



SIMPLE WAYS TO INCORPORATE SEL INTO YOUR REMOTE LEARNING

By Laura St John

As we continue along this uncharted trail of remote learning, it becomes increasingly clear that a guiding principle must be increased focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Our students are craving connection and need to be heard. A few simple additions to your online classroom can make a big difference.

- Create an opening ritual of checking in: Start every class in the same way, perhaps with attendance followed by a quick check in. A simple check in can be drawing an emoji to show how you're feeling today, or even giving a thumbs up, in the middle, or thumbs down. For students who start class with a thumbs down or an emoji that shows distress, we can offer the option of sharing why their day is off to a poor start in a private chat. It takes less than a minute but allows the instructor to see who is having a rough day and offers students a place to receive support.
- Meditate: Take one minute to breathe deeply and bring focus and awareness to clearing the mind. Using a bell, chime, or bowl can help bring focus. If you need help, you'll find a list of sixteen apps to review, put together by the *TeachThought* staff at this link: [List of Meditation Apps](#).
- Engage the body and voice: After a meditation, consider adding a quick physical and vocal warm up. Getting the body and voice engaged immediately can heighten engagement, as well as give you a visual indication of who is a willing and active participant and who is reluctant to get involved. You can develop your own movements, or for a wonderful set of warm ups for PreK-5th Grade students, visit the [Play In A Book](#) website. My drama based reading company developed asynchronous content to get kids moving back in March when the world changed so quickly. A favorite for PreK-2nd grade students is Alphabet Yoga.
- Reflect on the circumstances at hand: Incorporate a time to reflect on how students are feeling about the current issues including the pandemic, the challenges of remote learning, and the racial injustice brought to the forefront of our minds with the murders by police of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others. I learned a great activity for such reflections at a workshop hosted by [Better Cubed](#), an organization out of Minneapolis which is dedicated to reforming leadership based on the work of Brene Brown. Ask students to draw a picture of themselves (or just write their name) in the center of a full size sheet of paper. Draw a circle around the picture. Outside the circle, take a minute or two to list all of the things that are concerning you regarding remote learning (or another challenging subject). Once that list is complete, take a minute or two to list the things that are good or how you are overcoming some of your challenges with remote learning (or another topic). Put those items inside the circle with your name. This simple activity provides a visual reminder to maintain a circle of protection amidst all the challenges.

Although it may feel like time in the online classroom is too tight to add any additional activities, attention to SEL can provide a compass that guides us in making sure our students feel engaged and connected.

TWO SIMPLE MANTRAS TO GOOD TEACHING (PART II)

By Melissa Wheeler, IRC Secretary

Previously, I introduced you to my first mantra for good teaching, "Being a teacher means giving up my

rights to having a comfort zone.” I argued for equitable teaching practices that focus on the students rather than teacher preference. Today, I present to you my second mantra for good teaching.

“I don’t teach curriculum; I teach students.”

School districts put demands on teachers to use certain curricula. We are given pacing guides. We have standards that dictate what all students should be taught each year. We only have 180 days to meet all of these requirements, and sometimes it can feel like we’re throwing proverbial spaghetti all over the wall and just hoping that some of it sticks. We don’t even have time to wait and see if it does, though, before we’re rushing on to the next unit. That is nonsense.

My job as a teacher is to teach the beautiful, amazing, unique individuals I am lucky enough to get to work with each day. This means that my lessons will likely change from year to year, as my groups of students change.

- I need to know and understand my students as individual human beings, as family members, and as community members within our classroom.
- I need to be able to foresee what they will need in order to succeed in the curriculum I’ve been given, make sure they have access to it, and be ready to switch up my plans on a moment’s notice if they’re not bringing my students in the right direction.

Sometimes, that means I stray from the curriculum. I might need to go back and reteach prerequisite skills to make the curriculum accessible for some of my students.

Curriculum is a tool.

