

# A Message from the MIDDLE

Volume 14, Number 2, August 2023



*Space—Acrylics by Aaron van Driesum, Grade 8, Father Mercredi High School  
Photo by Patience Paquette, student, Father Mercredi High School*

## In This Issue

President's Message .....	2	Keeping It Real .....	12
Editors' Notes.....	3	Ballad of a Middle School Retiree .....	14
Conference Update .....	4	A Look at Our Bookshelf .....	15
Literacy Resources .....	8	Tech Corner .....	16
Character Archetypes in <i>Moana</i> .....	9	Student Corner .....	17
Sam Demma Visits Innisfail Middle School .....	10	AMLE Update .....	23

# President's Message



*Jeremy Spink*

positions recharged and ready to face the last push to summer.

After 30 years of teaching in a middle school, I still find June to be a tough month. Not the workload. I am used to all the extra hours that go into the job this time of year; it's the letting go. We spend 10 months with these young adults, and then have to set them free. We watch them grow, cry, laugh and even push us to the edge. We invest our

We were so happy to be able to see everyone in person in Banff! Dr Bruce Perry and all of the other presenters put on a great show. The weather was fantastic, and the mountain air sent us back to our respective

hearts and souls into our kids, and then they walk out that last day and we are left to start over again next year. It always brings tears to my eyes. I know I have to let them go and like my own kids, they need to move on and spread their wings.

We are continually looking for new ways to support middle years teachers and for feedback from you to help us out. We are committed to making sure that you, as members, receive as much as possible from your membership in the Middle Years Council. Please let me know if you have any ideas to make your years in the middle better by contacting me at [jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca](mailto:jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca). We hope that you love being part of our council and that you have a great year "in the middle."

I hope to see you at our annual conference in Banff in April 2024.

*Jeremy Spink  
President 2023/24*

# Editors' Notes



*Emma Holota*

It was great to see everyone at the conference in Banff. A highlight was Dr Bruce Perry's presentation on brain development.

In this issue we have added two new sections. The first is Student Corner, where students'

artwork and writing will be showcased. If you have student materials that you would like to share, please contact either me or Victoria, and we will send you what you need to obtain permission for the material. The other section is A Look at Our Bookshelf, where valuable resources that teachers have used in their practice will be promoted. If you would like to submit a book review to include in this section, again, please contact us.

The success of *Message from the Middle* really depends on contributions from teachers provincewide. If you have an event, resource or article that you would like to share with other Alberta middle school teachers, please forward it to us. We appreciate your contributions.

*Emma Holota, Coeditor  
Northeast MYC Representative  
Aurora Middle School, Lac La Biche*



*Victoria Holota*

Last year was a tumultuous school year full of twists and turns: using new resources, cheering on student sports teams and running to the computer to bring up breaking news.

This has been a great year for the Middle Years Council newsletter, and we hope that more teachers around the province find the opportunity to share their good news, tips and more with us. I'd like to thank the students who submitted their art and experiences for our cover image and in our new Student Corner.

We hope you all have an excellent school year!

*Victoria Holota, Coeditor  
North MYC Representative  
Father Mercredi High School, Fort McMurray*



# Conference Update

We are so privileged to share with you a brief report on the recent Middle Years Council (MYC) conference that took place in beautiful Banff, Alberta, on April 27–29, 2023, at the Banff Park Lodge. This first-ever *sold-out* conference was attended by 315 teachers from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Nova Scotia. All surveys and feedback suggest that it was a great event overall!

Focusing on the theme “Understanding the Middle,” the event was organized to allow teachers to network, share best practices and learn new teaching strategies, especially in the area of trauma-informed education and brain science. The sessions were informative and engaging, especially

our two keynotes: Dr Bruce Perry and teacher comedian Ken Valgardson.

Our first keynote speaker was Dr Bruce Perry, of the Neurosequential Network, who gave an inspiring session on the importance of understanding the brain in terms of education, teaching, learning and trauma. The keynote address was followed by a variety of panel sessions that were led by experienced educators and covered a wide range of topics of interest to middle years teachers (Grades 4–9). These sessions allowed teachers to delve deeper into specific areas of interest and to learn from their colleagues. As a specialist council and conference committee, we are blessed to have such a wide variety of teachers willing



*Banff. Photo by Chris McCullough*



to share their gifts and talents in their profession.

In addition to the panel sessions, the conference kicked off with our famous Sawback Brewery speed session, led by Chris Andrew and Kristie McCullough. This session, along with Dr Perry's and Ken Valgardson's sessions, were our highest-rated sessions. The speed session gets the conversation of teaching and learning going, and allows delegates to meet new people and learn from each other about the complex profession of teaching.

Overall, the conference was a valuable opportunity for teachers to connect with their peers, share their expertise and learn about the art and science of teaching. The conference committee believes that it's important for delegates to have fun and enjoy the gifts of fun, learning and fellowship. Throwing in a weekend in the Canadian Rockies doesn't hurt either, as Banff continues to be a beautiful destination for our event. We are grateful to our entire

conference committee for organizing such a fantastic conference!

We look forward to the next conference scheduled for April 25–27, 2024, again at the Banff Park Lodge. We will be hosting world-renowned middle years expert Jack Berckemeyer from Denver, Colorado. The conference theme will be "Managing the Madness." We hope to see all of our delegates return for a great weekend of learning and fun in the beautiful Canadian Rockies! See you in Banff!

## Conference Winners

Jessica Sliva: Morgex prize, presented by Randy Pearson, Morgex representative

Melanie Grant: free stay at the Banff Springs Hotel

Jessica Sliva: free 2024 MYC conference registration

*Chris McCullough and Tom Stones,  
Conference Cochairs*



*L–R: Morgex prize winner Jessica Sliva and Morgex representative Randy Pearson*



*L–R: Melanie Grant, winner of a free stay at the Banff Springs Hotel, and Jessica Sliva, winner of free 2024 conference registration*





Panel 1



Friday night social



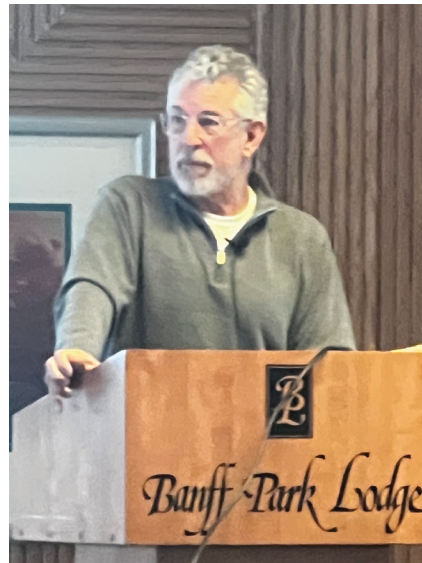
Round table



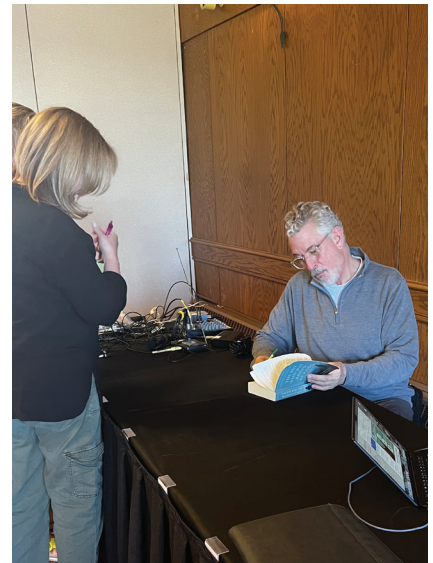
Chris Andrew and Kristie McCullough round table hosts



Keynote speaker Ken Valgardson



Keynote speaker Dr Bruce Perry



Keynote speaker Dr Bruce Perry





*Registration*



*Keynote audience*



*Conference committee*



# Literacy Resources

Language arts teachers are always on the lookout for new resources to aid their students in the art of reading, writing and editing English. It can be tough for teachers with a wide range of abilities in the classroom, in particular. Here is a selection of tested resources that I use on a rotating basis, so students can experience different ways to increase their literacy skills.

## *Reading Comprehension Success: Edu-Best Educational Resources*

Our school has a license for the Reading Comprehension Success Black Line Masters packages for multiple grades that enables teachers to print the resource at their leisure. Each package consists of grade-level readings of various types—poetry, short stories, articles and excerpts from longer resources. After each reading, there are multiple-choice questions that range in number depending on the length of the reading that was completed.

What makes this resource so useful is that it has you explicitly teach students five reading comprehension skills: Identify and Interpret Ideas and Details, Interpret Text Organization, Associate Meaning, Make Connections, and Evaluate. Each skill is used in the multiple-choice questions, and students are also able to identify which specific skill is being used. Having students identify the precise skill they are using enables students to think more logically about their responses not just in language arts but in other subjects as well. Their assessments do not seem as confounding because they know exactly what kind of

answer they need to be looking for, leading to pride in successful learning.

## *Spelling Power: Glencoe Language Arts*

With today's overreliance on technology, students often fall into the pitfall of being unable to function without using spell-check. Many assume that everything is autocorrected or not wrong at all, even when they can see the telltale squiggly red line underneath a word in their latest piece of writing.

In an effort to push back against common writing errors, I have been using Glencoe's *Spelling Power* in the first of my double block classes. *Spelling Power* is available at multiple grade levels, but often covers lessons in the same order. Students can use this resource to learn from something as elementary as silent consonants to being explicitly aware of how to spell words that have the seed sound (such as cede, exceed, supersede and so on) while also increasing their vocabulary.

Each lesson begins with a word bank and key concepts that explain how various spelling methods work. From there, students use their word bank in such activities as spelling practice to match words with definitions and spelling key concepts, spelling in context where students use the words in sentences, proofreading practice to identify incorrectly spelled words, and spelling application with additional words using the same key spelling concepts covered. I find that completing one double-sided sheet and going through the answers takes my Grade 8 students about 30–40 minutes.

## *Daily Paragraph Editing,* **Evan-Moor**

Many may already be familiar with Evan-Moor publications due to their excellent Daily Reading Comprehension series, but my favourite resource of theirs is *Daily Paragraph Editing*. Students are presented with four days of paragraph editing on a single topic, with one paragraph completed per day. Readings range from character sketches, science articles, sports articles and more. For example, the first set of paragraphs are about the comic series John Carter of Mars. Beside the paragraph are specific errors to watch for, such as adverbs,

hyphens and run-on sentences, but errors range beyond that list such as capitalization, apostrophe and spelling. There are about 18–20 errors per paragraph, and once students become accustomed to finding each type of error, their awareness for them in their own writing increases, and they become more proficient at editing their own works. I have many students with lower reading levels finding success with this daily paragraph editing because they are having an easier time recognizing what makes good or bad writing.

*Victoria Holota, Grade 8 Humanities Teacher  
Father Mercredi High School, Fort McMurray*

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## Character Archetypes in *Moana*

Character archetypes can be difficult for students to identify. For the last couple of years, I have been using the movie *Moana* (Musker and Clements 2016) to examine and identify who represents possible archetypes. (*Moana* is also an excellent movie to use when analyzing the hero's journey.) Students often disagree with each other in terms of which character represents which archetype, leading to interesting discussion and debate in regards to the characteristics being described.

The definition of the ally is a character who supports the protagonist in achieving their goal. Some students said that the ocean was the “ally” because the ocean accompanied Moana on her journey and helped her with her quest. Others said that Hei Hei was the ally because he provides comic relief, stays with her the whole time and actually saves the day by catching the heart.

Students worked in groups to decide which character fit the definitions the best. While listening to the students in each group discuss and give their reasons why a particular character fit a particular archetype, they gave thoughtful insights for their reasoning. In some cases, a student was very passionate about their reasons and had difficulty in reflecting that another possibility could even exist. This led to some exciting discussion.

### Reference

Musker, J, and R Clements, dirs. 2016.  
*Moana*. Los Angeles, Calif: Walt  
Disney Pictures.

*Emma Holota, Grade 8 Language Arts Teacher  
Aurora Middle School, Lac La Biche*

# Sam Demma Visits Innisfail Middle School

*"If you can hear me, clap once . . . if you can hear me, clap twice . . . if you can hear me say, 'Empty your backpack!'"*

Students responded with cheers, then attentive ears, as Sam Demma spoke in front of nearly 300 middle school students at Innisfail Middle School on May 26, 2023. Sam's message was clear: he was there to empower students to be the change they believe they can be by "taking small, consistent actions toward their personal goals" and by emptying their backpack of doubts.

"That heavy feeling of doubt is your backpack. It's full of limiting beliefs and

dreams crushed by the opinions of others. It's time to empty your backpack and release that weight from your shoulders."

Over the past 12 months, Sam has been busy travelling with a team of dedicated individuals to spread his hope-filled message across the country to as many students as he can reach.

One year ago, this young 22-year-old man was a keynote speaker for the Middle Years Conference in Banff. Today, he has done so much more. Although he is emptying his backpack of self-doubt; he is filling it right back up with all things good!



*Sam Demma*



Here's a glimpse of what this young man has accomplished since he last visited us in Banff just over a year ago:

- Sam published his first book titled, *Empty Your Backpack*. Through the book, Sam demonstrates that your dreams are within reach, and it's the beliefs you carry and the actions you take that determine whether you will achieve them. Since its release on November 18, 2022, the book has sold over 2,000 copies. You can read more about the book here:  
<https://book.emptyyourbackpack.ca/>.
- Built around the concepts in the book, Sam organized a national speaking tour in 82 schools across Canada. On March 19, 2023, Cross Nova (videographer), Aaliyan Khan (tour manager), Nine Degage (head of logistics) and Sam Demma put their normal lives on hold to journey across Canada. Sam spoke to approximately 40,000 students about mental health, antibullying and kindness. Ten per cent of all speaking revenues

from this project are being donated to the mental health charity Jack.org. You can learn more about the tour here:  
<https://emptyyourbackpack.ca/>.

- Sam was invited for his first in-person news interview on *Breakfast Television* to talk about his book and cross-country tour. Shortly after, many other news stations and television shows began reaching out to cover the exciting project. Platforms include CTV, CityNews, *The Marilyn Denis Show*, CP24 and many local newspapers.
- Currently, Sam is booking school speeches for this upcoming fall while writing his second book. He plans to be back in Alberta September 25–29.

Impressive to say the least!

We wish you all of the best, Sam, as you continue to grow and take small (or big) consistent actions that move you closer and closer to your biggest dreams!



## THE MIDDLE YEARS COUNCIL WANTS YOU!!!

### JOIN THE MYC

One benefit of being an active ATA member is that you may join one specialist council of your choice for free. The Middle Years Council has much to offer, such as recommendations for books and articles that will assist in your teaching practice. Check out our website at [www.ata-myc.com](http://www.ata-myc.com).

### NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

Do you have any website links, games, lessons or cool activities that you would like to share with other middle school teachers? Send them to Emma Holota at [holota.emma@gmail.com](mailto:holota.emma@gmail.com) or Victoria Holota at [victoria.holota@fmcscd.ab.ca](mailto:victoria.holota@fmcscd.ab.ca). We will include them in upcoming issues of our newsletter.

The MYC website is [HTTP://MYC.TEACHERS.AB.CA](http://MYC.TEACHERS.AB.CA)

Please add it to your favourites.

# Keeping It Real

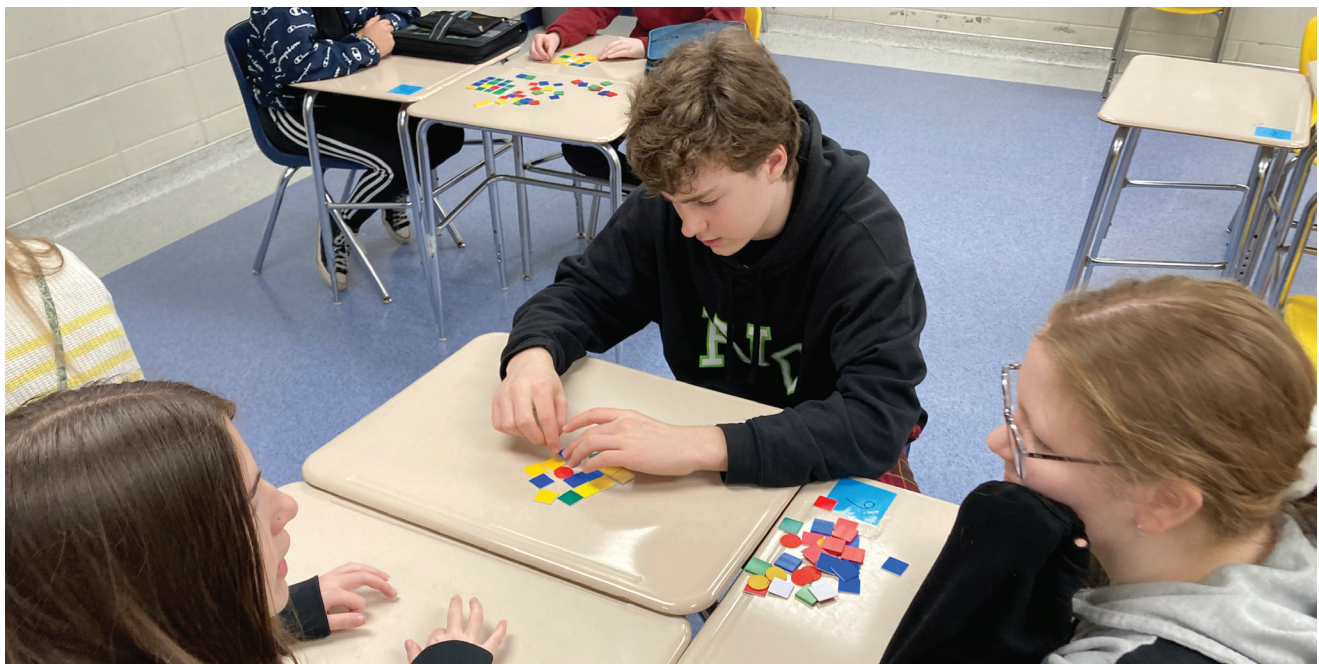
What's the latest fad in education? Building thinking classrooms (BTC). But, is it really all that it's cracked up to be?

I'm a middle school teacher with over 20 years' experience. I am very routine in my math class: start with a warm-up question on the board that uses the skill we learned last class, use the Cornell method to take notes of a new skill with examples, then practise with a worksheet. My students experience success in my Grade 8 math classroom, and I rarely have a parent complaint. So why would I even think about changing the way I teach math?

I also teach Grade 8 science, and my students really love my science program and hate missing a science class (not meaning to brag here). But it is easy to make science engaging with hands-on lab activities. I want my students to feel that excitement about math. I try my best to hype it up with enthusiasm. I use the students' names in my warm-up questions

and try to apply the problem to some aspect of their lives. I even reward the student with a candy if they get the correct answer and go up to the board and write down how they got it. Now, in theory, every student was supposed to be attempting the warm-up question, but in reality, only my top five students would. The rest would sit there and write the question down but then wait for someone else to go up and solve it. In theory, the students were then supposed to write down and understand what the example student did, but in reality, many would just write down the answer (or nothing at all) and learn nothing from the process.

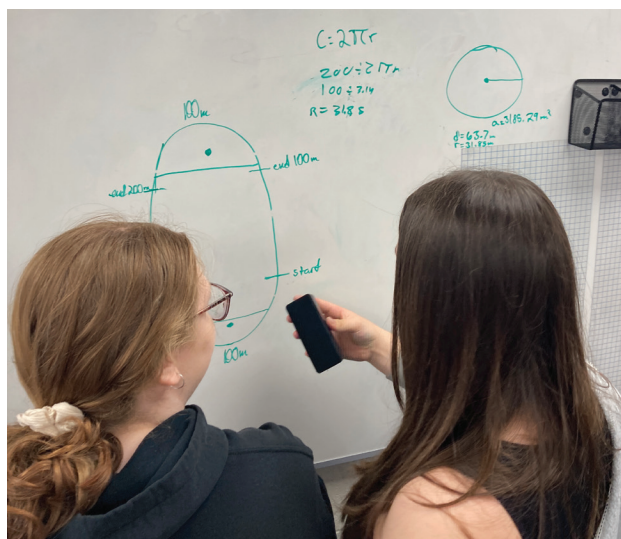
At a professional development day, when a colleague who doesn't even teach math (in fact, she struggles with math herself) told me her high school son was learning math in a new way and she wanted my opinion on it, I ditched my scheduled session and attended the one on "Building Thinking



Classrooms” with her. The instructor was a former student of mine, fresh out of university and in her second-year teaching at a neighbouring school. She explained that we were going to be placed in random groups, and my colleague was crossing her fingers that she was going to be in my group (remember, she’s not good at math). The instructor walked us through some of the problems from Peter Liljedahl’s book, *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics, Grades K–12: 14 Teaching Practices for Enhancing Learning* (2020), using his questioning strategies and vertical nonpermanent surfaces. Everyone in the session was actively engaged in the activity, and the light bulb went off inside my head—this is how I should do my warm-up questions!

I came back re-energized, which I’m going to admit hasn’t happened in a while from a PD day. My administration was tickled pink that I was willing to try this out in my classroom. As I was waiting for my whiteboards to come in, I thought I should probably read the book to have a little bit of a better grasp on what I was about to attempt. As I read the book, I got more and more excited. I decided that I was all in, not just implementing BTC into my warm-ups, but I was going to try an entire unit that way. When my students came back from winter break, the room was completely transformed from my organized rows and seating charts to randomly scattered groups of three. As students entered the room, I gave them each a random card so they knew where to sit for the day. I explained to them that I was testing out with them a new way to learn math, and that I welcomed their feedback, good or bad.

We were starting the integers unit, so as every math teacher does, I started with a review skill from previous grades. I verbally gave them the real-world problems



that I would normally use as a warm-up or example questions, and I saw the magic happen! Instead of only my normal five students attempting the questions, at least eight of them were (I know because I have eight groups in my class, and something was being written on every whiteboard). Instead of showing how to solve the problem in only one way, multiple ways were demonstrated across the whiteboards. I was able to see instantaneously what strategies they had learned and remembered from previous years. Number lines and integer tiles were being drawn to show their thinking. Deep conversations were happening. The classroom was alive!

Now, there have been bumps in the road. I discovered right away that I had to implement the rule that the person writing cannot write any of their own ideas on the whiteboard. Otherwise, one person would take over with no engagement from the other group members. I have had days where students would cry with frustration, so I would take a step back and try a new angle.

However, the pros far outweigh the cons. One of the hardest things for any math student is problem solving. But really, isn’t that the whole reason for learning math—to



apply it in real life? Now in my classroom, they are problem solving every day, without even realizing it. My students this year were able to derive algebraic equations from word problems better than I have ever seen!

Earlier I said that I was all in; however, I am still not willing to give up on certain things that I do. I still use Math with Pizzazz worksheets to check individual understanding. (If you have never seen these worksheets before, you need to check them out!) But, I don't give them daily like I used to, and I save them for the bigger concepts. The first day that I did not assign a worksheet and class was almost over, a student asked, "So, when are we going to do some work?" It baffled them when I explained that they were doing "work" throughout the entire class. I also still periodically give open-book quizzes, along with my district mandated common assessments at the end of each unit.

In my opinion, building thinking classrooms is not just the next fad in education. I am experimenting and learning what works and what doesn't in my math classroom, and I encourage others to not be scared to do the same. Start small, or go all in. When I asked my students what they preferred about the way I used to teach, they said they missed getting a candy when they went up to the board. So when the opportunity presents itself, we have little group math competitions (and now it's not always the same five students getting the candy).

## Reference

Liljedahl, P. 2020. *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics, Grades K-12: 14 Teaching Practices for Enhancing Learning*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin.

*Erin Shulko, Aurora Middle School  
Lac La Biche*

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# Ballad of the Middle School Retiree

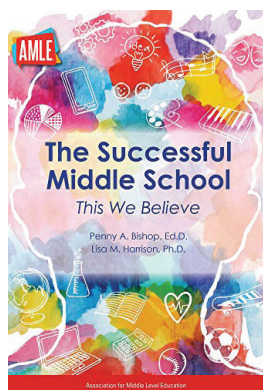
This is it! I thought to myself with glee,  
I hit "85," I'm free as can be!  
At the end of June, I danced out the door,  
A pirouette in the parking lot,  
Report cards no more!  
No ISPs, PGPs, CRMs, meetings  
No generative dialogues except—  
With my cat—they'll be fleeting!  
Imagine—a room with no odours—  
intentioned or not,  
At the right temperature—not frigid or hot,  
A place where the mention of certain  
numbers does not  
Elicit snickers, guffaws, a giggling lot.  
Snapchat, TikTok, my rivals extreme,  
Banished for life—stick that with your  
memes!

June turns to July, August to fall,  
A school bus rolls by, I see heads big and  
small.  
I watch it pull over, the doors open—bang!  
Shouts of excitement in the air hang.  
Welcome back, I missed you from my porch  
I can hear,  
How was your summer? Who's my teacher  
this year?  
Then, just as I feared, my heart starts to  
crack,  
I miss those darn kids! I want to come back!

*Patricia Whiting, 2022*



# A LOOK AT OUR BOOKSHELF



## ***The Successful Middle School: This We Believe***

**by Penny A Bishop and Lisa M Harrison, 2021**

For educators committed to success for every student, this updated edition of AMLE's position paper offers a set of attributes

and characteristics that define successful middle schools. Rooted in research cited throughout the book, you will find a framework for creating the learning environments and opportunities that all young adolescents deserve. When its concepts are embraced, students are prepared for success in school and career. Available at Amazon.ca and AMLE.org; also available as an eBook on Amazon Kindle.



## **Siha Tooskin Knows Series**

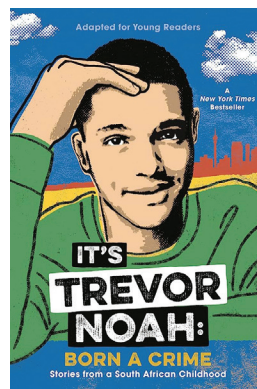
**by Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead. Illustrated by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch, 2020**

For non-Indigenous teachers, an excellent set of books is the Siha

Tooskin Knows series, which provides valuable information regarding traditional

ways and knowledge. The books are written by Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead. Illustrations are created by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch. The series is available at [strongnations.com](http://strongnations.com), [Amazon.ca](http://Amazon.ca) and [chapters.indigo.ca/](http://chapters.indigo.ca/) and comes highly recommended by Tina Chadwick.

A free teacher's guide is available from Portage & Main called *Siha Tooskin Knows: Education Guide* as an eBook at [www.portageandmainpress.com/Books/S/Siha-Tooskin-Knows-Education-Guide](http://www.portageandmainpress.com/Books/S/Siha-Tooskin-Knows-Education-Guide).



## ***It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood***

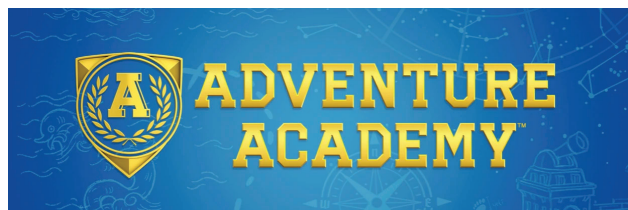
**by Trevor Noah, 2019**

An adaptation of Trevor Noah's 2016 memoir *Born a Crime*, this memoir about growing up as a mixed race child

in South Africa during Apartheid has incredibly vivid storytelling. The honesty found in Trevor's reflection enables teens to connect with his story, especially as he can say what helped him be successful and where he went astray. The book is available from Amazon.ca, Indigo, Chapters and wherever books are sold. It comes highly recommended by Victoria Holota and the Grade 8 department at Father Mercredi High School, who used it as a novel study.

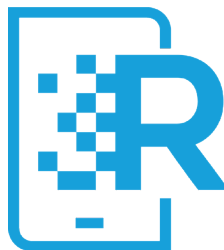


## Adventure Academy



Adventure Academy is an online learning platform that offers educational games, videos and activities designed for 8–13-year-old students. Middle school teachers can use Adventure Academy in their classrooms to supplement their lessons and provide students with engaging and interactive content that reinforces their learning. Adventure Academy offers a wide range of subjects such as math, science, social studies and language arts. Teachers can assign specific lessons or games to students based on their individual needs and learning goals. Adventure Academy also provides progress tracking tools that allow teachers to monitor their students' progress and adjust their instruction accordingly. Furthermore, Adventure Academy offers an online community where students can interact with their peers and participate in collaborative learning activities. This can help foster a sense of community and engagement in the classroom. By incorporating Adventure Academy into their teaching, middle school teachers can provide their students with a fun and interactive learning experience that enhances their academic skills and knowledge.

## HP Reveal



HP Reveal is an augmented reality app that teachers can use to enhance their lessons and engage their students.

Teachers can use HP Reveal to create interactive

experiences that students can access through their smart phones or tablets. For example, a teacher could create a 3-D model of a historical site or scientific concept and have students use HP Reveal to explore it in detail. HP Reveal can also be used to create scavenger hunts or other interactive activities that encourage students to explore and learn in a fun and engaging way. By incorporating technology like HP Reveal into their lessons, teachers can provide students with a more immersive and interactive learning experience.

## Featured Creator:

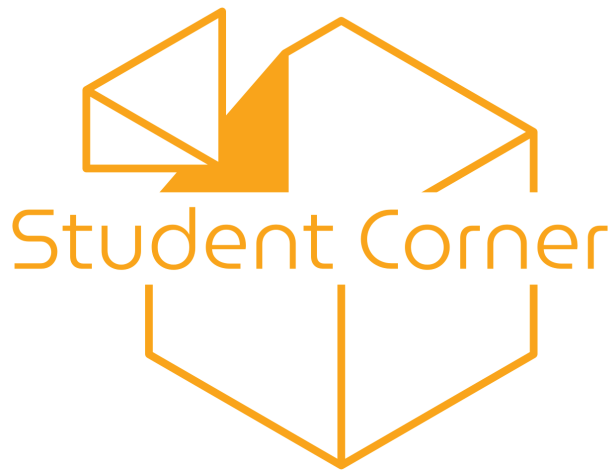
**@mathswithmisschang**



Miss Chang is a math teacher hailing from London who provides helpful advice on how to solve math problems.

Additionally, she goes into further detail about intriguing math problems that you may not have encountered during your time in school.





## **Students of Fort McMurray School Educate Others About Indigenous Access to Water**

This year, my Grade 8 class has learned about Water First, which is a fundraising organization created to support Indigenous communities with access to clean water. Our class is doing a number of things to raise funds for this campaign. The main reason we are doing this is because it fits in with our district's Faith Theme, "Do Small Things with Great Love" and because we pride ourselves on being servant leaders.

Water First is a fundraising program created to spread awareness about water challenges in Indigenous communities in Canada through educational training and meaningful collaboration. Water First has many programs for Indigenous youth, including the Drinking Water Internship, Environmental Water Technical Training and school-based water science education workshops. There are also many learning packages for teachers to help educate students on Water First and what they stand for.

Last week, my classmates and I walked to an elementary school. There, we educated the students about Water First through reading a story about an Indigenous girl who has no access to clean water. We also presented them with information about Water First. On World Water Day, my class conducted a photo booth fundraiser and staff jeans day. This fundraiser alone raised over \$300.

Every penny that we raised is going to Water First. Our contribution will go directly to Indigenous communities across Canada. Water First is a nonprofit organization, which means that they don't keep any of the money that is donated to them. The money goes to educating people on the water problems in Indigenous communities. They also use the money to help Indigenous communities properly treat their water and how to deal with water boil advisories.

Our class is very thankful that we got to participate in educating other students about the water situation across Indigenous communities. We hope to make a change by doing small things with great love.

*Trevor Janes, Grade 8 student  
Father Mercredi High School, Fort McMurray*

## Mountain Scene



*Lincoln Shulko*  
*Aurora Middle School, Lac La Biche*

## Killer Queen

### A Short Story

Thunder crashed and rain poured down as tears ran down Arthur's face. The 32-year-old detective had been called to a crime scene only to discover that the victim of the horrendous crime was his very own father, a police officer in the field.

"How could you!" he wailed. Arthur had never before felt the amount of sorrow he was feeling in that moment. Looking down at his father's lifeless body, which bore a red rose, Arthur promised that he would do whatever it took to catch the murderer.

He took the next couple of weeks off work to mourn his father. Although he was emotionally drained, Arthur knew if he wanted to catch his father's killer, that he would have to go into work.

Arthur dragged his feet into the office Monday morning and plopped down onto his black worn out detective chair and sat at his brown wooden desk staring at his father's investigation file left for him. The detective opened the file and read through the notes. The lead detectives on the case concluded that his father had been killed by "Killer Queen." The latest serial killer would inject poison into her victims and leave a red rose on the corpse. Arthur had decided he would find out who this "Killer Queen" was and make her pay for what she had done, and continued to do so to others. Arthur drifted off as he replayed the night where he viewed his father's corpse. The detective snapped back to reality when he heard a door close down the hall. Arthur adjusted in his seat, put on his glasses and started a search for all the murders connected to "Killer Queen."

He opened up all the cases connected to the serial killer and began reading the file notes. After reading all seven murder files, the slim built man found no apparent motivation for the murders, only a common trademark: a red rose found on each victim's corpse. Based on Arthur's experience, he knew there had to be some motivation behind these horrific murders. "There's got to be a reason for this. Maybe this is revenge for someone," he thought. Arthur decided to pull up other murder cases in the Baklus City area in the months leading up to the beginning of Killer Queen's killing spree. It was the third case when Detective Depth found something that caught his attention. A woman named Aurora had been murdered. She was held hostage by a drug gang and when ransom couldn't be made by her only daughter, her life was ended.

"Interesting," stated Arthur. He glanced up at the clock. It was already 3 PM. "How is it already that time?"

Arthur grabbed a protein bar from his desk drawer and headed to his boss's office. He had a scheduled meeting with him. He knocked on the door and opened it when he heard, "Enter."

His boss got up from his desk and approached Arthur with sincere regard. "How are you holding up?" questioned the boss.

"I'm exhausted and emotionally drained, but I have to figure out this killer," Arthur said with conviction.

"I thought you would say that, so I have found someone to assist you in solving this," announced the boss. "Wait here and I will go get her."

When he left the room, Arthur let out a deep sigh. I hope this isn't a babysitting assignment he thought.

A few moments later his boss returned with a tall brunette with athletic build. "This is Lexus Belvist. She was top in her class."

Arthur extended his hand, "Welcome! I am Detective Arthur Depth, your new partner."

"Nice to meet you. I'm overjoyed to join the force," announced the young lady.

"I'll let you two get acquainted and Depth, you'll fill her in?"

"Yes boss!" agreed Depth. He led the new detective back to his office.

Detective Depth offered Lexus a chair. She sat down while looking at the awards that decorated the office. "So, Lexus, are you from around here?" questioned Arthur.

"Not from around here, but I moved here not long ago when my mother passed," explained the short haired woman.

"Sorry to hear that. Do you have any other family?" asked Arthur.

"No, it was just my Mom and I," stated Lexus.

After an awkward silence, Arthur said, "Well, let's get to work."

Detective Depth informed Lexus of the serial killer and her trademark that she left behind. "I am now looking at previous cases to see if there is any connection or motivation for this sick individual."

Arthur typed in his password and when the computer opened, the last file Arthur was looking at was open on the screen.

What?!? Why does he have my mother's file open? Lexus worried.

"I was just reading this case where a lady was killed when a ransom couldn't be made to the drug gang. I was just about to look further into this lady—her family, her connection to the gang," explained the detective.

"I can do that," offered Arthur's new partner. She thought that she could distract the detective so that the truth about her would not surface.

"OK. You can use this laptop if you would like. I will look at a couple other cases. Let me know if you find anything," requested Arthur.

The minutes turned into hours and before long it was 5 PM. Arthur questioned his new partner, "Did you find anything?"

"Nothing worthwhile," commented Detective Belvist.

That seemed weird to Detective Depth as he had a feeling about that case when he first began examining it. "OK, let's call it a day and we can pick it up again in the morning."

Arthur showed the detective out and headed back to his office to pack up for the day. When he went to lock his computer screen, he had a gut-wrenching feeling. Something did not seem right. He sat down again and opened up the file that Lexus had



been looking into. Aurora's autopsy report indicated that she had drugs in her system. That's the connection to the drug gang, thought Arthur. He continued reading. The investigation reports indicated that the daughter, Sophia Belvist, knew nothing about her mother's involvement with drugs and was furious that the police could not stop this well-known drug gang from killing her mother. The notes further indicated that there were no other family members of the victim to question.

"Belvist . . . why does that name sound familiar?" asked Arthur. After a brief time, he realized that Lexus's last name was also Belvist. "That's got to be a coincidence."

Arthur's phone chimed—it was a reminder to put out his garbage. He locked his computer, grabbed his briefcase and headed home for the night. When Arthur got to the main doors he realized it was raining. Using his briefcase as an umbrella, he dashed toward his car.

Detective Depth headed into work early the next morning as he had a restless night. He couldn't seem to shake his feeling about the murder of Aurora Belvist and how his new partner had the same last name. Once in the office, Arthur reviewed the murder files connected to the villain Killer Queen. Looking again for any clues found—fingerprints, footprints, fabric samples, hair samples—to this point, nothing had been found at the crime scenes. This person clearly knows how to cover up a crime, thought Arthur. Arthur looked out his office window. It was a dreary morning, similar to the morning on the day his father had passed away. The raindrops had started to fall and were hitting the glass, mesmerizing Arthur. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. Arthur glanced up toward the brown oak door to find Lexus standing in the open doorway carrying two coffees.

"I brought you a coffee," announced Lexus with a smile.

"Thank you! I definitely need it today," replied Detective Depth. Arthur noticed that Lexus looked tired as she had dark circles under her deep brown eyes.

Lexus sat down at the round table where she had sat yesterday and opened up the laptop. Just then, Detective Depth's phone rang. Arthur answered the phone, his mouth dropping open and his eyes growing larger as he listened to the phone call. There had been another murder by Killer Queen last night, and the local police had just finished securing the crime scene.

Arthur looked at Lexus and instructed, "Grab your coat and your coffee. Killer Queen was at it again last night. This time it was at our very own training academy. We are heading to the crime scene." The two grabbed their coats and coffees and headed to the black CSI vehicle.

A short time later, the two arrived at the training academy. The rain had stopped but it was still cold and dreary outside. Arthur got out of his car and zipped up his jacket. The two ducked under the crime scene tape and headed over to the officer in charge.

"What do you have for us Sergeant Azvart?" asked Detective Depth.

There was a hesitation in the Sergeant's response, "Umm... it's.... your dad's old partner. Killer Queen got to him. He's out back by the obstacle course."

Detective Depth sent Lexus to investigate the inside of the building while he investigated the outside perimeter. Arthur slowly walked around the building, looking for any clues along his way. There were no forced entries, nothing that seemed out of place. From a distance Arthur could see a body lying on the mud covered ground, next to the climbing wall. He approached

the latest victim and studied the body. There were no wounds, no signs of strangulation, only a red rose. Arthur assumed that the deceased police officer was poisoned as well, but an autopsy would have to occur to conclude that.

Once Detective Depth had analyzed the body, he then moved on to analyze the surrounding environment. Sergeant Azvart stood back watching the detective in awe. Arthur walked around the climbing wall, looking for any tracks or traces of fabric or fingerprints on the wall. The detective's search came back empty-handed. Looking around, Depth saw the pit with barbed wire that the trainees would have to crawl underneath. He decided to go investigate that area next. Walking around the pit, to the far side, a footprint caught Arthur's eye.

Depth called and waved to Sergeant Azvart, "I found a print! Come and take pictures and complete the analysis."

Depth was keeping a close eye on the weather, as he did not want rain to wash away this one clue that could finally be the breaking point in solving the Killer Queen murders. Finding nothing further of interest, Detective Depth walked back toward the front of the training academy building, meeting his new partner as he reached the front.

"I watched the camera footage of the building, and there was nothing to report," announced Lexus.

"I found a footprint out back. Sergeant Azvart is analyzing and taking pictures of the print as we speak."

Detective Belvist had a look of shock and disbelief on her face. She stuttered, "Ah ... ah . . . that's great!"

There was a crack of thunder and the sky opened up, rain started pouring down. Depth looked back toward the training course to see Sergeant Azvart running back to the

building. He called out, "I got the pictures and finished the analysis just in time!"

Depth gave him a wave and told his partner, "Let's get out of here." They headed back to the comfort and protection of the vehicle. Once the engine was turned on, Arthur looked at the time—4:30 PM.

Upon return to the detachment, the lead detective had to park beside the newly landscaped flower bed. The rain had let up but it was still drizzling. The dirt from the flower bed had started to run across the sidewalk, leaving a muddy path. The two detectives got out of the vehicle and quickly headed inside. Depth following Belvist. Once inside the doors, Depth removed his wet jacket and it slipped out of his hands and onto the floor. When Arthur bent down to grab it, he noticed the shoe prints left behind from his partner. Arthur stopped dead in his tracks. The prints looked like the one he had found at the crime scene. The hair on the back of his neck and on his arms stood up.

Lexus looked back and called, "Are you coming?"

"Be right there," answered Arthur. "I'm just going to use the bathroom."

"I'll meet you in your office," replied Belvist.

Arthur went into the bathroom and tried to brainstorm how to move forward with this unfolding situation. He concluded that he would send Belvist home so he could do some background digging on his partner. Detective Depth headed nervously to his office.

Arthur sat down at his desk, trying to act as normal as possible. "Let's work on our case notes and then we'll call it a night. We have to wait for the autopsy and print analysis to be done before we can go any further with our investigation," suggested Detective Depth.

"OK," replied Belvist.

About an hour later, Lexus announced, "I'm done logging my notes."

Arthur had not yet finished his, as he was disturbed by his latest findings. "I'm not done mine yet, but you can head out."

"Oh, you're not done? Do you want me to help?"

"No," stammered Arthur abruptly.

Lexus was shocked and confused by his response. She got up from her small leather chair and walked toward the door. "OK then, I guess I will see you in the morning."

Arthur did not look up at the young lady. Lexus grew suspicious and worried, but she left the office, trying to act as normal as possible.

Once Belvist had left, Arthur quickly dashed to the large oak door, shutting it. He immediately searched "Lexus Belvist" in the system. Arthur waited impatiently for the results of his search. Finally, after a minute or so, the screen began to fill with information about his partner. Arthur scanned the information and quickly realized that Lexus was her middle name and her first name was Sophia, last name, Belvist. Depth sat back into his chair. Everything was starting to make sense. Sophia wanted revenge for her mother. Like a light bulb being turned on, the connections between the murders became clearer. Sophia was killing all those she felt failed her mother, resulting in her mother's death. Arthur's dad, a police officer on Aurora's case, his partner, a gang member, a paramedic and so on. They all were involved in Aurora's case.

Without warning, the office door opened. Lexus walked in and commented, "I forgot my coat." She walked toward her chair, grabbed her coat and turned only to see

Arthur's search on his computer screen. Lexus immediately dropped her coat and drew her gun. Pointing it at Arthur the entire time. She slowly shut the door, locking the handle to secure it.

"I know who you are!" exclaimed Arthur.

"You're too smart for your own good," warned Belvist.

"Why are you doing this?" questioned Depth.

"People need to pay for my mother's death. When she needed help, you guys failed her," explained Sophia.

"Is this what your mother would want?"

The question caught Sophia off guard. Arthur took notice of this and using his training and experience, he skilfully knocked her gun out of her hands. Once the gun was out of her possession, he swiftly kicked it away and drew his own gun.

Lexus froze, realizing she had finally been defeated. Using his uniform radio, Arthur called for backup.

Moments later, a swarm of officers busted through the door. They apprehended Killer Queen and took her away. "You will never hurt anyone else," commented Arthur as the officers led the criminal out of the office.

Arthur's boss was the last remaining in the office. "Let's debrief and get out of here," instructed the boss. After the debrief, Arthur was told to take a few days off.

Detective Depth walked out the door, feeling exhausted, drained, yet satisfied that justice was served for his father. Arthur went home and flopped on the couch. He planned to escape until his next case on Monday.

*Gracin Biollo*

*Aurora Middle School, Lac La Biche*

*Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.*



# AMLE Update

## AMLE Affiliation

The MYC is affiliated with the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), which is the international organization for middle years educators. The AMLE website ([www.amle.org](http://www.amle.org)) includes a variety of resources and information related to middle years education. With the free membership, you can access some materials. With the professional membership, you have full access to all resources, as well as discounts on books, resources and conference registration.

## AMLE Annual Conference

**National Harbor, Maryland**  
**November 2–4, 2023**

**Nashville, Tennessee**  
**November 7–9, 2024**

The AMLE annual conference is the world's largest conference for middle grades educators. This is an excellent opportunity for teachers to collaborate and learn from leaders in middle education. Feedback says that this is one conference that every middle school teacher should try to attend at some point in their career!

## AMLE at a Glance

AMLE is committed to helping middle school educators

- reach every student,
- grow professionally and
- create great schools.

## Mission

AMLE is dedicated to improving the educational experiences of all students ages 10–15 by providing vision, knowledge and resources to educators and leaders.

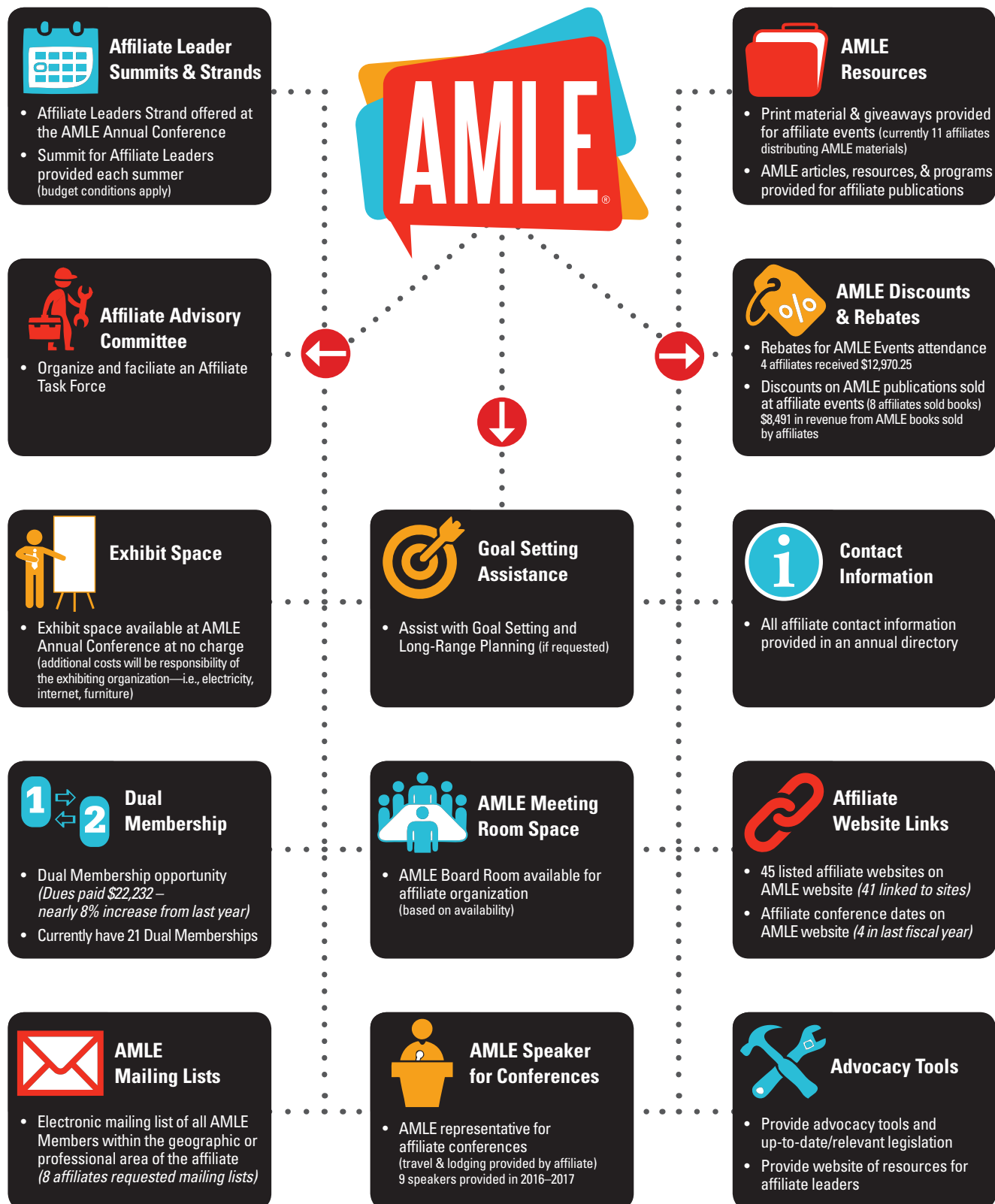
## Vision

AMLE is the leading international organization advancing the education of all students ages 10–15, helping them succeed as learners and make positive contributions to their communities and to the world.

## Core Values

- *Integrity.* AMLE practises the ethical, inclusive and courageous behaviours that sustain an open and honest organizational culture.
- *Future thinking.* AMLE is visionary and prepares for the future.
- *Respect.* AMLE values human worth, dignity, diverse talents and varied perspectives.
- *Collaboration.* AMLE seeks active partnerships and shared leadership opportunities at the state, national and international levels.

# What does AMLE provide to affiliates?



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### **Facebook**

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Notify the ATA privacy officer immediately of any incident that involves the loss of or unauthorized use or disclosure of personal information, by calling Barnett House at 780-447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208.

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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