

President's Message



A lot has changed for all of us in the last several months. Some changes can seem overwhelming (watch for our #GoodSocialStudies campaign that we rolled out in November), but 2020 has also provided opportunities to try new things. In the spring I truly missed being in the classroom, but the change in routines also offered me time to build a locally created social justice course I hope to teach next year. I also took several tutorials from EdTech to better learn how to use Google Classroom (you don't know what you are missing until an expert shows you all of the tricks and shortcuts). Now that I am back

in the classroom, routines I've been using for decades are being thrown upside down with some surprising (and positive) results. And in this ever-shifting atmosphere, we are able to show students how important social studies is in their everyday lives, whether it's understanding the historical legacies that have led to the marginalization of peoples or the options governments have in responding to a crisis. As I worked on the social justice course, I kept coming across the same message: You may not have the power to change the big problems, but doing good in your own community will make a big difference. And, as teachers, you are doing good for your community.

Sadly, we are not having a conference this year, but your Social Studies Council is eager to support you in your classroom. Please let us know if there is some professional development we can help you with, whether it is developing a professional development opportunity or accessing funds to participate in an online course. We wish you all the best for the remainder of 2020!

Jennifer Williams

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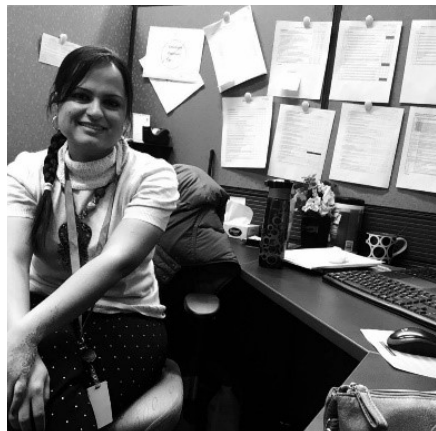
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From the Editor



I hope you have been enjoying the past issues of the *Focus Newsletter*. If you have any suggestions or ideas, please contact us anytime to let us know. Also, we are always looking for submissions. If you have a great idea that you'd like to publish, please send it to us for review. If it meets all our criteria, we would love to feature you in our newsletter!

There are no regional updates in this issue. Due to the current pandemic situation, all regional presidents have been holding off on in-person events until further notice. In the meantime, please check out our website, Facebook page, Twitter, e-mail newsletters and Instagram to learn about any virtual events that we might be hosting.

As most of you know, our conference has been postponed until October 2021. We will keep updating our conference website (www.atassconference.com), so please keep an eye on it for up and coming information.

For the past few newsletters, I have included a fun puzzle of some kind. This time, I have a riddle for you that I heard from one of my students:

Why do they call it the novel coronavirus? (See answer below.)

I encourage you to take time for yourself during this uncertain time. Try not to worry too much about the future. If you find yourself worrying, remind yourself that worrying only takes you away from the present moment rather than fixing any future problems. If you are one of the lucky ones dealing with everything really well, perhaps think about reaching out and checking up on others (socially distanced of course!) because they may not be coping as well as you might hope. Hearing from you and knowing that someone cares could make all the difference!

Sana Waseem

Riddle answer: *Because it's a long story!* 😊

Award Recognitions

Kristian Basaraba

Have you been enjoying reading Kristian Basaraba's excellent articles that we have been publishing in our newsletters lately? Well, great news! Kristian has been awarded the prestigious Governor General's History Award for his excellence in teaching. Read more about it here: www.canadashistory.ca/awards/governor-general-s-history-awards/award-recipients/2020/kristian-basaraba.

Congratulations, Kristian, for this amazing achievement! Thanks so much for all your contributions to our newsletter!

More Governor General's History Awards

If you would like to read about other award winners across Canada, please check out this link: www.canadashistory.ca/awards/governor-general-s-history-awards/award-recipients.

I Belong Bags: Returning Dignity to Children in Crisis in Alberta

As featured on CTV News (<https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/calgary-mom-filling-backpacks-of-hope-for-children-in-crisis-1.5175095>), I Belong Bags (IBB) is a grassroots initiative in Calgary supporting vulnerable children in crisis. This initiative and vision originally focused on supporting children entering foster care but has since transitioned to include all children and youth experiencing crisis, trauma, neglect and poverty in the city. IBB provides children in crisis with backpacks filled with essential and comforting items such as pyjamas, toothbrushes, soft blankets, small toys and other gifts.