As a teacher, I have many tools in my belt. Not every concept is a nail, so there’s no reason for every lesson to be a hammer. I can draw from a vast array of tools that I’ve gained from professional communities and organizations, like IRC, other experts, fellow teachers, research, professional reading, book clubs, and experience. The curriculum is a great guide for what the grade-level goals and expectations are for my students. I must map out a course to get each of them from where they are to those goals. When I can loosen my grip on the curriculum, I can step back and make important connections between the content and my students’ personal lives. I can use it as an aid as I craft engaging lessons, weaving the content together with purpose and immediacy. Some fourth-graders in our classroom might see little urgency in learning to write an essay so that someday they can get into a good college. If a powerful essay is the goal, though, why can’t it be used to affect change in ways that those fourth-graders can see, feel, and experience in their worlds right now? Cornelius Minor addresses this use of curriculum as a tool in his fabulous book, *We Got This*. He argues for adapting the curriculum to not just prepare our students for some distant future but to engage with the world around them in powerful ways right this very moment.

I didn’t marry the curriculum.

I work with the curriculum. I have recited no vows and made no promises to adhere to it alone at the exclusion of all other resources. Being a literacy specialist, this opens up a world of possibilities for me to bring my expertise into the classroom. I can incorporate literature that is outside of the cannon anthology, and suggestions that provide more mirrors, windows, and doors (as Rudine Sims Bishop so adeptly phrased in 1990) to my students. I am obligated to look critically at curriculum and supplement it with authentic voices and accurate portrayals of cultures, races, ethnicities, socio-economic classes, genders, sexual identities, and more. My goal as a teacher is to help my students find their voices and be empowered to engage fully in a global society, ready to affect change in the world in which they live to create a more beautiful reality than we currently have. One narrow curriculum is not going to cut it. Our students deserve so much more. Our Black students, Indigenous students, students of color, disabled students, gender non-normative students, and poor students deserve to see themselves in our lessons and in our books in authentic ways that reflect their actual lives. It is my job as their teacher to ensure that it is so. It is also my job to expose students to a broader world than they experience in their daily lives, to impart truths about our collective history, and to encourage exploration.

EQUITY AND TITLE I

By Nancy Oesterreich, IRC Treasurer

While the term “equity” seems like the newest buzzword in education, the search for equity isn’t new. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and its revisions and amendments have sought to achieve equity amongst our students across the country, starting with low income students and later including English language learners, and all lower performing students.

In ESEA of 1965, the federal government provided a billion dollars to disadvantaged students in K-12 schools for school libraries, state departments of education, and research. Additional dollars were added for bilingual education and students with disabilities (Nelson, 2016). The decentralized nature of American

education and the reliance on local property taxes for funds had long contributed to differences in quality of education (Gamson, McDermott, & Reed, 2015).

ESEA was designed to satisfy many different constituencies. ESEA was drafted to alleviate poverty, primarily through providing funds that will allow poor children equal access to an education. ESEA was seen as a way for the federal government to direct funding to areas most affected by poverty. ESEA was a way to innovate, experiment, and research educational theories (Gamson, McDermott & Reed, 2015).

In the early years of implementation of Title I, ambiguities in the law led to confusion about the program's purpose and beneficiaries (Murphy, 1971). Congress delegated choices about Title I spending and program design to local districts and schools, but did reserve the federal authority to establish "basic criteria" to guide state and local implementation of Title I. Responsibility for developing these guidelines fell to the United States Office of Education (USOE).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 has over its history changed the course of public education in the United States (Gamson, McDermott, & Reed, 2015). "Among Title I's policy mechanisms for addressing inequities in educational resources are criteria for allocating and targeting supplemental funds to districts and schools" (Boyle & Lee, 2015, p 11). In particular, the federal role in education has evolved along with methods to address educational inequities for underserved students (Boyle & Lee, 2015). Although ESEA's commitment to helping the nation's most vulnerable students through Title I has held, its structure has changed in response to policy and education reform movements, from a program designed to help individual low-income students to a program that provides leverage for improving *all* public schools.

