

President's Message



Last year we held our annual General meeting online and shared what we were able to accomplish before COVID-19 shut everything down. As a council we have been able to present to beginning teachers and preservice teachers, both in person last year and over Zoom this year. The Lethbridge region has also been great, holding various events in that area, including a session with Eva Olsson, who is a Holocaust survivor, and an Indigenous night with traditional games and food. Council members also hosted booths at teachers' conventions to spread the word. Unfortunately, we had to

postpone our Banff conference; future conferences are in the planning stages, but are still up in the air due to the current pandemic situation.

At the AGM we put out a request for individuals to serve in new roles on the council. We would like to welcome Melissa McQueen, who has offered to take on the role of Central Alberta Regional president. We would also love to find someone passionate about using social media to help us with our campaigns—contact me at atasscpresident@gmail.com if you are interested. Also, at our AGM next year we will be looking for any individuals who would be interested in taking on the role of president of the council, so please encourage anyone you know who might be interested to contact me and I can give them more information on this role (I'm not going anywhere, but thought it would be a good time to hand the reins over to a new person).

We love to hear about the great things you are doing in your classrooms through our *Focus* newsletter. If you know of someone in your school who has some great ideas for the social studies classroom (including yourself!), please contact our *Focus* editor at atasscfocus@gmail.com. We are also fortunate to have a professional

publication, *One World*, that provides us with insights into the academic world of social studies.

We realize that this can be a very stressful time, not just because of the limitations in our classroom, but also because of concerns related to the draft new social studies curriculum that we have heard members express. We have advocated on behalf of our council members by sending a letter to the minister of education expressing our concerns. We also created a social media campaign, "Good Social Studies ..." to help educate the public about what is essential for the curriculum focus. I thank all of the people that helped to research and create the posts for this information blitz.

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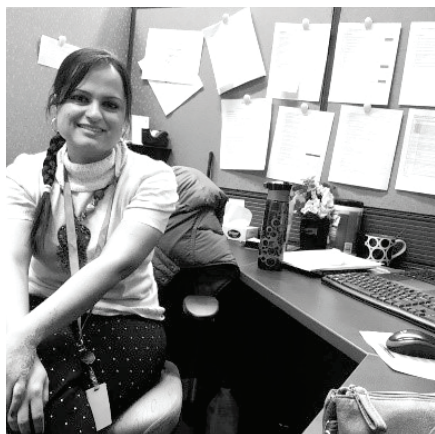
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Letter from the Editor



Dear readers

I hope you had a great summer and are successfully back into the swing of things at school.

September is both my birth month and the start to a new school year, so to me, September is a time for a fresh new start and a time to think about personal and professional goals for the year. September, rather than January, is the real “new year’s resolution” time for me. I try to focus on at least one goal in each of these three areas: professional

growth, personal growth (this could be something as simple as trying a new recipe or something as complicated as learning a new language just for fun!) and something for my mental health and well-being. This year, I plan to complete the University of Alberta online course on Indigenous ways of knowing, try a new recipe at least once a month (I don’t like cooking but I like eating home-cooked meals, so I want to try adding some new things to my meal rotations) and work on some paint-by-number projects I ordered online (arts and crafts help ground me).

My goal as the *Focus* editor is to get more involvement from all of you. If you would like to be featured in our newsletter or would like to write an article for us, I would love to hear from you! Please email me at atasscfocus@gmail.com.

I wish you all the opportunity to work on goals of your own this school year.

Make a great day!

Sana Waseem

continued from cover...

On a national scale, we are part of SENC (Social Studies Educators Network of Canada), an organization established to support social studies teachers from across the country. This fall we provided funds for members of the council to participate in an online national conference that was organized by the members of this national network. I also want to remind you that with the limited ability to provide professional development in person due to the pandemic, the council has created a \$1,000 professional development fund for teachers to take an online course,

with up to \$250 per teacher per year. This is in addition to the funding that regional councils can provide to host local events.

Our goal is to support you in any way we can to enhance your teaching practice in the social studies classroom. If you have any ideas for an event you would like to be held (virtually in the immediate future, but also in person once limitations are lifted), please contact me or your regional representative. We wish you all the best in the remainder of this school year.

