps create safer, more inclusive school environments where students feel seen and supported. This representation not only validates students, but other queer staff members, offering them a sense of solidarity and visibility in an often-isolating profession. Seeing colleagues who share their identities thrive in the field reinforces the belief that they, too, belong and have a future in education. It also fosters mentorship and mutual support, helping to counteract the burnout and alienation that many queer educators face.

EXIT STRATEGIES, NOT FAILURE

They reality is, sometimes the classroom is not safe for us. For those who do leave, shifting into advocacy, policy work, or teacher education can be a continuation of the fight rather than an admission of defeat. Many former educators become instrumental in shaping broader educational policies that improve conditions for future queer teachers and students. They can use their first-hand experience to advocate for stronger protections, push for inclusive curricula, and support the next generation of educators. Leaving the classroom does not mean abandoning the cause—it means finding new ways forward.

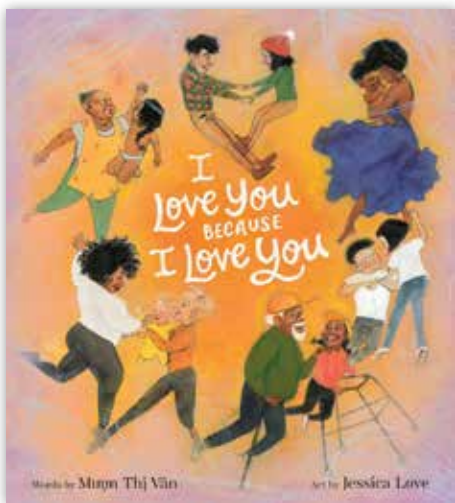
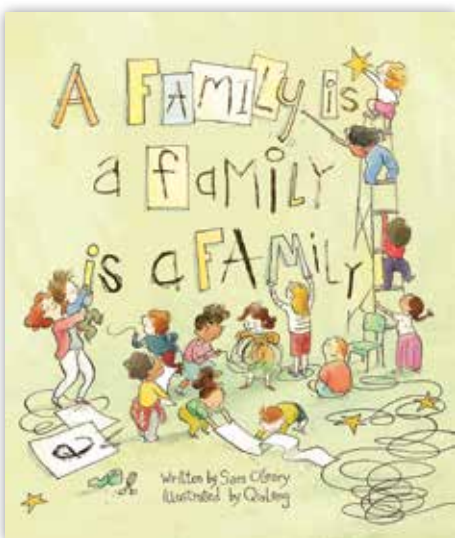
THE FUTURE OF QUEER TEACHING IN BC

As we push for more equitable and just school environments, the conversation must shift from why we leave to how we create conditions that allow us to stay. Until queer teachers can exist without fear, and stifling oppression, the teaching profession will continue to lose educators whose presence is vital to the well-being of all students, in particular the queer, trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit ones. If public education is truly about fostering inclusive, critical, and compassionate societies, then keeping queer teachers in classrooms is not just an act of resistance—it is an act of necessity. •



Left: The button-maker in action (far left); a student's buttons ready to be gifted (left). Photos provided by author.

"... it was important to me to include all the iterations of families. ... including queer families, blended families, children who are raised in care or by grandparents, single parents, or families living intergenerationally."



RESOURCES

I Love You because I Love You
by Mượn Thị Văn
A Family Is a Family Is a Family
by Sara O'Leary