The shift from providing educational equity for impoverished students to one of improving schools as a whole has not solved the problem of providing an equitable education for all students. While funding for Title I is federal in nature, state and local agencies must solve the equity problem with little guidance or protocols in place to do so. There are no standards by which a school district must operate their Title I program or spend their Title I funds. School districts are encouraged to use research based strategies, but there is no accountability to do so. It also seems that "research based" is a moving target, and that there is plentiful "research" to justify any course of action. ESEA has proven to have potential as a powerful financial resource for improving equity. Without guidance and research on what equity means for students with different educational needs, however, throwing money at a problem with no defined solutions or consistency is doing little to solve the problems of equity in education.

References

Boyle, A. & Lee, K. (2015). *Title I at 50: A Retrospective*. American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Title-I-at-50-rev.pdf>

Gamson, D.A., McDermott, K.A. & Reed, D.S. (2015). *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act at Fifty: Aspirations, Effects, and Limitations* RSF 2015 1:3, 1-29. Retrieved from: <https://www.rsjournal.org/doi/abs/10.7758/RSF.2015.1.3.01>

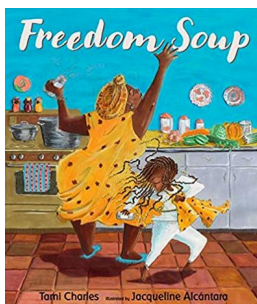
Murphy, J. T. (1971). Title I of ESEA: The politics of implementing federal educational reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 41(1), 35-63.

Nelson, A. (2016). *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act at Fifty: A Changing Federal Role in American Education*. *History of Education Quarterly*, 56(2), 358-361. doi:10.1111/hoeq.12186

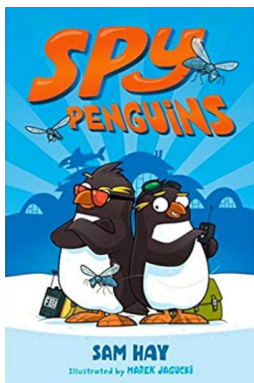
FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

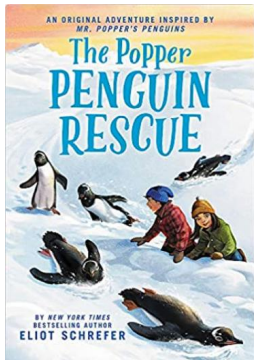
Happy New Year! During January we remember Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, celebrate National Puzzle Month, and cheer your favorite team's march towards the Super Bowl. On January 20th Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will become America's next President and Vice President of the United States. January is also a good time to hibernate, enjoy some family activities, have some hot cocoa, and read some good books.



To get the New Year off to a fresh start read **Freedom Soup** by Tami Charles. It's New Year's Day and Belle and Ti Gran (grandma) are preparing a stew called Freedom Soup as is the tradition to make and eat in Haitian households on New Year's Day. This soup is made to commemorate the end of slavery. While making the soup Belle learns about the ingredients being used but also the history attached to the soup. Belle learns that the slaves had to make the soup for their masters but could never eat it until they were free. As the soup is being made Belle and Ti Gran sing and dance in a story sprinkled with onomatopoeia and accompanied with delightful illustrations. *Freedom Soup* is a fun read to start the New Year and learn about a custom and tradition of another country.

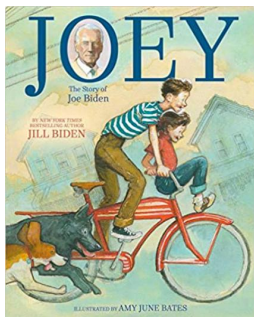


A winter snowy day/weekend is the perfect time to read about two adventurous penguins who want to join the FBI (Frosty Bureau of Investigation) in the new series **Spy Penguins** by Sam Hay. In this first book of the series, we meet Agent 00Zero and Q who are better known as Jackson and his friend Quigley. Jackson wants to be an agent in the field like his Uncle Bryn. Quigley wants to be the guy with the gadgets like his cousin Sunny. Although they're a bit young to join the FBI they do have the ability to get into trouble. When the rare fish at the aquarium begin disappearing, the two would-be agents set out to crack the case. Will they solve the case and avoid being the next to disappear? *Spy Penguins* is a fun read with penguin related vocabulary. The black and white illustrations add to the humor of the story.