As of June 2018, in Alberta, over 11,000 children accessed child intervention services of some kind (Alberta Children's Services 2018/19). Many of these children would have been apprehended from their homes for their protection with only the clothes on their backs or just enough time to fill a trash bag with their most treasured belongings. Using a trash bag as a suitcase or leaving empty-handed from the only place they know as home sends damaging psychological messages to children already experiencing trauma, and children do not deserve to feel this way. The impact of this moment lives with them and carries into every part of their existence from this point forward. I Belong Bags is working toward changing this meaning-making moment for children and reminding them that

they do belong in this world, no matter what they've experienced, where they're from or what they believe to be true about themselves.

Founder Tanya Forbes started I Belong Bags in her child's Grade 1 classroom at Tanbridge Academy in February 2019. The Grade 1 social studies class took this project on wholeheartedly and spearheaded it to the entire school. They drafted e-mails to parents and created posters, donation boxes and a presentation for the Grades 2–9 students. As the donations started rolling in, they collected and sorted the items into backpacks. By the end of the term, they collected 18 filled backpacks as well as such miscellaneous items as diapers and newborn hats to add to each backpack. The Grades 2–9 students donated over \$700 that they earned from an entrepreneurial fair and casual Friday. These backpacks found homes at the women's emergency shelter and Tsoguna Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service.

The social impact of this little project was far-reaching. This hands-on involvement helped the students connect with words like *belonging*, *responsibility*, *rights* and *active citizenship*, and instilled such values as compassion, empathy and caring for others. Students gained an understanding of how to affect change in the world by supporting children in need in their own communities. Rather than simply talking about what it looks like to be positive members of society and of

the community, the students gained a lived experience that strongly impacted their sense of pride and self-worth. They took responsibility and ownership of this project in a big way, were truly engaged in the learning and enrolled older students, teachers and parents with their presentation and leadership skills.

This small school project was expected to be a one-time initiative but has since grown into a viable community movement that is on its way to becoming a nonprofit organization. IBB is working with Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service, the Children's Cottage Society and the Alex Youth Centre, and free storage space is generously sponsored by Sentinel Storage.

The I Belong Bags Backpack Program has been submitted to the Calgary Board of Education again this year as a community project for teachers to review and consider implementing in their classrooms as part of the social studies curriculum in new and creative ways.

If you are inspired by the impact of this initiative and would like to find out more, please reach out to Tanya Forbes at tanya@ibelongbags (Subject: Backpack Program) or call 403-512-5606.

Reference

Alberta Children's Services. 2018/19. *Child Intervention Information and Statistics Summary*. Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Children's Services.

Write for Rights

Nassima is in prison for campaigning for women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Gustavo was shot and blinded by police for protesting in Chile. Jani is risking her life to protect the Amazon in Colombia.

The stories of Nassima, Gustavo, Jani and seven other urgent cases are why we need teachers and schools to join Amnesty International's Write for Rights, the world's biggest event for human rights.

Every year around December 10 (International Human Rights Day), people around the world write millions of letters, e-mails and tweets, and sign petitions in solidarity with people who have been harassed, threatened and jailed for speaking out or for who they are.

Together, we will be putting pressure on governments, leaders and decision makers. We will show love and support for the people featured in this year's cases and their families. And we will make change happen—releasing activists and protecting people who stand up for change.

Last year, more than 6.6 million actions were taken in homes, schools and public spaces across Canada and the world. And we helped to change lives, including that of 18-year-old Magai Matiop Ngong, who was freed from death row in South Sudan in July 2020:

Thank you so much. I have no words. You have no idea how my heart is filled with happiness.
—Magai, *Write for Rights 2019 case*

You can participate in this global event by organizing or supporting an event in your classroom or at your school. You can register and find all the case sheets, tips and resources here: <https://writeathon.ca>.

Be sure to visit the resource page for teachers! Download lesson plans, sample letters and cases prepared for students ages 9 and up: <https://writeathon.ca/resources/classroom>.

Thank you for making our collective voice for change even louder by joining Write for Rights!

In case you missed it this year, please feel free to keep an eye out for it next winter!

Bursaries

We aren't having a conference this year, but there is still so much you could do, and the ATA Social Studies Council is here to help financially. There are plenty of great courses and resources online by such various organizations as Facing History and Ourselves (www.facinghistory.org/calendar).

Their Teaching the Residential Schools Stolen Lives course is particularly interesting.

If you are interested in a bursary and would like more information (how to apply, which courses it applies to and so on), please e-mail our president, Jennifer Williams, at atasscpresident@gmail.com. Thanks!