Jennifer Williams

Get to Know Your Council Executive

Jenn Williams



Outgoing President

When people ask us in an icebreaker activity to “tell a partner

something unique about you,” I usually say that I grew up in a very conservative Christian home and ended up marrying an agnostic bartender (this year I will be celebrating my 25th anniversary—although “celebrate” might be a bit optimistic, since the trip to Hawaii was cancelled due to the pandemic). I was not a strong student, but I loved my social studies classes; I took several years after high school before going back to university (GPRC and U o L) to get my BA in history/sociology and BEd. During those intervening years, I was a waitress in an old-timey saloon where I also had to can-can dance, a dental lab assistant where I made dentures, a tour guide in southern Utah and a nanny—but none of those jobs gave me the satisfaction I get from teaching. In my free time I am often thinking of new ideas or learning more about how to improve my teaching practice; they say you know you love what you do when you think about it even when you don’t have to. This includes listening to great podcasts like *Revisionist History*, *Stuff You Missed in History Class*, *You’re Dead to Me*, *Planet Money*, *99% Invisible* and *The Happiness Lab*. I started my teaching career in Grande Prairie, and have been teaching at Bert Church High in Airdrie since 2007. Currently, I

am serving as the president of the Social Studies Council, but have decided to step aside next year so some new energy can lead the council. I do plan on continuing to be actively involved, as I love networking with other teachers in the province.

Shelley Kirkvold



Incoming President and Southern Regional President

Hello, Oki, Bonjour! I am Shelley

Kirkvold and I serve as the South Zone representative. A little about myself—I teach Grades 10–12 at Catholic Central High School in Lethbridge. My passions are spending time with my family, especially my five amazing grandsons; travel; hiking; and, of course, teaching. I teach social studies and Aboriginal studies; however, I feel I learn so much from my students. Some highlights from my teaching career include attending the Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, in Ottawa; learning from Blackfoot elders; and travelling with our students to attend the 100th anniversary of Vimy, as well as the Holocaust tour to Germany, Poland and Czech Republic.

I would love to connect with more members in this region. We try to host some great events and collaborate with some incredible educators. Please e-mail me at atasscsouth@gmail.com.

John Tidswell



Past President

John has been an Alberta teacher for 25 years and has taught in every grade from 1 to 12. He is

currently working in a virtual classroom, teaching and developing coursework for Revelation Online, Edmonton Catholic Schools’ online learning department. Previously, John worked for seven years as the district’s social studies consultant, working with schools and teachers to promote best practices. He is the past president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association Social Studies Council, and is currently working with other educators from across the country to help establish the Social Studies Education Network of Canada (SSENC). This organization seeks, among other goals, to facilitate cooperation among social studies educators across Canada. John is a musician and is interested in the arts, culture, politics, economics and environmental issues.

Kristy Williams



Treasurer

Hi everyone! I am Kristy Williams, your newly elected treasurer.

I am currently teaching social studies and

English 8 at St John Paul II in Grande Prairie. I am a “new teacher” because I returned to finish my education

degree only two years ago, after a long career with Statistics Canada.

I live just outside the Grande Prairie city limits with my husband, Dave, and our three kids—Alexandra (15), Bradley (13) and Corben (10). Teaching teens is tough—but *living* with them is a true labour of love! We love to spend time back-country hiking or snorkelling on the sandy beaches of Hawaii.

My favourite part of social studies is how easy it is to connect to our world. Grade 8 curriculum has been a great way to start my career, and working with other new teachers we have developed a new, fun crosscurricular assignment using math skills to create Tenochtitlan. I am very excited to see what the future holds for me!

Jennifer Manjak-Gill

Conference Director

Jennifer Manjak-Gill is our conference director. She has been extremely busy planning a large in-person conference, and then working even harder on all the details to postpone it due to the pandemic and finding other opportunities for members instead. Hopefully, Jennifer will get to plan an amazing in-person conference again soon.

Outside of council duties, Jennifer is a high school social studies teacher, currently enjoying maternity leave. She is passionate about project-based learning, finding ways to challenge students to play an active part in their communities and fostering a passion for finding sustainable global solutions to issues. She collaborated on a *Dragons Den* project with Jennifer Williams at Bert Church High School to have students use project-based learning in order to understand

the concept of a global village and the impact of globalization in areas such as culture, communication, environment and economics.

Carla Peck



University Liaison

Carla Peck, PhD, is professor of social studies education in the Faculty of

Education at the University of Alberta and is the director of the *Thinking Historically for Canada's Future* SSHRC Partnership Grant (www.thinking-historically.ca). She researches teachers' and students' understandings of democratic concepts, and teachers' and students' historical understandings, and is particularly interested in the relationship between students' ethnic identities and their understandings of history. Carla regularly works with teachers at the provincial, national and international level and serves as a consultant on numerous boards and advisory groups for history and civic organizations.