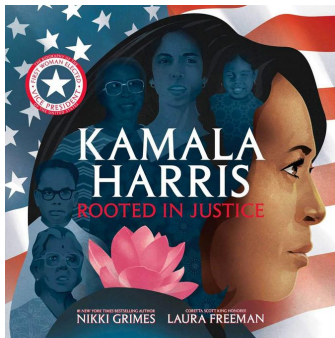


The time honored classic *Mr. Popper's Penguins* by Richard Atwater is the inspiration for the spinoff/sequel **The Popper Penguin Rescue** by Eliot Schrefer. Mrs. Popper, a distant relative of the original Mr. Popper, is a single mom and moves with her children Joel and Nina to Hillport, a neighboring town of Stillwater where the original Poppers lived. Mrs. Popper has purchased an abandoned house that was once part of the penguin petting zoo. While getting the house in order Joel and Nina discover two penguin eggs in the basement but don't tell their mom. They care for the eggs until they hatch and their secret soon gets out. Knowing they'll need help with the penguins, the Poppers contact the Popper Foundation for assistance. When word comes that the foundation is willing and financially able to help bring the penguins to the Arctic and later to the Antarctic, thus begins an adventure of a lifetime, with problems, a blizzard, and penguin antics. Will the Poppers and their Inuit guide get the

penguins to the Antarctic while being environmentally responsible? You'll need to read *The Popper Penguin Rescue* to find out how this adventure turns out

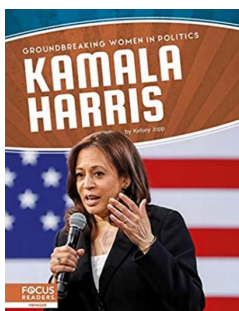


Joey: The Story of Joe Biden by Dr. Jill Biden is the biographical story of Joe Biden who will become America's 46th President of the United States. This is a story of a boy who came from a working class family, who stuttered, was athletic, became class president in high school, and held other leadership roles as he grew up. Hearing a speech by President John F. Kennedy led Joey to become a lawyer and to become a U.S. senator and Vice President of the United States. *Joey* is a delightful book to read and the illustrations further enhance Mr. Biden's life story. The back of the book includes photos of Mr. Biden as a child, a timeline, and a list of "Bidenisms." This is a book for all libraries.



Nikki Grimes, the author of **Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice**, begins the story of America's first woman elected Vice President by introducing the reader to a young black girl named Eve who wants to be President when she grows up. Her mother tells Eve about Kamala Harris to show her that this can be a possibility/reality. The discussions between Eve and her mom are italicized while the biography of Kamala is written in free verse. The story begins with Kamala's parents who are from Jamaica and India and meet in Oakland, California, Kamala's birthplace, and the meaning of her name, which is lotus flower. The story tells of her formative years and the marches she accompanied her parents on for civil rights. Kamala's parents taught her and her sister about freedom, fairness and justice, multiculturalism, and the dedication to hard

work. These ideals and values led Kamala to college, law school, and a career in criminal justice, public service, and eventually to the elected office of Vice President of the United States. The back of the book contains a timeline of important events in Kamala's life. This is a beautiful book to share with your students, even though it was published before the election results. You can hear *Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice* on YouTube.



A more recent book about Kamala Harris is **Kamala Harris (Ground Breaking Women in Politics)** by Kelsey Jopp. This book tells about Kamala and the back of the book includes a teacher resource section that includes how you can download lesson plans to accompany the book. Both books would make a nice addition to all libraries.