Celebrating Family Day in Kindergarten

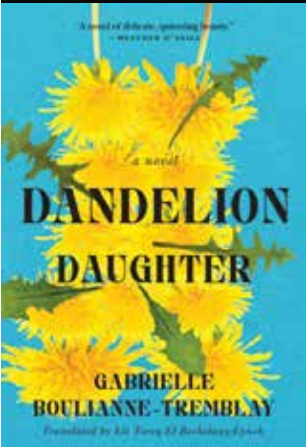
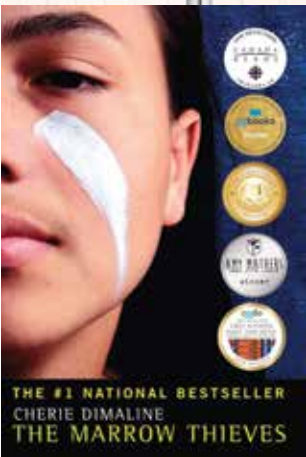
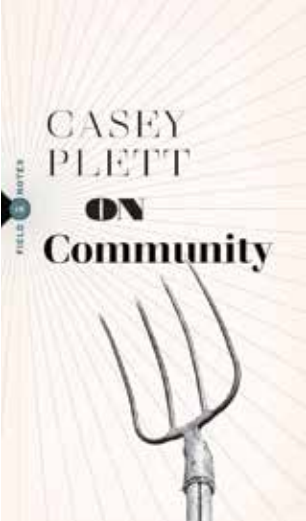
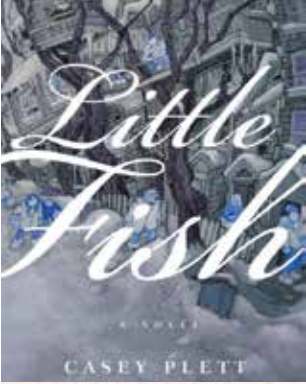
By Mahima Lamba (she/her), teacher, Delta

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I made a change in the way I plan my yearly calendar. I made the choice to consciously emphasize and celebrate Family Day in February rather than Mother's Day or Father's Day in May and June. While this was a departure from the traditional early childhood education thematic calendar, instead of making a special craft for Mom and Dad in May and June, I wanted the children in my class to be able to have a token of love for all of their important adults.

Family will always be important to young children and a meaningful theme in the early years. Learning about our families is a way for children to develop a positive personal and cultural identity. It is for this reason that it was important to me to include all the iterations of families. I wanted to be able to recognize and include the many families that exist in our school communities, including queer families, blended families, children who are raised in care or by grandparents, single parents, or families living intergenerationally. This inclusive approach has the added benefit of being trauma-informed and sensitive to families who are experiencing separation or death, knowing Mother's Day and Father's Day can be hard days on the calendar for many children and adults.

For this project we chose to make "campaign" style buttons using a button-maker machine. A local high school teacher lent us the button-maker from his business education program and generously donated the supplies, so we had no limit on the number of buttons each child could make. Each child decorated a beautiful heart in oil pastel and chose a colourful paper background to make an image that popped. Then I photographed each one and printed them on to a template to use with the button-maker's die-cut machine. Each child got to press and make their own collection of buttons and generate a list of people they wanted to make a button for. It warmed my heart as children listed parents, grandparents, siblings, and beloved neighbours they wanted to make buttons for. Now in our community I see people proudly wearing their buttons on jackets, bags, and lanyards carrying their Kindergarten love with them.

Making a special project meets our ADST curricular outcomes such as making (a product using known procedures) and sharing (choosing who to share your product with). I was happy to find a way to continue to include the fun and learning of a Mother's Day-type project with a simple, inclusive change. •



SUMMER READING LIST

Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ authors

CASEY PLETT

Casey Plett won the Amazon First Novel Award, the Firecracker Award for Fiction, and the Lambda Literary Award for Best Transgender Fiction. Her biography notes, "I've moved around so much in my life, but more than anywhere else I'm from Treaty 1 Territory, Winnipeg and Southern Manitoba. I'm a trans woman and my writing tends to center around that, in one way or another."

Books: *Little Fish*, *On Community*

CHERIE DIMALINE

Cherie Dimaline is an award-winning author who lives in her Georgian Bay Métis Community in Ontario and writes/produces for screen and stage. "All I ever wanted to be was a writer," says Cherie. "My stories come from generations of halfbreeds on the Great Lakes over to Manitoba and reaching into the US, and guided and influenced by powerful, generous women who had already done the heavy lifting of blazing the literary trail."

Books: *The Marrow Thieves*, *VenCo*

GABRIELLE BOULIANNE-TREMBLAY

Gabrielle Boulianne-Tremblay is a writer, actress, trans rights activist, model, and speaker. Her book, *La fille d'elle-meme* was a Quebec bestseller and is now available in English, translated by Eli Tareq El Bechelany-Lynch.

Book: *Dandelion Daughter*

LI CHARMINE ANNE (李倩文)

Li Charmaine Anne (李倩文) is a Hong Kong diaspora writer and settler on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), q̓ícəy̓ (Katzie), q'w̓a:n̓'ən̓ (Kwantlen), and kwikwəłəm (Kwikwetlem) nations. Comfy with the pronouns she and they, "Li" is her family name, which she lists first as per Chinese tradition. Charmaine's first novel *Crash Landing* won the 2024 Governor General's Literary Award in Young People's Literature—Text. Charmaine believes that by sharing and listening to each other's stories, we create a more just world.

Book: *Crash Landing*

JILLIAN FLECK

Jillian Fleck is a multidisciplinary artist who lives in Calgary, Alberta. Jillian's art practice consists of comic-making, drawing, writing, and storytelling. They work within themes of queer identity, the weird and the uncanny, as well as mental illness.

Graphic novel: *Cheryl*

JOSHUA WHITEHEAD

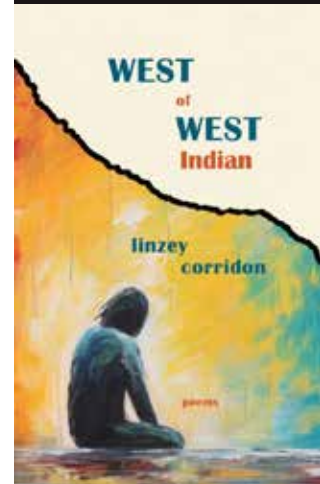
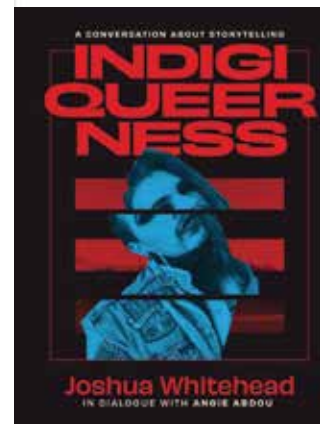
Joshua Whitehead is an Oji-Cree, Two-Spirit storyteller and academic from Peguis First Nation on Treaty 1 territory in Manitoba. He is an associate professor of Indigenous Studies and English at the University of Calgary on Treaty 7 territory.

Books: *Making Love with the Land*, *Indigiqueerness: A Conversation about Storytelling*

LINZEY S. CORRIDON

Linzey S. Corridon is a Vanier Canada Scholar, educator, and writer. Born and raised in the Caribbean multi-island nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, he now resides in Canada. Linzey's research focuses on the experiences of queer Caribbean (Queeribbean) peoples.

Book: *West of West Indian*





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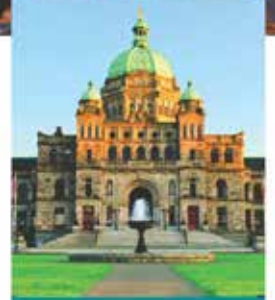
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For more information and to access IMS, contact Sherry Payne, Nadia Bove, or your local union.

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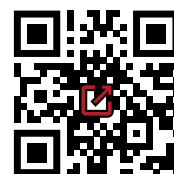


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For more information and to access PSS, contact Sherry Payne, Miranda Light or your local union.

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ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE STUDENTS IN THE FIELD

Photo taken in the Climate Adaptation Research Lab in the Mount Maxwell Watershed, where Sara Peerless's environmental science class carries out research in collaboration with working scientists. Read more on pages 8–11.

Photo by Grade 9 student
Finlay Repen.

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