Bryan Burley

Communications



almost as long as I have owned a

I am now in my 27th year of teaching with Red Deer Public Schools. I have been a member of the ATASSC provincial council for

cell phone. Within council, it has been my joy to be the Central Regional president (2000–08), provincial president (2008/09) and conference chair (2011), and now communications manager—so many great years working with amazing colleagues across Alberta. The power of a council to create positive movements in education is never more important than today with the impending curricula rollouts. I know that I want the best education system in the world as my grandson makes his way through public schools.

Nik Selwood



Northern Regional President

Nik has been teaching in Northern Alberta since 2002, having

graduated from the University of Alberta with a BA and BEd. His current assignment is at Charles Spencer High School, in Grande Prairie, teaching Grades 9–12 social studies. He has been married for 20 years and has one amazing son. His passion for social studies began at a young age, when his Oma travelled with him to Europe a few times (for a few months at a time). In an age before smartphones, experiencing other parts of the world helped to expand and inspire Nik's world view. In his earlier years of teaching, Nik had been involved with the Social Studies Council, but the Northern Regional became inactive for a while. Nik has tried to get the Northern Regional active again with events and resources and is currently planning for our next event.

Orlena Shew



Edmonton
Regional
President

Orlena Shew
has been a
teacher with
Edmonton
Public Schools

for over 20 years and is currently the social studies lead teacher at S Bruce Smith Junior High. She has a BA degree in history and political science and a BEd in secondary social studies. Orlena is a lifelong learner; one of the highlights of her career was participating in the Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, which involved a week-long trip to Ottawa, to access rich resources to further develop quality resources for all students at her school. Orlena is also the First Nations, Métis and Inuit lead teacher at her school, and is responsible for organizing and curating resources to enhance the quality of education in all classrooms, as well as arranging authentic professional development experiences for staff throughout the year. Orlena believes in the importance of teaching students to be responsible citizens both in class and

in the community. She selects and leads a group of student volunteers who are focused on helping the community—as a whole and within the school. Orlena has organized several student-led initiatives over the years, including community Halloween parties, food bank drives and several other school activities. She enjoys travelling and is looking forward to exploring the world again.

Melissa McQueen



Central
Regional
President

Melissa
McQueen
teaches high
school social
studies in

Drayton Valley, a community located an hour-and-a-half southwest of Edmonton (where she was born and raised and went to school). As of late, Melissa's focus has been on radical hope in social studies by looking at curriculum through pop culture lenses such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe to help students engage with difficult knowledge.

Sana Waseem

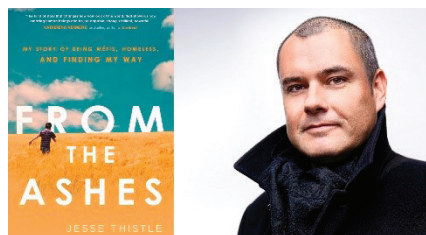


Calgary
Regional
President
and *Focus*
Newsletter
Editor

Hello! I am

Sana Waseem and I serve as the Calgary and area regional president as well as the *Focus* newsletter editor. I really enjoy what I do and can't wait for the COVID-19 situation to get to a point where we can run in-person conferences again. Outside of council duties, I am currently happily employed with CBE on a temporary contract, teaching Grade 7 humanities and helping with the school's equity committee because I am passionate about social justice and equity. At the end of the school day, I come home to my family and little rescued dog, all of whom I love very much. In the evenings I always try to make some time for myself, too. This can include but isn't limited to reading, knitting, painting, playing games, watching TV, listening to music or just hanging out with my family.

Regional Updates



South Zone

Well, things have changed in our delivery of professional development; we missed the face-to-face reunions and the sharing of some wings. With that said, this year we needed to think outside the box and find different ways to host PD. This past February, during our SW teacher's convention, we held a book draw and hosted a meet and greet with Jesse Thistle, author of *From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way*. All who participated were grateful to make deeper connections to his story of hope and resilience and learn of his next endeavours. I encourage you to read this book.

In March we hosted a Doc Night with a screening of *The New Corporation*. Over 40 people participated from across Alberta. Our breakout groups allowed us to share our take-aways and gain strategies on how to incorporate this resource into our classrooms.

It is always nice to see teachers involved in PD. It reminds me of a quote I saw at the Jewish Museum in Berlin—a Yiddish proverb, “As we teach, we learn.” I would love to connect with more members in our region. We try to host some great events and collaborate with some incredible educators. Please e-mail me at atasscsouth@gmail.com and I will add you to our South zone list. Stay safe, and take some time for yourself.

Shelley Kirkvold



Edmonton Zone

Please welcome Orlena Shew as our new Edmonton Regional president. Orlena jumped right into the swing of things and helped support members in Edmonton who wished to participate in our January book club. Welcome, Orlena!