Looking Ahead

January 4 – Louis Braille Day

January 11 – Amelia Earhart – First Woman to Fly Solo

January 17 – Benjamin Franklin Birthday

January 18 – Winnie the Pooh Day – A. A. Milne's Birthday

January 20 – Penguin Awareness Day

January 21 – Squirrel Appreciation Day

January 29 – Multicultural Children's Book Day

January 29 – National Puzzle Day



Multicultural Children's Book Day is celebrated on Friday, January 29, 2021. Go to multiculturalchildrensbookday.com for a wealth of materials and activities to celebrate [#ReadYourWorld](https://twitter.com/ReadYourWorld) through children's literature and help bring about inclusion and kindness within your classroom, library, and other school settings.

*Let America be America again
Let it be the dreamer it used to be
~ Langston Hughes*

LITERACY LINKS

By the IRC Educational Media Committee

Take a moment to review some of the Literacy Links provided by the IRC Educational Media Committee to help Illinois educators in today's classrooms.

Reading Passage Resources

[Listenwise](#)

This online tool provides podcasts for the classroom including current events. It also works with Google Classroom for easy sharing with students. They have remote and hybrid learning resources as well.

Interactive Resources

[Magnetic Poetry](#)

This free interactive tool allows students to write poetry and stories in a fun and interactive way. This tool also provides an opportunity to learn grammar and encourage writing for all ages. This is a great resource for online learning.

Web 2.0 Resources

[Culture Street Super Action Comic Maker](#)

This free online tool allows the user to create comics to tell a story, teach students how to use dialogue, or to summarize an event or scientific process. This is easy to use for all ages for remote learning and sharing online.

UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

Don't forget to take advantage of some upcoming PD opportunities planned throughout Illinois.

- **January 6, 2021: IRC Webinar** on Dark, Absurd Humor...for Dark, Absurd Times with Crystal Chan.
- **January 6, 2021: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host a Wired Webinar Discussion following the IRC Webinar with Crystal Chan at 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **January 12, 2021: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host Making Assessments that Matter with Kim Marshall from 4:00 to 6:00 pm via Zoom.
- **January 14, 2021: Will County Reading Council** will host an Author Discussion with Joelle Charbonneau on her latest book, *Disclose*, from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via a virtual platform.

- **January 20, 2021: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRC Book Chats on alternating professional books and literature topics from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **January 21, 2021: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host the Book Gossip with Kathleen March from 6:15 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **January 24, 2021: IRC Winter 2021 IRC Book Club** will begin on *Breathing New Life into Book Clubs: A Practical Guide for Teachers* by Sonja Cherry-Paul and Dana Johansen AND/OR *The Next Step Forward in Word Study and Phonics* by Jan Richardson and Michèle Dufresne.
- **January 25, 2021: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host Maslow Before Bloom with Bryan Pearlman from 7:00 to 8:30 pm via a virtual platform.
- **February 3, 2021: IRC Webinar** on Discovering the 2021 Illinois Reads Books with Becky Anderson.
- **February 3, 2021: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host a Wired Webinar Discussion following the IRC Webinar with Becky Anderson at 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 6, 2021: Chicago Area Reading Association (CARA)** will host Literacy is a Political Act with David Stovall from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 9, 2021: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host an Author Chat with Samira Ahmed from 6:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 17, 2021: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRC Book Chats on alternating professional books and literature topics from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 22, 2021: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host Teaching in a Post-COVID Classroom with Grace Stevens from 7:00 to 8:30 pm via a virtual platform.
- **February 27, 2021: East Central-EIU Reading Council and National Road Reading Council** will host the Literacy & Learning Conference from 8:15 am to 12:20 pm at Eastern Illinois University, Buzzard Auditorium, 1920 9th Street, Charleston, Illinois.

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).

QUICK LINKS

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Questions? Please feel free to reach out to the Illinois Reading Council by email at irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org or by phone at 309-454-1341.

See what's also happening on our social media sites:



