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Simple Suggestions to Support In-Class or At-Home Learning

- Engage Students with Contemporary Poetry
- Listen and Learn with Audiobooks
- Slow Down (or Less Is More)
- Try Digital Texts for Younger Readers

SEL Resources for Teachers and Students

- KQED MindShift
- Learning for Justice
- PBS Learning Media
- NEASC

Other Resources

- [ELA Spotlight on Equity](#)
- [Vermont PBS January Resources](#)

Professional Offerings and Opportunities

- VT Entrepreneurship Day

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Simple Suggestions to Support In-Class or At-Home Learning

While I know there is no quick fix to the myriad problems that keep popping up as a result of the pandemic, it is my hope to offer you a few suggestions that are simple to implement and could help lessen the load for you as well as your students.

Engage Students with Contemporary Poetry – In [November's newsletter](#), I talked about the benefits of teaching poetry. In [How Teaching the Work of Living Poets Can Make English Class More Exciting and Inclusive](#) from [KQED MindShift](#), author Kara Newhouse goes one step further and explores the ways that teaching the work of living poets can benefit students in the classroom or during remote instruction. Newhouse tells us, "Students can see themselves better reflected in the experience of contemporary poets, which makes learning about their work more exciting. Plus, you can have them in your class or on a Zoom!" ([Newhouse, 2021](#)). Because of the relevancy of the work of living poets, teaching poetry this way can be more student-centered, personalized, and therefore engaging. Sometimes students can even meet the poets, either in person (if they are local) or online. Newhouse's article introduces readers to Melissa Alter Smith, an educator who started the hashtag [#TeachLivingPoets](#) to encourage educators to incorporate the work of living poets into their curriculum because doing so can "bring new voices to the literary canon and change the dynamics of a classroom" ([Newhouse, 2021](#)). As Smith notes, her work is not about "closing the door on the canon whatsoever. It's just about [opening the door wider](#) for more voices, more contemporary voices to come into our classroom space" ([Newhouse, 2021](#)). More information and support can be found on Smith's monthly [Twitter chat](#) for teachers or [at her website](#).

Listen and Learn with Audiobooks – [An Ear for Reading: Audiobooks Take Center Stage in the Classroom](#), written by Malanie Kletter for School Library Journal, is an excellent reminder the many ways audiobooks can support students and includes a list of resources that offer audiobooks. Audiobooks can support learning in the classroom or at home. "New tech resources have made it easier for students to access audiobooks both at school and at home,

enabling families to listen to books together and practice and reinforce skills that students are learning in class” ([Kletter, 2021](#)). Some possible classroom uses include whole class listening and discussion, small group or individual listening stations, or as an SEL tool to help students transition between activities ([Kletter, 2021](#)). At home, caregivers can engage in the stories with their students, giving them an activity to do as a family. Not only are audiobooks an excellent way to pull reluctant readers into a story, they are also a good tool for modeling fluency and they can increase comprehension ([Kletter, 2021](#)). Even though students do not have to decode when listening to audiobooks, they are still considered reading. As Denise Johnson, professor of reading education at William & Mary says, “The idea that we must decode in order to read is an unfair way to think about it. The goal is comprehension” ([Kletter, 2021](#)). Johnson goes on to say that if a student cannot decode, books become inaccessible. “But just because a kid can’t read at a high level, that doesn’t mean they can’t understand and comprehend at a high level. Using audiobooks opens up access and levels the playing field. Kids can all listen to the same book and then can talk and discuss it and have rich conversations” ([Kletter, 2021](#)). Finally, audiobooks provide respite from screen time when students have to engage in a lot of digital learning ([Kletter, 2021](#)).

Slow Down (or Less Is More) – In [How to Gain More from Your Reading](#) from Psyche digital magazine, author Robert DiYanni explores the ways in which readers can get more pleasure as well as understanding out of their reading experiences. Of note for teachers is that none of his recommendations involve assigning *more*, either in volume or the amount of time students spend reading. In fact, DiYanni advises that readers slow down in order to fully appreciate what they are reading (DiYanni, 2021). Additionally, readers are advised not to jump to conclusions about what the text is saying, but rather take time to pause and reflect so that they can get the most out of what they have read (DiYanni, 2021). Finally, DiYanni suggests limiting the amount of time one spends reading, making it possible to consume digestible chunks of information and sit with it (DiYanni, 2021). What this means for teachers is that students can actually get more out of a short time spent reading and deeply engaging with a text than they would rushing to complete a lengthier reading assignment and associated tasks.

Try Digital Texts for Younger Readers – Whether or not digital books are as beneficial for younger readers as physical books is the subject of much debate and study. The KQED article [In Print or Onscreen? Making the Most of Reading with Young Children](#) (reprinted from [How We Read Now: Strategic Choices for Print, Screen, and Audio](#), by Naomi S. Baron) compares the effects of both modalities and highlights positive attributes of each. The bottom line is that it depends on the purpose of reading, though multiple purposes (social,

linguistic/cognitive, engagement) are arguably interwoven ([Gobir, 2021](#)). Socially, reading together is as much about sharing the experience and bonding as it is about the book, which means that digital books can be just as effective as physical books if caregivers are still interacting with their children while reading ([Gobir, 2021](#)). As far as engagement, children tend to be more engaged with the technology than the story when it is digital, but a similar result occurs with print books and is part of what it means to actively engage with a text: “the act of reading (or being read to) is most beneficial when it includes activity on the child’s part. Importantly, this activity involves constructing meaning from what’s being read, but it might also entail patting fuzzy surfaces or opening windows in a print book, or perhaps selecting music or exploring an image in a digital work” ([Gobir, 2021](#)).

SEL Resources for Teachers and Students

When experts tout the importance of self-care, sometimes it feels as though they are piling another responsibility on our shoulders (you mean, now I have to find the time to take care of myself?). While self-care may seem like a luxury, it is essential. Here are a few resources to help you explore the idea of social-emotional learning for yourself as well as for your students.

- [If Your Brain Feels Foggy and You’re Tired all the Time, You’re Not Alone \(KOED\)](#): You can read or listen to this article about trauma, stress, fatigue, and some suggestions to combat it.
- [Practice Self-Care as an Act of Resistance and Social Justice \(Learning for Justice\)](#): “Self-care is critical. But for BIPOC educators, it can be a first step toward self-sustaining, anti-racist practices in schools. Education consultant and equity and justice strategist Jamilah Pitts writes that educators—particularly Black women educators and educators of color—must practice self-care and preservation as acts of resistance.”
- [Redirecting Grief to Growth – a Trusted Space \(PBS Learning Media\)](#): “As the nation navigates the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this film and curriculum offers tools to mitigate the effects of grief, trauma, anxiety, and other emotional stressors affecting both students and teachers.”
- [Supporting Students Through Coronavirus \(Learning for Justice\)](#): Learning for Justice designed this collection of resources to support student well-being and learning during school closures and continues to update it as new materials are published. This collection contains trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices.
- [Taking Care of Teachers: SEL Starts with Adults \(NEASC\)](#): This webinar and collection of accompanying resources explores the idea of

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taking care of the needs of educators so that they can best meet the needs of students. You'll need to scroll down a bit and expand the title of the session to get the recording and resources.

Other Resources

- [English Language Arts: Spotlight on Equity Resources](#) – Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources, opportunities, and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, whatever their race, gender/identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, language, ability, family background, or family income may be (Adapted from CCSSO, Leading for Equity). The Spotlights on Equity Resources provide a list of considerations and resources for the purpose of supporting equity and access across content areas, emphasizing high quality and culturally sustaining learning opportunities for all students.
- **Vermont PBS: January Resources to Welcome the New Year** – The Vermont Agency of Education has updated our [Vermont PBS webpage](#) for January, 2022. This month, strengthen students' media literacy skills with activities and resources to help students think critically, communicate effectively, and engage as active citizens. Other topics of interest include finding common ground through guided discussion, free learning games and podcasts, understanding race and racism, and examining identity. We will continue to update this webpage monthly, so check back often to find new featured resources related to monthly themes and organized by grade band and subject area. To share resources and network with colleagues, join the [Vermont PBS Educational Resources](#) group on [Edmodo](#). Activate your Edmodo account and join the VTED Learns community by filling out [this form](#).

Professional Offerings and Opportunities

- **2022 Vermont Entrepreneurship Day – 13th Annual – FREE Virtual Event** – On February 9th, all secondary students and educators in any are invited to join this engaging, educational program to hear from young enterprising VT Entrepreneurs sharing their stories and offering tips on how to be successful in business or in the workplace. Plus, hear from a communications expert about personal and professional branding. [Register here](#).

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