Central Zone

With the shift of ATA meetings and gatherings to online, alongside the health crisis that is concerning for all Albertans across communities, it only makes sense for the Red Deer Central division to follow suit with online gatherings and get-togethers for the 2021/22 school year. This is a great opportunity for our area— which spreads to Rocky Mountain House, Red Deer, Drayton Valley and beyond—to get together and make those needed connections between social studies educators. We are in the works on figuring out PD and events for the Red Deer region and hope to have some fun during this turbulent time.

North Zone

Nik has recently been busy helping support members in his region who wished to participate in our book club in January. Despite working through a global pandemic, Nik has found creative ways to keep members engaged. Please do keep an eye out for future events and resources!

Calgary Zone

We have had some quieter years due to the pandemic, so Sana has been trying to share as much as possible in our ATA Social Studies Facebook group so that teachers still have access to resources and online PD. As in other regions, Sana was also recently quite busy helping coordinate details for members in her area who wished to participate in the January book club. Sana has more ideas for future events, so please keep an eye out!

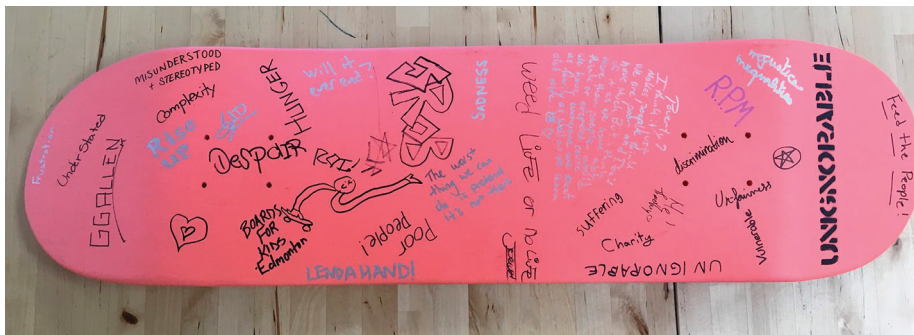
Unignorable: Poverty Awareness with Skateboards

Skateboards, street art and homelessness in youth were the themes for a student art project that took action against the #UNIGNORABLE issue of local poverty this past year. The PAWS (Poverty Awareness with Skateboards) project by Next Step High School (SPO) students was one of 21 projects awarded a grant by the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region for the 2018/19 school year, and aimed to teach students about the challenges that local individuals face when living in poverty. The goal of the PAWS project was to have students create an artistic image using a skateboard deck as a canvas in order to engage and invoke a conversation about poverty and homelessness in youth.

Next Step students made weekly visits to the Old Strathcona Youth Society (OSYS) Co-op to forge relationships and share experiences with the youth that frequent the space. Each week featured SPO students bringing along an art activity for all participants to work on plus a couple of “Make Your Mark Sharpie Boards.” These skate decks were given to people to share their thoughts on poverty through a word, picture or story written on these boards with a Sharpie. These interactive pieces allowed everyone to be engaged in this discussion, including students, co-op youth and others, and provided some insight into how this issue is viewed by each of them.

The weekly visits allowed for conversations among youth while creating some wonderful art. The first visit enabled the students and youth to get introduced to one another, to have all involved be given a synopsis of the project and to use a button maker to make buttons. Students brought along Sculpey clay to create sculptures on the second visit; in the third week, participants created drawings using pencils and paper. On each visit, SPO students heard stories from the co-op youth as to what it takes to survive and live on the street. It was these stories that one SPO student described as “an experience that has impacted me greatly, and has made me feel much more empathetic toward people in this situation.” The rides back home after these visits were very emotional for some students, and allowed them to reflect on how fortunate they are and how poverty affects youth their age. It was a humbling experience for some, and reshaped some student views and influenced what they want to do in the future. In the words of another SPO student, “It has changed my views and perspective on what I want to do with my life.”

Using these emotions, stories and experiences, the SPO students then embarked on their skateboard deck design planning and implementation. Each student was given a blank skateboard deck and challenged to create a graphic that promotes an awareness of poverty and homelessness in youth. One goal was to create a graphic that encourages a discussion of this issue and, perhaps, initiates an impetus for change. The boards were to be displayed in an art show and silent



Make Your Mark Sharpie Boards



Art pieces created by SPO students and OSYS youth during the weekly visits

an auction fundraiser for the OSYS on the evening of February 19, 2019, at The Aviary, in the heart of Edmonton.