Decolonization Skateboards

Indigenous history, skateboards and art were themes that drove an exhibit, entitled Exploring Colonialism, Creativity and Reconciliation with Skateboards, curated by the students of Sal's Skate Shop, a classroom at Salisbury High School, in Sherwood Park, that melds entrepreneurial skills and skateboard culture to engage youth. This project, partially funded by the Aspen Foundation for Labour Education, was inspired by the work of Micheal Langan, owner and operator of Colonialism Skateboards based in Saskatchewan. His company's goal is "to draw attention to, and have people engage with, complex and untelling aspects of Indigenous Canadian history and culture by combining skateboard art with history lessons on Indigenous culture and colonialism in Canada" (www.colonialism.ca/). Modelled after Micheal's work, this project had a goal to collaborate with Indigenous creatives and leaders in the community to create works of art that explore those ideas of Canada's colonial past.

The project began with local educator Michel Blades visiting the class to give a seminar on foundational Indigenous knowledge. Topics she covered allowed students to learn about the Canadian government's policies directly affecting the lives of Indigenous Peoples, such as treaties, the *Indian Act*, residential schools and the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As one student mentioned, "I learned what Indigenous children went through in residential schools . . . where inside those buildings there was absolute destruction of their language and culture." The seminar also enabled the students to have

confidence in guiding his project by allowing them to be teachers, and the teachers (guest artists and community leaders) to be learners as set out with Indigenous pedagogical ways of knowing and doing.

One of those community leaders was Colonialism Skateboards professional rider Joe Buffalo. Originally from Maskwacis and now based out of Vancouver, Joe visited the class to talk about the positivity he found in skateboarding and how it allowed him to overcome the darkness experienced while attending a residential school in Alberta. He also shared the story behind the graphic on his first pro model: a skateboard that pays homage to his ancestor Plains Cree chief Pitikwahanapiwiyn (Poundmaker). Joe's story and graphic shed light on how skateboarding can be used as a form of activism and a method to invoke social change, and it was his involvement with this project that inspired him to begin work on his nonprofit organization entitled Nations.



Teacher Kristian Basaraba and pro skater Joe Buffalo with his Poundmaker pro model.

With Michel and Joe laying the groundwork, the students were introduced to artist-in-residence

John "JCat" Cardinal of Whitefish Lake First Nations. John's work depicts a connection to his cultural roots with the use of colour, designs and animals but also incorporates contemporized themes in hip hop, fashion and anime. His ability to bring these two seemingly separate worlds together made him a perfect fit to mentor the students and help them find their voice through art. John worked seamlessly with the students teaching them the skills and techniques necessary to bring the teachings of Michel and Joe to life on a skateboard deck. These workshops also led to John sharing his story of being a self-taught artist growing up on a reservation and how he used art to escape the negative social pressures he faced while there. Through this mentorship the students ultimately became further agents to bring awareness to oppression and systemic harm through their skateboard graphics, social media presence and the art exhibit they curated together. It also spawned a partnership to make this project an annual collaboration between John, Joe and a new batch of Sal's Skate Shop students.



Artist-in-Residence John "JCat" Cardinal and his Decolonization Skate Deck

Over six weeks students painted their boards with the addition of planning and promoting the art exhibition hosted by Local 124 skate shop in Edmonton. The exhibition featured 17 decks with varying themes related to Canadian colonialism such as residential schools and state actions that have led to the disappearance of thousands of Indigenous women. Visitors to the opening reception were treated to a skate demonstration by the Full Circle Skate team on the indoor skate ramp as well as the opportunity to visit with the artists and get their perspective on what they learned from this journey. The exhibit ran for five weeks and received many positive comments and accolades from student peers, the public and school and community leaders. To paraphrase Michel Blades, reconciliation is about relationship building, and this project extended that out past the classroom to the skate shop and had a broader social media engagement that reached hundreds of people. The dialogue

between community stakeholders within these venues and platforms was testament to the power of skateboarding and how it can be used as a call to action to forge the path to decolonization.



Decolonization Skateboard Exhibit at Local 124 Skate Shop



*My heart and soul were never mine to own...
Artist: Georgia L*

Kristian Basaraba

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Maggie Shane, the ATA's privacy officer, is your resource for privacy compliance support.

780-447-9429 (direct)

780-699-9311 (cell, available any time)

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Signed: _____

Print name: _____ Today's date: _____

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