This art exhibit featured all of the ten students' boards and included four designed by local Edmonton artists. The students displayed their work proudly and were excited to welcome guests, dignitaries and VIPs. The night also featured all of the art created on the weekly visits, the interactive Make Your Mark Sharpie decks and a variety of musical guests, including our teacher colleague Tyler Buchan, and the SNFU punk cover band The Devil's Voice. All the boards were sold in a silent auction format; this, combined with the cover charge for the event, enabled the students of Next Step High to raise approximately \$1,700 to fund programming for the homeless youth that frequent OSYS.

On April 29, 2019, the United Way hosted an awards program and celebration attended by more than 300 students, teachers and guests. It was a chance for everyone involved in this initiative to see all of the 21 projects and the impact they had on fighting poverty. Four projects were put in the spotlight for their efforts, and the students from Next Step High came away with an Awareness Award for their project. This award highlighted the hard work these students did and recognized the impact it had on everyone involved.

Kristian Basaraba



Skateboard entitled "Time Machine," by an SPO student



Untitled skateboard by an SPO student



Untitled skateboard by an OSYS youth participant

Social Studies Teacher Spotlight

Interview with Carmen Giancarlo, Grade 8 teacher, Annie Gale School

What is your favourite part of being a social studies teacher?

My favourite thing about teaching social studies is having the ability to share perspectives with my students and challenge their thinking. I really enjoy seeing them question and think critically about topics.

Through these discussions, we are able to explore how people experience things differently and how much we are influenced by our environment and the people we are surrounded by. We can look at sources to question their validity and discover how easy it is to find biased and/or false information. We also have the opportunity to share about ourselves and our own experiences, analyzing world views. Students can question their family's traditions and how and why they came to be. We can also explore the perspectives of other people and learn how their world views may be similar to or different from our own. It is also a fantastic opportunity to remind students that they are learning about themselves and that it's okay if they don't feel like they completely know who they are. Their own perspectives will develop and grow as they do. It's nice to be able to show students that this is a process and that it's okay to change their interests, how they identify, their perspectives and so on, as they learn more about themselves and the world.

What makes your school unique?

I work at a very diverse school. We have a high ELL population,



part of our school has the TLC program and we also have the Learning and Literacy program. There are about 36 different languages spoken among our student population.

Why/how did you decide to teach social studies?

My passion for social studies stems from an interest in all things relating to people. In university, I was able to major in the social sciences by focusing on the three disciplines of anthropology, psychology and sociology.

What has been the most surprising thing for you about teaching social studies during COVID?

I feel continued astonishment that we are living through a pandemic

and that students are showing up each day, ready to learn despite all the extra challenges we're facing. Students are living in what will have been a very significant time in history. It was also pretty surreal to teach about the Black Death and for it to be so relatable to students. Last year, I had to spend more time ensuring everyone understood terms like *sanitation* and *hygiene*, but this year they were all very aware of them.

What have been some challenges of teaching social studies during COVID-19, and how did you make the best of the situation?

I have found myself very grateful to have been able to teach in person for the school year, but there have still been many barriers. At times, I

was teaching a handful of students in person (those with IPPs who wanted to continue to come in) and the rest of the class online. Other times, certain students were out from anywhere between a day to over a month. A few students I have now joined my class after having been doing online learning for the last year. I've found that these inconsistencies have made it a lot more difficult to keep students caught up. I've had to be more flexible with my expectations and creative with assessments. It's also been difficult having students sitting by themselves at their desks for the majority of the school day. This meant planning more activities that can be done outside (when the weather's nice), building in more

movement breaks and intentionally including tasks where students can interact while maintaining protocols (such as "turn and talks").

What makes your day as a social studies teacher worth it?

I really enjoy when students make connections and have "ah-ha" moments. Their ability and desire to share background knowledge and see the interconnectedness of our experiences is inspiring. When students are passionate about what we are learning and curious to find out more, it's infectious.

What does a day in your life as a social studies teacher (both in and outside of the classroom) look like?

I teach humanities (social studies and English) to a Grade 8 class that also includes students in the

Learning and Literacy program. For this reason, I team-teach with another teacher who leads the math and science for the same class. I am also a learning leader, so I have various other responsibilities throughout the school day. I do reading testing with students, support other teachers with their classes, plan and prepare for professional development and professional learning communities, gather resources for my team to use, work on the school development plan, supervise students during lunch and break times, work with students one on one, and cover for teachers who didn't have a sub pick up the job (to name a few).

Annie Gale School is a Grades 6–9 school in Calgary.



The Alberta Teachers' Association
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- Bigger Class Sizes During COVID-19
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